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Most expensive rice in NCR now at ₱68; cheapest at ₱30, DA data shows

By JEL SANTOS

The most rice that can be purchased in the National Capital Region (NCR) is Local Special which ranges from ₱50 to ₱68 a kilo.

This was based on the price monitoring data of the Department of Agriculture (DA) released on Tuesday, Nov. 28.

Meanwhile, the cheapest retail price of rice in the metropolis is the Local Regular Milled rice, which sells for around ₱33 to ₱52 per kilo.

Ironically, the price of rice reportedly went up despite the pronouncement of the DA last Nov. 14 that at least 90 percent of palay in the country has already been harvested.

The most expensive retail price of rice in the NCR on Sept. 12 was only ₱65 per kilo. According to the record of the agriculture department, Imported Special was

only retailed for ₱53 to ₱65.

The agriculture department even assured Filipino consumers of "enough affordable supply of rice in the market" due to the wet season harvest.

Agriculture spokesperson Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa stated that the country is expecting a total yield of 3.063 million metric tons (MMT) for November and December.

"Based on data and information from the Philippine Rice Information System, it is generally a good harvest year for the Filipino rice farmers," he earlier said.

The DA said its market price monitoring in Metro Manila covered Commonwealth, Guadalupe, Las Piñas, Malabon, Marikina, Mega Q-Mart, Muntinlupa, Muñoz, Pasay, Pasig, Pritil, Quinta, and San Andres.

To recall, President Marcos said during his campaign that he was aspiring to bring down the price of rice to ₱20 per kilo.



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Declining yields weigh on coco sector

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

THE local coconut industry continues to suffer from declining yields and hybrids and other varieties need to be cultivated to revive the sector, the chief of the **Department of Agriculture (DA)** said.

"The Philippines needs to embark on increasing productivity through the cultivation of quality planting materials like [coconut] hybrids and varieties with superior traits," **Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.** said during the International Scientific Conference on Research and Development at the

University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB), Laguna, on Monday. The Philippines, the department said, is ranked second as the largest coconut producer worldwide next to Indonesia. The country remains the world's top coconut exporter, shipping around 70 percent of its output overseas.

"Despite stable export growth, the coconut industry continues to suffer from declining farm yield that started in 2010 due to infestation and major typhoons, low investments, limited research and development, and poor infrastructure — all keeping many coconut farmers poor," the DA said.

The Philippines' top coconut exports include crude and refined coconut oil, desiccated coconut, copra meal, and coconut water. The Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) said the coconut industry generated \$22 billion in exports in 2022.

In terms of land area, there are approximately 3.6 million hectares

of coconut plantations nurtured by around 3.5 million farmers. Of the country's 82 provinces, 68 are coconut producers, with Davao Oriental being the biggest producer, the DA said.

The Agriculture chief also expressed support for "unified, responsive and market-driven initiatives" that can increase coconut production and, in turn, improve the livelihood of millions of coconut farmers.

In a bid to reinvigorate the Philippine coconut industry, the PCA announced in August that it was targeting replanting 100 million coconut trees to meet the domestic and export demand for coconut

products.

PCA said replanting would significantly increase coconut productivity and engage more farmers in value-adding activities.

The average yield per coconut tree is 44 nuts per year, and through replanting, the agency said this figure could be doubled, a target that can be achieved within the term of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

Laurel also emphasized during the same event the need to modernize the agriculture sector as part of the government's thrust to increase food production.

The conference was attended by representatives from the Australian

Centre for International Agriculture Research and Departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the International Genetic Resources Treaty on Food and Agriculture, the International Coconut Community, the International Coconut Genetic Resources Network, scientists, coconut industry representatives, and local researchers.

"The novel initiative of [conference] organizers linking science and business to genetic resources conservation, germplasm exchange, and use can only be achieved by harmonizing the minds and efforts of researchers, policymakers and private sector," Laurel said.



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Agri-marine estates proposed to ensure adequate food stocks

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said on Tuesday that it plans to build a network of agro-industrial and marine estates to ensure the adequacy of food supplies.

In a statement, Agriculture Secretary **Francisco T. Laurel, Jr.** said he is planning to amend the charter of the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA) to make it responsible for developing and managing the facilities.

Mr. Laurel added that tweaking the PFDA's functions aligns with the goals of the Philippine Rural Development Program and the current administration's plan to modernize agriculture.

The estates will serve as "one-stop shops" with ports, cold-storage facilities, silos, and warehouses.

"I've seen this model successfully implemented in South Korea and Japan. I hope the World Bank can help us realize this vision," Mr. Laurel said.

According to the DA, the World Bank has indicated that funding sources are available in the form of grants from the Global Environment Facility and the European Union, which support marine protected areas.

He added that agri-fisheries logistics needed to be improved, and called for a "logistics masterplan" for the industry.

"That is one thing I think is lacking in the DA," he added.

Mr. Laurel said he would designate an assistant secretary to take charge of logistics.

"We need to scale up and get our priorities straight," he said. "I have technically three-and-a-half years to accomplish these things. The DA, under my watch, will do its best to speed things up."

Additionally, Mr. Laurel said he was seeking possible adjustments to the DA budget for 2024 to better align with the administration's farm production goals and to raise incomes of farmers and fishermen. — **Adrian H. Halili**



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Programs set for select agriculture sub-sectors

SEVERAL projects have been lined up to further improve the country's fisheries, coconut and organic agriculture sectors, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said the agency has called for the amendment of the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA) charter to expand its function to include developing and managing marine

and agro-industrial estates across the country to ensure ample food supply.

