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AMID RUSH TO USE NARROW RICE IMPORTATION WINDOW

... WITH PH PURCHASES AGGRAVATING PRICE PRESSURES

By **Ronnel W. Domingo**
@RonWDomingoINQ

The global rice market has been stabilizing “somewhat” over the past few months, but the Philippine government’s move to ramp up private-sector imports and with the prevailing risks from the El Niño climate phenomenon are keeping upward pressure on prices.

This was according to Fitch group subsidiary BMI Country Risk and Industry Research, referring to a statement made by **Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.** last week.

Last Nov. 20, Laurel told the committee on agriculture and food at the House of Represen-

tatives that he gave importers less than five weeks to use the permits granted to them—to buy an additional 1 million tons of rice from abroad to boost local stocks—or else these would be canceled.

He said that by assuring that import permits are used quickly, the DA could better manage the supply of rice, the country’s main food staple, and avoid price surges that hurt consumers.

In its report issued on Wednesday, BMI said this move by the DA “poses an upside risk to short-term trade prices.”

BMI noted that the global market has stabilized somewhat since the government of

India’s last July announced an immediate ban on non-basmati white rice exports.

However, the ban did not cover government-to-government deals, which included an agreement to ship 295,000 tons to the Philippines.

Still, as of October, the All Rice Price Index of the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization was pegged at 2.5 percent lower than in August in the immediate aftermath of the Indian ban.

On the other hand, the index was also 24 percent higher than its level 12 months earlier in October 2022.

“It is our view that India’s rice export restrictions will remain in

effect until after the April-May legislative elections (in 2024), which will support prices at recent levels as will El Niño risks,” the research group said.

“In the short term, expected import demand from Indonesia and the Philippines will support prices while crop conditions in north-eastern Thailand, downgraded to ‘poor’ at the end of October,” it added.

Various analysts and think tanks have raised the flag about inflation in the Philippines remaining high in the coming months, especially with the expiration on Dec. 31 of Executive Order No. 10 which temporarily lowered tariffs on key exports like rice, corn and coal. **INQ**



Scientists and societal change

WITH the rapid development of technology today, there is a need to make sure that science and technology (S&T) outputs truly contribute to societal change. If that is not the case, S&T outputs cannot be useful or can endanger society as a whole.

We just need to look at how the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) has caused worries on how AI can potentially replace millions of workers in the future. Hence, there are calls to ensure that AI will have a real positive impact on businesses and industries, including agriculture.

When it comes to agriculture, the irony is there are numerous S&T outputs to increase crop production and improve value adding, but much of these never get into the hands of smallholder producers or agribusiness enterprises. This has resulted in the Philippines lagging behind in food and crop production in Southeast Asia.

This view is echoed in a commentary by Agriculture Undersecretary for Rice Industry Development Leocadio Sebastian published over <https://transactions.nasi.ph> titled "Scaling S&T in the



MOVING FORWARD

WILLIAM D. DAR

National Rice Program."

"That the Philippines' neighboring countries have far overtaken us in agricultural development remains to be a topic of public discussion. My experience working with our Asean neighbors, particularly Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam, has shown me where we massively lag behind: we fail to scale or commercialize many of our S&T outputs and innovations. We take for granted our societal responsibility," Sebastian said.

This is echoed by R.S. Paroda, a Padma Bhushan Awardee and secretary of Department of Agricultural Research and Education of India, who emphasized in an article published in www.krishijagran.com the need to link science to society.

"For transforming our agri-food system to be more resilient, sustainable, productive and profitable, we have no other option but

to scale agricultural innovations aiming at linking science to society," Paroda said.

Becoming agents of change

But we are also witnessing a gradual reorientation in the attitude of scientists and researchers with more of them regarding themselves also as agents of change.

"We have not been taught to work for societal outcomes or impacts. We mistakenly believe that this is not our responsibility. Should it not be our duty as S&T workers to ensure that our work transcends the boundaries of our respective fields to effect real change in people's lives, societies and the world? It should be," Sebastian said.

Hence, Sebastian sees the application and upscaling of S&T outputs as critical to the success of the Department of Agriculture's (DA) flagship program for rice, the Masagana Rice Industry Development Program (MRIDP), which aims to increase the country's rice self-sufficiency level to 95 to 97 percent before the end of the term

of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in mid-2028.

The MRIDP will employ technologies from the biological, mechanical and digital spheres to enable rice farmers to increase their production and incomes.

And more importantly, the MRIDP aims to make farmers assume a significant role in the entire rice value chain.

Let me add that 100-percent rice self-sufficiency will come naturally if Filipino farmers are empowered by technology, integrated into the value chain and have access to financing. That approach will also entice younger people to become rice farmers, and we all know how eager the Filipino youth are in adopting current and emerging technologies, especially digitalization.

I have high hopes for the success of the MRIDP. Also, the success of that program will clearly demonstrate the importance of giving millions of farmers access to S&T outputs.

Success of Boochetana project

Scaling up S&T outputs to

millions of poor farmers was successfully undertaken by the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (Icrisat) then under my leadership through the Boochetana (Revive the Soil) project in the Karnataka Region in India from 2009.

Icrisat started with six districts and 200,000 farmers, and the project expanded to more than 26,000 villages and 4.2 million farmers over the next nine years. The Boochetana project utilized science-backed innovations, with millions of farmers getting 20 to 66 percent higher crop yields. Icrisat said in its website this produced a net benefit of around \$453 million.

"It was extraordinary in that it was successfully scaled up to include all the districts in Karnataka and also to other states in the country," Icrisat said in its portal devoted to Bhoochetana.

The success of the Bhoochetana can definitely be duplicated in the Philippines as we already have an army of researchers, scientists and extension workers ready to disseminate and

upscale S&T outputs in the agriculture sector.

The private sector is also more than ready to do its part. A good example is the forging of at least 45 "big brother-small brother" partnerships under Go Negosyo's Kapatid Angat Lahat Agriculture Program (Kalap) that links organized farmers with established agri-food companies. Our partners in Kalap also introduce and scale up technology in the production systems of their smallholder partners.

It is also imperative that the application and scaling up of technology be a permanent part of the long-term solutions to ensure the country's food security. And newly appointed Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. has made it very clear that one of the priorities of the DA is to modernize the country's farming and fishery sector to ensure food security. This pronouncement by Laurel should be supported by the country's scientists and researchers, and for them to be more conscious of their role in societal change.



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Irrigation, processing facilities focus areas for rice program

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said its plan for raising rice production will focus on expanding irrigation and building more processing facilities.

In a statement on Wednesday, Agriculture Secretary Francisco T. Laurel, Jr. said: "Ultimately, our aim is to minimize rice imports to achieve food security and sufficiency."

As of Nov. 16, rice imports hit 2.94 million metric tons (MT), according to the Bureau of Plant Industry.

He said that minimizing imports could also improve the income of farmers and fisherfolk.

"(It would) create more jobs in a sector that already provides employment to one in every four Filipinos and reverse the shrinking trend of agriculture's contribution to economic growth," he added.

In a speech, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., the previous Secretary of Agriculture, said the DA is stepping up efforts to

mechanize farming, increase agricultural infrastructure and adopt technology to improve grain production and supply.

"I am optimistic that all concerned government agencies, partners, and stakeholders will continue to explore ways to enhance existing agricultural technologies to improve and strengthen the rice industry, in line with our goal of a food-secure nation," Mr. Marcos said.

He added that modernization of agriculture will equally focus on livestock, poultry, fisheries and high-value crops.

"The government shall continue to give primacy to research and development to ensure a sustainable rice value chain," he said.

He added that the administration will also support the research initiatives of the Philippine Rice Research Institute to introduce modern agricultural biotechnology to improve rice output. — **Adrian H. Halili**

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Manila forms team to inspect Brazil's meat exporters

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS

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MANILA will send an inspection mission to Brazil as the South American country is seeking system-wide accreditation that will allow its establishments to export animals, meat and meat products to the Philippines.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. issued Special Order (SO) 1435 that formed and authorized the sending of an inspection mission to Brazil for the accreditation of Brazilian foreign meat establishments (FMEs).

"In view of the application of the Government of Brazil for System

Accreditation, a DA [Department of Agriculture] Inspection Mission for Foreign Meat Establishment accreditation to Brazil is hereby created and shall be composed of technical experts on border control, animal health, and meat inspection from the National Meat Inspection Service and the Bureau of Animal Industry [BAI]," Laurel said.