Laurel said tweaking PFDA's functions dovetails with the Philippine Rural Development Program and the current administration's goal of modernizing the agriculture sector.

Laurel said he is eyeing the establishment of marine and agro-industrial estates as one-stop shops that will house ports, cold-storage

facilities, silos and warehouses for basic commodities to ensure stable supply.

"I've seen this model successfully implemented in South Korea and Japan," Laurel said.

The DA also acknowledged the World Bank's suggestions on the need to improve logistics and to adopt digital transformation in agriculture.

Laurel said he will soon appoint an assistant secretary whose sole

focus would be logistics to ensure public funds are well spent.

The DA also stressed the importance of organic agriculture enterprises in providing farmers with opportunities to market their products and enhance their income.

The DA is also looking at massive coconut planting and replanting to boost production. Coconut accounts for more than a third of the country's agricultural exports.

-Jed Macapagal

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CTALK
CITO BELTRAN

Revisit devolution and universal health myth

In general, when government or the legislature passes a law or rolls out a program, there is a prescribed or set period after which a review or evaluation is done in terms of the success or effectiveness of the law or the program. From the time of president Noynoy Aquino, president Rodrigo Duterte until the second year of the Marcos Jr. presidency or approximately 14 years, there have been a lot of programs or laws in place but not much in terms of reviews or evaluation.



The Local Government Code, which caused the major devolution of services and funds from the national government down to provincial and local government units, was passed into law in 1991 or 32 years ago. The law that established PhilHealth was passed in 1995 or 28 years ago. The Universal Healthcare Act was signed into law in 2019 and was supposed to be implemented in 2020 but was totally disrupted by the global pandemic COVID.

When does Malacañang or Congress and the Senate plan to do the full review of these laws and programs?

In the meantime, the Local Government Code, PhilHealth and the Universal Healthcare Act have been the target or focus of complaints for what critics call infirmities or defects of the law or the related program. A number of former Cabinet secretaries and undersecretaries representing the Department of Health, Department of Agriculture and the DepEd have pointed out that these laws and programs have created serious gaps, misinterpretation of roles and authority and serious failure to deliver services.

Two former secretaries of the DOH – namely Francisco Duque and Janette Garin – have told me that the government and Congress should act to “renationalize” health care under the DOH. The fragmented reality of health care under the current system of devolution has jeopardized health care needed by Filipinos because LGUs and political leaders are all short-term officials (three years) and are generally “professional politicians,” not necessarily career management executives, certainly not trained health care administrators.

The reality is that there is also politics in the appointment of senior officials of regional hospitals and local hospitals. Rumor has it that the confirmation of Secretary Ted Herbosa got hamstrung because one congressman wants an official of a regional hospital related or closely associated with a governor replaced by an acceptable candidate. In other regional hospitals, things are so bad and impoverished because the governor or congressman has never set foot inside the dilapidated and poorly funded regional hospital.

I remember a time when several provincial governors made a beeline to borrow something like P1 billion each

from the PNB or Philippine National Bank to put up their respective provincial or city hospital. Twenty years later, those hospitals have been run to the ground, hospital equipment busted and patients having to provide their own materials before and after surgery! Essentially all that's left is the building and the personnel.

I can only hope that while Congresswoman Janette Garin is in Congress, she can muster enough support for the re-nationalization of health care and while she's at it, review the PhilHealth program which gives zero balance billing to indigent patients who don't pay contributions while contributing members end up shouldering most of the cost of a medical emergency or procedure. During a recent event among health care stakeholders and organizations, a high-ranking officer was very vocal about how she had to pay so much for the medical emergency of her father. Other people quickly joined in and shared how they too felt left out or betrayed by the “No balance billing” slogan of PhilHealth. One participant asked, “Do you always have to be as poor as a rat in order to get relief from the government?”

I got an email from one of our readers that was so informative I had to copy-paste it today:

Reacting to your column today, Nov. 24, “Teach a man how.”

I was extremely gladdened by your putting emphasis on the backyard industry as a vital cog in the livestock and poultry setting. The backyard industry still remains as the main source of meat supply for the large rural areas outside the cities, in spite of the constantly/oft repeating backyard animal population dips and rises brought about by the repeating outbreaks of endemic animal diseases, like NCD in poultry, hog cholera in swine, hemorrhagic septicemia in cattle, among others. And now, adding to the stew, the more pathogenic, more destructive ASF and avian flu.

Backyard livestock production is really the descriptive phrase of the word “resilience.” Pre-1987, the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) was a constant field partner for the backyard industry, having a technician in nearly all the towns, providing ready technical support, breeding stations and regular free vaccination activities.

The BAI was then producing its own vaccines for NCD, hog cholera and hemorrhagic septicemia, among others, at its Vaccine Production Laboratory in then Alabang Stock Farm. The continuous vaccination activity greatly tempered the effects of repeating outbreaks.

Devolution effectively decimated the ranks of livestock technicians, breeding stations and backyard livestock support services. LGU agriculture technicians are now basically “gift givers,” not technology providers.