Under prevailing rules and regulations, a country may seek two types of accreditations to export meat and meat products to the Philippines—a system-wide or an FME-specific accreditation.

In a system-wide accreditation, all locally accredited FMEs by an exporting country can export meat

products to the Philippines while an FME-specific accreditation only allows specific firms to ship meat products to the country.

"Prior to accreditation, on-site assessment of the veterinary services, animal health and food safety control of the exporting country has to be undertaken," Laurel added.

Under the order, the inspection mission is tasked to prepare the import risk analysis (IRA) design and conduct the on-site inspection and document validation.

Furthermore, the mission is expected to prepare and submit its report to the DA Accreditation Review Board within 30 days from the completion of the IRA, on-site inspection, and validation.

The members of the mission are entitled to claim their respective salaries, pre-departure expenses, round-trip economy airfare, and 50 percent of the daily subsistence allowance based on UNDP rate. They are also entitled to clothing allowance.

Brazil has is now one of the Philippines's key sources of imported meat, particularly chicken and pork.

In 2022, Brazil was the country's top chicken meat import source and was the second largest supplier of pork to the Philippines.

The country imported 235.256 million kilograms of chicken meat and 79.109 million kilograms of pork from Brazil last year, based on BAI data.

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DA extends aid to farmers, fishers in quake-hit Mindanao areas

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it distributed assistance to farmers and fishers in areas in Mindanao that were recently struck by a strong earthquake.

In a statement, the DA said Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. visited the affected sites in Region 12 last Friday and led the distribution of the government's aid.

"I came here to personally see the situation after the earthquake," Laurel told workers gathered at the General Santos Fish Port Complex. "I want to see firsthand what happened here and how we can help our farmers and fishermen in Region 12, in

Gensan and neighboring provinces."

Laurel met with irrigators groups in Koronadal City to lead the National Irrigation Administration's distribution of P26.3 million worth of machineries and checks for indemnity and loans in South Cotabato.

In General Santos City, Laurel distributed vegetable seeds, coconut and banana planting materials, fertilizers, and indemnity claims worth P4.7 million.

He said three teams from the DA have been deployed to help in the ongoing field validation in various areas in Region 12 affected by the earthquake. But even as the field work is

still ongoing, Laurel said 54 individuals have been master-listed as recipients of new fishing boats and paraphernalia worth an estimated P2.08 million.

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources is also addressing the damage caused by swells spawned by the earthquake to fish cages owned by the Malapatan Fishermen Association worth P1.8 million.

The DA is provisioning 1,000 pieces of banana planting materials and 1,000 hybrid coconut seedlings for farmers affected by the earthquake.

Laurel said other assistance may be

provided after the field assessment. He added financial assistance is also available at the Agricultural Credit Policy Council.

The agriculture secretary made the rounds in south-central Mindanao to personally oversee the relief operations on the farmers and fishers affected by the temblor.

On November 17, a 6.8-magnitude earthquake rocked Sarangani, Davao Occidental and a large section of Mindanao, killing several people and injuring hundreds while damaging hundreds of houses and infrastructures.



'PHIL will lean on biotech to boost rice output'

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA
@sam_medenilla

MAINSTREAMING new farming technology to increase the production of rice and other food items is the focus of the Philippine Rice Research Institute's (PhilRice) Strategic Plan 2023-2028, according to President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.

In his message at the 35th National Rice Research for Development Conference delivered by Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., the chief executive said the priority of the plan is to disseminate new technologies that will not only increase food production but also lift farmers' income.

"Rest assured that the government shall continue to give primacy to research and development to ensure a sustainable rice value chain," Marcos said.

"We will also continue to support the initiatives undertaken by

the PhilRice in introducing modern agricultural biotechnology to improve rice production."

Among the innovations to be introduced by PhilRice, an attached agency of the Department of Agriculture, is the NSIC Rc 160—a local premium rice, which will be marketed as "Lakambini."

Similar schemes, Marcos said, will also be implemented for livestock, poultry, fisheries and high value crops.

The President stressed the importance of strengthening the food value chain so the country

PHOTO from www.philrice.gov.ph

can become food secure.