The BAI then was wise in leaving the commercial livestock sector alone, concentrating available resources on the backyard sector, with commercial sector support limited to removing the barriers to allow unimpeded growth of the then emerging industry (which, essentially, laid the groundwork for the phenomenal growth of the commercial livestock and poultry sector in the last three decades).

Thank you bringing forth the issue to the public arena, and to the new secretary of agriculture, Kudos also to the work you and San Miguel are doing for backyard industry.

Sincerely, Joel F. Mangalindan, DVM, animal clin. nutrition practitioner

E-mail: utalk2ctalk@gmail.com

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DA SETS ASIDE P161 M

AID FOR NEGROS RICE FARMERS READY

DUMAGUETE CITY—The Department of Agriculture (DA) has set aside P161.6 million in cash assistance to 32,337 rice farmers in Negros Oriental in anticipation of the adverse effects of the drought spawned by the El Niño weather phenomenon next year.

Alejandro Rafal, DA-Negros Oriental Agricultural Program coordinating officer, said on Tuesday that the amount

was part of the P600-million funds already downloaded to their regional office for the use in Central Visayas provinces.

Each farmer will receive P5,000, he said, but the date and mode of distribution have yet to be decided.

The cash aid is one of the many government interventions for drought-affected farmers, Rafal said. —KAYE BRIER
INQ



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DA to promote PPP projects in agri-fisheries sector

The Department of Agriculture-Project Development Service (DA-PDS) conducted the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Forum in the Agriculture and Fisheries Sector on November 24, 2023 to discuss PPP projects that will help boost the country's agricultural production.

"PPP talaga is the way we need to go. Talagang importante ang mga PPP Forums like this because I think this is the way to go to help the government," DA Undersecretary for Policy, Planning, and Regulations Mercedita Sombilla said.

She added that the private sector may not be enticed in agriculture because of its vulnerabilities especially with climate change, but she challenged the forum participants to think of out of the box strategies and projects that are beneficial for both parties.

"I hope that as we continue to have fora like this in the future, we can develop more and more PPP projects that would really push the agricultural sector further than what we really target. We have a PPP Unit in the DA and I hope that all our regional offices will also have a conscious effort to really look for projects that we can implement through PPP," Undesecretary Sombilla said.

She also stressed the need for more PPP projects to help the government and for the local agriculture and fisheries sector to move towards indus-

trialization.

During the forum, PPP Center Capacity Building and Knowledge Management Service Director Feroisa Francisca Concordia discussed the Philippine PPP Program, concepts, processes, legal frameworks, capacity building frameworks, and updates on the PPP Code of the Philippines.

DA-Investment Programming Division Chief Joseph Manicad, on the other hand, discussed the National Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization and Industrialization Plan (NAFMIP) 2021-2030, identified major challenges and opportunities for growth and other appropriate and relevant strategies for the sector.

Moreover, DA-PDS Project Identification and Evaluation Division Chief Rowel Del Rosario presented PPP opportunities in the sector such as in terms of establishing production and postharvest facilities, agri-fishery industrial business corridors, and agriculture and fisheries laboratories and testing centers, among others.

DA Undersecretary for Finance Agnes Catherine Miranda, DA Undersecretary for Livestock Deogracias Victor Savellano, DA-Legal Service Director Willie Ann Angsiy, DA-PDS Director Fernando Flores, DA-Regional Executive Directors, and officials and representatives of DA bureaus and banner programs also participated in the forum. (DA-AFID)



Championing the Philippine halal economy for greater prosperity

Assalamu alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh.

I was privileged to speak during the Philippine Halal Economy Festival organized by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) on Nov. 22, 2023. As the only woman Muslim Cabinet member and a proud daughter of Mindanao, I expressed my appreciation for being given the honor to be with my Muslim brothers and sisters as well as halal advocates at this event that recognizes our culture, tradition, and way of life.

As I highlighted during my speech, I champion going halal and assure my unequivocal support for the initiative. Halal is more than just a dietary restriction in observance of the faith. It also provides an understanding of Islam, the world's second-largest religion which was brought to the Philippines 643 years ago. This fosters a deeper appreciation of the Muslim culture which promotes peace and consequently, progress. Further, halal-certified food is a healthier alternative as it is guaranteed to be devoid of alcohol, chemicals, pork, and its derivatives — an option that can be adopted by everyone. Halal cuisine is also extremely tasty! I can attest to this since I grew up in a halal household. Thus, in my own way, I have been promoting this by serving halal food at the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) on occasions, especially during our Eid al-Fitr celebration.

I firmly believe that the Philippine halal economy holds so much potential for growth and presents opportunities for Muslim Filipinos and the nation. Market studies project that the halal food and beverages' market size will reach nearly US\$4 trillion by 2028. With around 11 million Muslim Filipinos or about 10 percent of our population, as estimated by the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), and a growing number of non-Muslim consumers, innovative halal products strategically marketed in mainstream channels can easily capitalize on this trend. As the demand grows, so do the opportunities! In addition, the global halal economy is expanding to cover not only the food and beverage sector but the entire lifestyle industry, ranging from fashion, health, media, and recreation.

Thus, I trust that when we stand united as a country, we can seize the opportunity to tap into the vast market of this sunrise industry to achieve prosperity. I, therefore, laud the Departments of Trade and Industry, Agriculture, Tourism, Health, Science and Technology, and Foreign Affairs, as well as the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, Mindanao Development Authority, and the NCMF, for utilizing a whole-of-government approach to pursue the Philippine Halal Export Development and Promotion Program under Republic Act No. 10817, also known as the Philippine Halal Export Development and Promotion Act of 2016. The law aims to promote the growth and ensure the integrity and quality of Philippine halal exports.

Through the law, our country has expressed its commitment to harmonizing local standards with international standards and complying with standards of halal products, processes, and services. This includes adopting measures to make halal exports more competitive through research and product development, quality assurance measures, and value-adding mechanisms. Our government also aims to protect consumers and users of halal products from unscrupulous agricultural, manufacturing, and trade practices.

Moreover, we are fortunate that President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. (PBBM) is committed to the development and prosperity of Muslim Mindanao and recognizes the significance of Islam in our history and culture, staunchly advocating for the development of the halal industry. During his Malaysia state visit in July, he and Prime Minister Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim discussed priority areas for cooperation and agreed to closely coordinate efforts to build capacity in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), particularly in sectors such as the halal industry and food security, among others. PBBM emphasized in a statement, "With Malaysia being one of the leading halal economies in the world, cooperation in this sector would mutually benefit the growth of our respective halal ecosystems."

I agree with DTI Secretary Alfredo Pascual when he said that "our micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, or MSMEs, are at the forefront of our halal initiatives, poised to reap

significant benefits." The agency's efforts to promote halal industry development

by empowering MSMEs to participate in the global ecosystem, through capacity-building and financial support, are worth recognizing. Armed with its national halal strategy, it aims to generate ₱230 billion in trade and investments and create 120,000 jobs over the next five years. The plan includes halal-friendly travel and tourism, Islamic finance, fashion, halal pharmaceuticals, and halal cosmetics sectors.

I am also glad to know see that our international collaborations, including bilateral agreements with key players in the halal industry, such as the Emirates Authority for Standards and Metrology (ESMA), the International Halal Accreditation Forum (IHAF), Brunei Darussalam, and Mutual Recognition Agreements with Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and most Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members, fortifying our position in the global market.

On our part at the DBM, BARMM, as one of the key focal points in our development goals, is allocated ₱80.6 billion to ensure inclusivity throughout the region. This is complemented by capacity-building training and assistance to the region's Public Financial Management practitioners toward the effective and efficient delivery of public service through sound management of financial resources. We also fully support the countdown to the 650th anniversary of Philippine Muslim History and Heritage in 2023 which promotes Muslim Filipinos' cultural heritage.

Beyond budget, the Philippine halal economy is expected to contribute to the Bagong Pilipinas vision of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., where there is prosperity from greater economic activity, inclusivity, quality employment opportunities, and an enhanced quality of life for all Filipinos. Thus, let us support this sunrise industry. It is high time we go halal. And when we go halal, let us go local!

(Amenah F. Pangandaman is the current Secretary of the Department of Budget and Management.)



BEYOND BUDGET

AMENAH F. PANGANDAMAN
DBM SECRETARY



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DA calls for amendment of PFDA charter

THERE is a need to amend the charter of the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA) to expand its function to developing and managing marine-agro-industrial estates across the Philippines.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel said he envisions marine and agro-industrial estates "as one-stop shops that will house ports, cold-storage facilities, silos, and warehouses" during the World Bank's presentation of its latest report on the **Philippine Rural Development Project (PRDP)** on Nov. 22, 2023.

He added that this will help store and ensure the longevity of farm and marine products such as rice, sugar, vegetables, palm oil, and other basic commodities, and ensure

their stable supply.

"I've seen this model successfully implemented in South Korea and Japan. I hope the World Bank can help us realize this vision," Laurel said.

He added that amending the PFDA's role aligns with the PRDP and the government's goal of modernizing the agriculture sector.

Before his appointment as Agriculture chief this November, Laurel led Frabelle Fishing Corp., a leading supplier of fresh, frozen and processed seafood, to markets in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, South Africa and the United States.

Laurel has also emphasized the need to improve logistics in the agriculture sector.

"Definitely, we need a logistics masterplan. That is one thing I think is lacking in the DA," said Laurel, pertaining to the World Bank's recommendation on the need for digital transformation and logistics.

The Agriculture secretary said he will soon appoint an assistant secretary who will be tasked with logistics and to ensure public funds are well spent.

In its PRDP report, the World Bank identified potential funding sources for Philippine agriculture, like grant funds from the European Union and the Global Environment Facility to support marine-protected areas.

Moreover, Laurel said that they are looking to adjust the 2024 budget and have been

meeting with lawmakers in the past days.

He noted that this move aligns with the government's goal of boosting farm productivity and raising the incomes of farmers and fisherfolk.

Government data showed that the agriculture sector provides jobs for every one of four Filipino workers. Janine Alexis Miguel

However, around 10 million farmers and fishermen still live below the poverty line.

"We need to scale up and get our priorities straight," Laurel said.

"I have technically three-and-a-half years to accomplish these things. The DA, under my watch, will do its best to speed things up," he further said.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



An intellectual giant on Philippine agribusiness: Diversifying crops



JAKE GARD-UNSPASH



(Part 3)

The late Dr. Rolando "Rolly" Dy always started with a macro view of the entire agricultural sector as he related it to comprehensive economic development and poverty eradication. He, however, was at his best in descending to the micro level of agribusiness which he always viewed as a whole value chain from farming to post-harvest to logistics, manufacturing and processing, retailing and all the way to the final consumers of food and beverage products. That is why he was a favorite consultant of some of the largest Philippine agribusiness firms like San Miguel Corp., Del Monte, Monde Nissin, Nestlé, Century Pacific, etc.