He said the measure will not only improve the productivity of farmers, but also deter illegal activities, such as smuggling and hoarding.

"In collaboration with relevant law enforcement agencies, we will continue to give priority to com-



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bating illegal activities that involve our agricultural produce," Marcos said.

The 35th National Rice R4D Conference was held at the DA-PhilRice Central Experiment Station in Muñoz, Nueva Ecija with the theme: "Better Rice Communities."

The President's pronouncement came more than a month after the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) released data on food self-sufficiency which indicated that the country's rice self-sufficiency ratio (SSR) fell 77 percent in 2022. The SSR last year was the lowest in more than two decades, as the

country remained as one of the world's largest importers of the staple.

PSA data showed that the country's rice SSR last year was lower than the 81.5 percent level recorded in 2021.

Historical PSA data showed that last year's rice SSR was the lowest in 24 years or since 1998, when it settled at 72.1 percent.

This is the third time, since 1988, that the country's rice SSR was below 80 percent.

The PSA defines SSR as the extent to which the country's domestic production can meet its domestic requirement.

"A ratio of less than 100 percent indicates inadequacy of food production to cope with the demand of the population," the PSA said. "The higher the ratio, the greater the self-sufficiency."

The country's milled rice output last year fell to 12.921 million metric tons (MMT) from the record-level of 13.054 MMT registered in 2021, according to the PSA.

During the same year, the Philippines's rice imports surged to a record 3.863 MMT, about 30 percent higher than the 2.967 MMT it imported in 2021, PSA data showed.



Gov't to prioritize science-based strategies to modernize agri sector

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. reiterated on Wednesday his support for a science-based approach to modernizing the agriculture sector and incorporating new technologies to the everyday work of farmers in line with the administration's thrust on food security.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. conveyed the message of the President in assuring the government will continue to put priority to research and development to ensure sustainable value chain in the sector, particularly for rice.

"Let us be guided by the science-based strategies presented in the Strategic Plan 2023-2028 of the Philippine Rice Research Institute, which highlights the need to educate farmers on modern technologies suitable for integration into their everyday work," Laurel said in representing President Marcos as the Guest of

Honor and Keynote Speaker at the opening of the 35th National Rice R4D Conference at the DA-PhilRice Central Experiment Station in Muñoz, Nueva Ecija on Wednesday.

"Rest assured that the government shall continue to give primacy to research and development to ensure a sustainable rice value chain. We will also continue to support the initiatives undertaken by the PhilRice in introducing modern agricultural biotechnology to improve rice production."

This year's National Rice Research for Development (R4D) Conference bears the theme "Better Rice Communities", aligned with the new strategic plan of the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) for 2023-2028.

The plan emphasizes the use of advanced science and technology to create prosperous rice communi-

ties, focusing on improving their productivity, profitability, and well-being.

In his message, the President said the administration will continue to provide adequate attention and support to other agricultural products, along with enforcing laws against illegal activities in the sector.

"While rice is the country's staple food, other equally important sectors such as livestock, poultry, fisheries and high value crops shall also continue to receive adequate attention and support from the government to maintain the availability, accessibility, and affordability of food for our consumers," Marcos said.

"Also, in collaboration with relevant law enforcement agencies, we will continue to give priority to combating illegal activities that involve our agricultural produce," he added. **PCO**

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Sen. Mark Villar and Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual inspect prices of *Noche Buena* items at a supermarket in Divisoria, Manila yesterday.

EDD GUMBAN

Villar, Pascual monitor *Noche Buena* prices

Sen. Mark Villar joined officials of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) yesterday in their price monitoring of *Noche Buena* items in Divisoria, Manila.

"Now that Christmas is near, we need to strictly monitor the prices of products to ensure a happy Christmas for fellow Filipinos," the chairman

of the Senate committee on trade, commerce and entrepreneurship said.

Villar, Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual and other DTI officials inspected food items regularly used for the *Noche Buena* including pasta packages, spaghetti and tomato sauce, sandwich spread and canned goods. They

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Villar From Page 1

checked whether these items are following the 2023 Price Guide for Noche Buena products released by the Consumer Policy and Advocacy Bureau last Nov. 21.

Villar emphasized the importance of regular price monitoring for the protection of consumers, in compliance with the Price Act. This law ensures the availability of basic necessities and prime commodities at reasonable prices at all times while securing a fair return on investment for businesses.

"We are very festive people. The yearly celebration of Noche Buena is a fixture in the Filipino Christmas," the senator said.

Both Villar and Pascual called for the public's help in reporting any merchant or vendor that is non-compliant with DTI's SRP and quality standards. For complaints, the general public can report to the DTI Hotline 1384 or to any social media accounts of the agency.

In a Viber message, Trade Assistant Secretary Amanda Nograles told **The STAR** that "based on our price monitoring, we found that NB items were sold below or at prices set in the price guide."

Apart from *Noche Buena* items the inspection also monitored the enforcement of technical regulations of Christmas lights. "We were also able to confiscate Christmas lights without PS (Philippine Standard) mark or ICC (Import Commodity Clearance) sticker," Nograles added.

Nograles earlier said that out of the 240 stock keeping units (SKUs), around 35 percent or 83 SKUs have implemented price increases of one to five percent. Also, 15 percent or 37 SKUs posted price increases of six to 10 percent, while 13 percent or 32 SKUs posted price increases of more than 10 percent.

On the other hand, 21 SKUs posted price decreases, while the prices of 34 SKUs were unchanged.

The *Noche Buena* price guide covers products such as ham, fruit cocktail, keso de bola, cheese, sandwich spread, mayonnaise, pasta or spaghetti, elbow macaroni, salad macaroni, spaghetti sauce, tomato sauce and all-purpose cream.

Meanwhile, Interior Secretary Benhur Abalos has directed local government units to organize their Local Price Coordinating Council (LPCC) to ensure stable supply and prices of commodities during the Christmas holiday.

Abalos said local chief executives should keep an eye on the prices of *Noche Buena* items at their local markets as the holiday season nears.

"The task of the LPCC is to protect consumers. That's why I trust you will put measures in place to ensure their interests are protected and they get their money's worth," he said in Filipino.

Abalos said that the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) is working with DTI, **Department of Agriculture (DA)** and other agencies to ensure that consumers are not being taken advantage of.

The DILG chief said that local officials have the power to ensure stable supply and that the sellers are sticking with the suggested retail price of commodities.

He warned sellers and retailers to follow the SRP and avoid overpricing their items.

The DA has assured the public that there are no problems with the supply of pork and other commodities this coming holiday. — Catherine Talavera, Romina Cabrera

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FITCH UNIT CITES INDIA EXPORT BAN, EL NIÑO

TIGHT GLOBAL RICE SUPPLY TO PERSIST INTO NEXT YEAR...

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**
@jordeenelagare

India's export ban and the El Niño phenomenon will keep rice prices in the global market elevated next year, according to Fitch group subsidiary BMI.

"It is our view that India's rice export restrictions will remain in effect until after the April-May legislative elections, which will support prices at recent levels as will El Niño risks," BMI said in an emailed commentary.

The global data and research firm is anticipating India to retain its export ban until the second half of next year as the country won't risk stoking (food) price inflation in the run-up to the elections.

BMI revised upward its average rice forecast to \$15.95 per hundredweight (cwt) from \$15.50 per cwt for Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT)-listed second-month rough rice futures in 2024.

So far, rice prices have averaged \$16.39 per cwt since the beginning of September but it is estimating prices to decline to \$13.25 per cwt by 2027 or the end of its five-year forecast.

In terms of export prices, BMI noted the world market has somewhat stabilized since India's decision to implement an immediate ban on the export of non-basmati white rice in mid-July.

"Prices remain elevated, however, with the October print also 24.1 percent higher than its level of 12 months earlier," it said.

"In the short term, ex-

pected import demand from Indonesia and the Philippines will support prices while crop conditions in north-eastern Thailand, downgraded to poor at the end of October, will continue to be closely monitored too," it added.

BMI also said the El Niño will persist until April to June next year, with a 35 percent chance of the dry spell becoming a "historically strong" event between November and January next year, based on the US meteorological department's latest update.

Rice, a staple food among Filipinos, is a water-sensitive crop that is susceptible to water shortages.