He would usually start with some strategic directions at the macro level, such as: "For agriculture to be able to contribute to inclusive growth, three pillars or job creation streams must be pursued: farm productivity, farm diversification, and agri-manufacturing. An overall requirement is that of market-driven competitiveness of the entire sector. The private sector must take the lead and the public sector must be

HUMAN SIDE OF ECONOMICS BERNARDO M. VILLEGAS

there only to give the necessary support of the physical and legal infrastructure."

His insistence on the three pillars remind me of what former Secretary of Agriculture William Dar presented to President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. as his Transition Report in which the former Secretary, who always consulted with Rolly, specifically referred to the three strategic directions of land consolidation (to reach economies of scale for productivity increase), product diversification (veering away from the obsession with rice), and industrialization (value adding through processing raw materials instead of just exporting them). The only strategy that was added in the Transition Report was "Digitalization" which only recently has become an imperative in any attempt to improve the productivity of any sector, whether agriculture, industry, or services.

After specifying the strategic directions at the macro level, Rolly immediately plunged into the microeconomics (or industry level) of agribusiness. In his Magisterial Lecture, he made a very useful comparison of the productivity levels in very specific crops among the ASEAN countries. He presented data demonstrating that the Philippines lags in farm productivity metrics in the major crops common to ASEAN economies: in rice, corn, coconut, coffee, and rubber. The Philippines only excelled in banana and pineapple, two plantation crops that accounted for less than 1.5% of the total farmland of about 10 million hectares. The crop with the largest area, coconut, accounted for 3.5 million hectares with productivity levels of only 25% of the potential, considering the other coconut producers in Asia such as Indonesia and India. According to the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA), barely one million hectares have some form of intercropping. The crop mainstay, because of poor clones, senility, and limited fertilization, generates less than one ton of oil

per hectare as compared to oil palm at four times that level.

Rolly enumerated the causes of low productivity in Philippine farms. They can be categorized as follows:

- Inputs: limited access to land, inadequate supply of quality seeds and seedlings; high costs of inputs, limited access to credit;
- Production: poor farm management, lack of access to advanced technology, no economies of scale because of farm fragmentation;
- Market: poor access to market, lack of price and market information, lack of information on returns on alternative crops;
- Infrastructure: inadequate and poor quality of farm-to-market roads, high cost of power;
- Pests and Diseases;
- Natural calamities;
- Lack of long-term capital; and,
- Misguided policies of Government, both at the national and local levels.

In contrast with what was happening in the Philippines, in which agriculture suffered from both benign neglect and erroneous policies, the rapid productiv-

ity gains in many parts of Asia were fueled by a veritable Green Revolution. This Revolution led to increased producers' incomes, higher laborers' wages, and lowered prices of food.

In addition, new livelihood opportunities were generated when success in agriculture provided the basis for economic diversification. Links between agriculture and poverty reduction are forged through four transmission mechanisms: a.) direct and relatively immediate impact of improved agricultural performance on rural incomes; b.) impact of cheaper food for both the urban and rural poor; c.) agriculture's contribution to growth and the generation of economic opportunity in the non-farm sector; and, d.) agriculture's fundamental role in stimulating and sustaining economic transition, as countries (and poor people's livelihoods) shift away from being primarily agricultural towards a broader base of manufacturing and services.

Increasing agricultural productivity remains the single most important determinant of economic growth and poverty reduction in countries with the

necessary land endowments such as Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines. In fact, the success stories of Thailand and Vietnam in transitioning from low to high-middle income economies in the last 20 years mirrors the process described above.

In advocating for product diversification, Rolly presented clear evidence of lack of diversification as one source of the underdevelopment of the Philippine agricultural sector. Some 80% of all the farmlands are planted to just three crops: coconut, rice, and corn. Most are producing below potential. At the same time, there are other commodities such as tree crops (e.g., coffee, rubber, cacao, and palm oil) and fruits which can be intercropped in coconut areas. Some of them can be planted as mono crops such as oil palm and rubber. There can also be mono tree crops that can be planted in large corporate farms like mangoes, avocado, and durian, following the very successful experiences in banana and pineapple plantations in Mindanao.

The dismal record in product diversification is reflected in the



El Niño, India's export restrictions to push global rice prices up

THE report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on international food prices for October may have allowed some nations to heave a sigh of relief. This is because most quotations of food items, including rice, declined. According to FAO, its food price index dipped by 0.5 percent from September, with the index for dairy products the only one rising.

However, countries that rely on imports to beef up their rice supply remain uneasy over the FAO data on food prices for October. The FAO All Rice Price Index averaged 138.9 points in October, down 2 percent from its September level, but still 24 percent above its year earlier value. Prices of rice usually purchased by the Philippines were still more expensive in October, based on FAO data.

Figures from the FAO showed that the average quotation of Thai 25 percent broken in January to October reached \$521.20 per metric tons, nearly \$100 more, or 22 percent higher, than the year-ago quotation of \$427 per MT. The price of Vietnamese 25 percent broken was \$488.90 per MT during the 10-month period, \$100, or 27.7 percent, higher than the \$382.70 per MT recorded last year. The price of Vietnam's 5 percent broken was also higher by more than \$100 at \$509.20 per MT, compared with the previous year's \$400.80.

Unfortunately for countries like the Philippines that import huge quantities of rice, the elevated prices of the staple may not ease any time soon mainly because of India, the world's top rice exporter. International economists interviewed by Bloomberg said India is expected to maintain its curbs on overseas sales well into next year. This, they said, will likely hold the staple grain at close to its highest price levels since the food crisis of 2008. (***See, "India seen keeping rice export bans into 2024, holding up global prices," in the BUSINESSMIRROR, November 20, 2023.***)

These concerns may have pushed the Philippine government, particularly the Department of Agriculture, to consider the cancellation of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearance of traders who will not bring in the staple within 30 days. (***See, "DA: Importers lose SPSIC if rice not here in 30 days," BusinessMirror, November 21, 2023.***) There are around 1 million metric tons of rice imports covered by SPSICs that have not arrived in the Philippines. The arrival of the volume covered by SPSICs would beef up the rice inventory of the Philippines by the end of 2023, which will most likely discourage speculators from taking advantage of the developments in the international market.

Apart from India's restrictions, the possibility of El Niño affecting areas that produce the staple could also be exploited by profiteers and unscrupulous traders. FAO had projected that the Philippines and parts of Indonesia, Timor-Leste and Sri Lanka will see below-average rainfall due to El Niño between November 2023 and March 2024. If this forecast materializes, rice yields could decline, which is why it makes sense for the government to push for the early arrival of imports.



BFAR-Ilocos distributes Malaga fingerlings to fish cage operators

LAOAG CITY — The supply of Malaga fish in Ilocos Norte province got a boost through the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) typhoon rehabilitation and recovery program, thus ensuring the recovery of calamity-hit coastal communities.

Vanessa Abegail Dagdagan, BFAR senior aquaculturist, said the Ilocos Region is known as among the growers of Malaga, known internationally as Siganid or Rabbitfish.

Due to advances in technology, Malaga can now be cultured in cages or ponds.

Dagdagan said the cultured variety can be harvested in five to six months when the fish has already reached a marketable size of 200 grams to 300 grams per piece and can be sold at an average price of PHP310 per kilo.

"It is a promising commodi-

ty due to its meat quality and taste," she said.

On Friday, BFAR distributed 40,000 Malaga fingerlings to the 54 fish cage operators in Barangay Gaang, Currimaog town, the initial batch of recipients whose businesses were ravaged by Super Typhoon Egay and Typhoon Falcon, which slammed the country consecutively in July and August, among other tropical cyclones.

On Tuesday, 32 fish cage operators from Paoay town will receive between 500 and 1,000 pieces of Malaga fingerlings.

To avail of the program, Dagdagan said affected operators may enlist through the municipal or city agriculture offices.

According to BFAR, Ilocos Norte has around 39 hectares of potential aquaculture areas for brackish water that is fit for Siganid culture.

PNA



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Ample pork supply for holidays, but hog raisers are losing money – solon

By ELLSON QUISMORIO

The country has enough supply of pork for the entire holiday season.

The bad news, however, is hog raisers are losing money due to the high volume of imported pork products.

Rep. Nicanor Briones of the AGAP (Agricultural Sector Alliance of the Philippines) Partylist bared this in a Facebook live interview.

“Pagdating sa karneng baboy, ako’y naniniwala may sapat na suplay tayo itong Kapaskuhan hanggang sa susunod na quarter (When it comes to pork, I believe we have enough supply this Christmas up until the next quarter),” Briones said.

Despite this positive supply outlook, Briones was quick to deliver the bad news.

“Kung titignan niyo ang farm-gate price ng aming baboy sa aming ► 10

Ample pork supply for holidays, but hog raisers are losing money – solon 1◀

kanya-kanyang farm, ay nasa ₱170 to ₱175 lang per kilo (If you’re going to look at the farmgate price of our pork from our respective farms, it’s between ₱170 to ₱175 per kilo),” Briones said. “Ang mga backyard nalulugi dyan. Ang mga efficient na commercial farm sa pag-aalaga ng baboy, yun lang ang tumatabla. So, ibig sabihin, mayroon tayong sapat na suplay ng baboy. Hindi nga umaangat, eh (Backyard hog raisers have been losing money. Only the efficient commercial farms that raise hogs are breaking even. So, that means we have enough supply of pork, although the farmgate price hasn’t been going up).”

Briones, chairman of the Pork Producers Federation of the Philippines and Egg Council of the Philippines, said the real dagger to local raisers is the high volume of imported pork coming into the country.

Unlimited pork importation

“Masyado kaming apektado ng unlimited importation (We’re so affected by the unlimited importation),” lamented the AGAP solon.

He claimed that some 60 million kilos of imported pork arrive on a monthly basis. “Umaabot nga na 100 million kilos ang laman ng cold storage, eh (There are up to 100 million

kilos inside cold storage facilities).”

As such, Briones appealed to the government to no longer extend Executive Order (EO) No.10, which lowered the tariffs for agricultural products like pork, rice, and corn.

“Sa baboy, malinaw na naghihirap at nalulugi dahil sa pagbababa ng taripa (Clearly, the lowered tariffs have been a burden to hog raisers as they’ve been losing money),” Briones said. “Yan din ang nagiging dahilan kaya napakarami nang gus-tong mag-import dahil napakalaki ng kinikita ng ating mga importer (That’s also the reason a lot of people want to get into importation, because the profits are huge).”



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Govt vows to keep inflation in check

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

THE government will continue implementing measures that will keep inflation rate down and mitigate its impact, Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno said yesterday.

Diokno, in a briefing after the sectoral meeting in Malacanang, said the country's headline inflation eased to 4.9 percent in October from 6.1 percent in September which is lower than the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas' (BSP) forecast of 5.1 to 5.9 percent.

The BSP projects inflation to be within the 2 to 4 percent range in the first quarter of 2024 and around 4 percent in the second quarter.

"We are applying science to anticipate the gap between how much is needed by the economy and how much should be imported. We have to do that in a timely manner, so the prices would no longer be affected," Diokno said.

He said among the measures the government has ad-

opted are the close monitoring and assessment of market developments; the use of remote sensing technology, particularly satellite, for corn and rice production and; the implementation of the El Niño mitigation and adaptation plan.

Diokno said the government will also continue implementing targeted interventions such as subsidy for those affected by higher inflation to protect such as the vulnerable sector, farmers, fisherfolks and members of the public transport sector.

Diokno said the economic team has also endorsed to the President the extension of the reduced most-favored nation (MFN) tariff rates on rice, corn, and pork under Executive Order No. 10 to ensure supply and keep prices down.

With barely a month towards the end of the year, Diokno said a catch-up plan should be pursued and avoid underspending in the first semester of next year, especially



Onions are displayed at a stall at a public market in Manila on Jan.28, 2023. (Reuters Photo)

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GOVT

among the local government units (LGUs).

He said the economic team has asked the President to encourage LGUs to boost their spending, as he noted local governments' "low absorptive capacity to improve the quality of public goods and services that they are supposed

to deliver."

As this developed, Diokno reported to the President the Philippines is the fastest growing economy in Southeast Asia and is poised to outgrow its peers in East Asia and the Pacific.

Diokno also said based on the forecast and optimism of inter-

national financial institutions, the Philippines will continue to grow despite the projected slowdown of the world economy in 2024.

He said the economy will grow around 6 percent this year and will continue to grow at around 6.5 percent to 8 percent for the rest of Marcos' term.



COFFEE FARMERS SA SULTAN KUDARAT TINULUNGAN NI BONG GO

PATULOY na nagsusulong ng pagpapalakas ng mga sistema ng suporta sa agrikultura, binisita ni **Senador Christopher "Bong" Go**, sa pakikipag-ugnayan kay Gobernador Datu Pax Ali Mangudadatu, ang mga magsasaka ng kape sa Isulan, Sultan Kudarat at binigyan sila ng mga kinakailangang tulong.

Idinaos ang relief activity sa Provincial Capitol grounds, higit-kumulang 400 magsasaka ang nakatanggap ng mga kamiseta at bola para sa basketball at volleyball. May mga nakatanggap rin ng mobile phone, relo at pares ng sapatos mula sa senador.

Bukod dito, ang Department of Social Welfare and Development ay nagbigay ng livelihood grants sa mga kwalipikadong benepisyaryo.

Miyembro ng Senate committee on agriculture, patuloy si Go na nagsusulong para sa pagpapalakas ng mga sistema ng suporta sa agrikultura.

Ani Go, malaki ang kontribusyon ng mga magsasaka sa

pagpapanatili ng seguridad sa pagkain.

"Dapat po masaya ang ating mga magsasaka. Dapat po ay kumita ang ating mga magsasaka. Sila po ang dapat suportahan ng gobyerno," idiniin ni Go.

"Napakaimportante na walang magutom. Sikapin nating bigyan ng karampatang suporta at proteksyon ang ating mga maliliit na magsasaka na kumakayod araw-araw para masigurong may pagkain sa hapag-kainan ng bawat pamilyang Pilipino," dagdag niya.

Si Go ang isa sa may-akda ng Republic Act 11901, o ang Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Development Financing Enhancement Act of 2022, na

nagpahusay sa istrukturang pinansyal na sumusuporta sa agrikultura, pangisdaan, at pag-unlad sa kanayunan.

Bukod dito, siya rin ang co-sponsor at co-author sa Senado ng RA 11953, na kilala rin bilang New Agrarian Emancipation Act.

Inihain din ng senador ang Senate Bill No. 2117 na naglalayong tiyakin ang masusing crop insurance protection sa mga benepisyaryo ng repormang agraryo.

"Nais kong hikayatin ang lahat ng lingkod-bayan na makiiisa sa pagtulong sa ating mga magsasaka. Ang kanilang mahalagang papel sa ating pagkain at ekonomiya ay hindi mata-

tawaran. Suportahan natin sila sa pamamagitan ng pagpapalakas sa kanilang sektor at pagpapalaganap ng mga programa na tutugon sa kanilang pangangailangan," giit ni Go.

Hinikayat din ni Go, chairperson ng Senate committee on health and demography, ang mga magsasakang may problema sa kalusugan na gamitin, kung kinakailangan, ang serbisyo Malasakit Center na matagpuan sa Sultan Kudarat Provincial Hospital sa bayan.

Ang programang Malasakit Centers ay nagbibigay ng one-stop shop na serbisyo upang tulungan ang mga mahihirap na pasyente sa kanilang mga gastusin sa pagpapagamot. **RNT**



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NEWS BRIEF

Romualdez: ₱20 per kilong bigas hindi imposible

HINDI imposible na matitikman ng mga Pilipino ang ₱20 kada kilo ng bigas na isa sa mga ipinangako ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr.

Kahapon sinaksihan at nagsilbing panauhing pandangal si Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez sa pagbubukas ng "Sugbo Merkadong Barato" program ng Cebu kung saan dito sinimulan ang makasaysayang pagbebenta ng de-kalidad na bigas sa halagang ₱20 kada kilo.

"Tunay po na makasaysayan ang araw na ito para sa bansang Pilipinas. Ngayong araw, napatunayan ng mga Sugbuanon na hindi imposibleng makamit ang pangarap na magkaroon sa merkado ng de-kalidad na bigas sa halagang 20 pesos bawat kilo," ayon kay Romualdez.

Ang sinimulan umano ng Cebu ay maari at narapat din umano gayahin ng buong panig ng bansa.

Pinasalamat ni Romualdez ang mga lider ng Cebu partikular si Gov. Gwen Garcia dahil sa mahusay nitong liderato sa pagpapatupad ng mga makabagong solusyon. (Eralyn Prado)

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Coffee farmers sa S. Kudarat tinulungan ni Bong Go

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Raw sugar futures recover after dipping near one-month low; London cocoa rises

NEW YORK — Raw sugar futures on the ICE exchange recovered after hitting their lowest in nearly a month on Monday as soaring output from Brazil tempered some supply concerns, while cocoa continued to consolidate its recent run to record highs.

March raw sugar settled up 0.22 cent or 0.8% at 27.20 cents per pound (lb), having set a 12-year high earlier this month.

Dealers said expected record output from top producer Brazil continues to pressure sugar, although logistics constraints are putting a floor under prices as this sugar is not able to exit the country in the required volumes. They said that around five million metric tons (MMT) are expected to be loaded in Brazil.

They also noted excess rains in the European Union could delay the start of the harvest and thereby hurt the season's total output, while imports of the sweetener from top consumer China are picking up pace.

Sugar production in Brazil's Center-South was seen at 2.19 MMT in the first half of November, up 30% year on year, according to industry group UNICA on Monday.

The lowest price offered in an international tender from Egypt's GASC for about 50,000 metric tons of raw sugar was believed to be \$690 a ton CIF free out, traders said, but noted GASC's target for raw sugar is \$655 a ton.

March white sugar rose \$7.60 or 1% at \$745.60 a ton.

March London cocoa settled up 20 lbs or 0.6% to 3,479 lbs a ton, as the market continues to consolidate from a series of recent record highs.

Dealers said the market is nearing the point at which tight supplies from top producing region West Africa have been priced in, with attention shifting to rising output from Brazil and weakening nearby futures price spreads.

ICE Futures Europe cocoa speculators cut their net long position by 2,562 lots to 64,994 lots as of Nov. 21, exchange data showed.

March NY cocoa rose \$41 or 1% to \$4,130 a ton, having set a 45-year high last week. —

Reuters



Russian wheat export prices rise

MOSCOW- Export prices for Russian wheat rose last week, helped by a continuing drop in shipments owing to stormy weather in ports, analysts said.

The price of 12.5 percent protein Russian wheat scheduled for free-on-board (FOB) delivery in January was \$235 per metric ton last week, up \$5 from the previous week, the IKAR agriculture

consultancy reported.

The Sovecon agriculture consultancy pegged the same class of wheat at \$234-239 a ton FOB last week.

"News about Black Sea storms damaging or even destroying ships in the region also could have provided some support. However, bear in mind that we are approaching a season of stormy weather, so

it's not something extraordinary," Sovecon said in a weekly report.

The Black Sea region has been hit by heavy storms since Friday, disrupting logistics and damaging homes and infrastructure. Three people have been killed and hundreds evacuated, state media said on Monday.

Russia exported 0.72 million tons of grain last week, down

from 0.81 million tons the previous week. The exports included 0.56 million tons of wheat, compared with 0.75 million tons the previous week, Sovecon wrote, citing port data.

It lowered its estimate of wheat exports in November by 0.1 million tons to 3.8 million tons, compared with 4.3 million tons a year ago. - *Reuters*



Wheat, soybeans firm

SINGAPORE- Chicago wheat rose for the first time in three sessions on Tuesday as bargain buying supported the market although improved health of the US winter crop limited the upside potential in prices.

Soybeans gained ground on concerns over planting delays in top exporter Brazil, where dry weather is threatening to cut yields, while corn was little changed.

"US winter crop ratings are better than expected which has raised hopes for supplies next year," said a Singapore-based trader. "But the crop still has to go through the development phase early next year."

The most active wheat contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) rose 0.3 percent to \$5.62-1/2 a bushel, after dropping 2.8 percent in the last session.

Soybeans added 0.4 percent to \$13.34-3/4 a bushel and corn was unmoved at \$4.75-1/4 a bushel.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) on Monday rated 50 percent of the US winter wheat crop in good-to-excellent condition, up two percentage points from last week and a bigger improvement than most analysts expected.

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