"The department's longer-term forecasts also point to an extended period of below average rainfall, commencing in February 2024, stretching from northeastern Thailand over Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam to the Philippines," the research firm said.

"In the absence of Indian rice exports, Thailand and Vietnam would be expected to account for a sizable share of global rice deliveries, which will render trade prices sensitive to weather conditions in either market," it added.

BMI is projecting the global rice sector to incur its third consecutive deficit, seen to improve by 4.9 million metric tons (MT) in 2024 against the projected deficit of 9.7 million MT this year.

The Philippines has so far imported 2.93 million MT of rice, mostly from Vietnam, based on the Bureau of Plant Industry's tally as of Nov. 16. **INQ**



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FROM FLOODING CAUSED BY SHEAR LINE

Agricultural damage hits P202 million

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

AGRICULTURAL damage due to flooding caused by the shear line that affected the country in the past week has almost doubled and reached P202.89 million, the **Department of Agriculture (DA)** said on Wednesday, November 29.

The DA's latest bulletin showed that a total of 7,521 metric tons of commodities such as rice, corn, high-value crops and livestock were lost.

To date, the number of farmers affected by the flooding stood at 8,322.

According to the DA, they are continuously "monitoring the actual

weather situation and field conditions in the areas affected by the shear line."

Among the affected commodities, the biggest damage was reported in rice with an estimated loss of about P189.8 million followed by corn with P2.15 million.

The high-value crops, meanwhile,

posted a total loss worth P8.44 million; livestock and poultry at P2.18 million; and cassava at P128,860.

Damage was also reported in irrigation facilities with an estimated loss of P200,000.

Provinces affected by the shear line include Albay, Masbate, Sorsogon and the province of Samar with an affected area of about 8,446 hectares.

Arnel de Mesa, DA assistant secretary and spokesman, assured that farmers will still be able to harvest by April to March next year as the flooding coincides with the planting season this month of November.

He added that equipment will be provided to ensure quick recovery of the damaged farm-

lands and affected farmers.

On the other hand, the department's regional field office has readied interventions for the affected farmers which include P29.30 million worth of rice, corn and assorted vegetable seeds, and P211,500 worth of native chicken.

The Agricultural Credit Policy Council, meanwhile, is open to provide loans through its Survival and Recovery Loan Program worth P50 million. Each farmer can avail a loanable amount of up to P25,000 payable in three years at zero interest.

Moreover, the 2024 Quick Response Fund is also available for the rehabilitation of affected areas, according to the DA.



Ilocos mung bean farmers cope with demand

MUNG bean (munggo) farmers in the town of Caba, La Union, are boosting their output as demand for the crop in Denmark is increasing.

The crop, known as "galog" or "balatong" in Ilocano, is cultivated by the San Fermin Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Multi-Purpose Cooperative (San Fermin ARB), among others.

Eduardo Balanag, San Fermin ARB manager, said the ISEED Marketing Cooperative in Vigan, Ilocos Sur, buys the bulk of their mung bean produce and exports the crop to Denmark.

The cooperative said most of what is exported to Denmark is consumed by a growing number of Asians in the European country, including Filipinos working and residing there.

The Department of Agriculture-

Philippine Rural Development Project (DA-PRDP) said the Ilocos Region is the top producer of mung bean in the country, contributing 33.5 percent to national production.

"We continue to look for more farmers with whom we may collaborate to fulfill the required volume needed by our buyers," Balanag said.

"We are also encouraging other farmers to sell to us their mung bean produce that meets the required quality," he said adding the cooperative will buy their produce at a good price.

Based on its official Facebook page, the San Fermin ARB is paying farmers P25 per 250 grams for their mung bean harvest.

Balanag said in jest that mung bean is a lazy person's crop. "You just sow the seeds after rice plant-

ing, and it grows on its own. We only visit the plants during harvest time," he added.

The San Fermin ARB was able to upscale its mung bean production after it received P3.3 million under the DA-PRDP. Within six years, the cooperative was able to enter the markets in La Union, Baguio City, Urdaneta City and Vigan City, all in the Ilocos Region (Region 1), as far as Tanza, Cavite.

"There is income and demand for the crop and to date, our cooperative is still looking for other farmers who can help us meet the required supply at the local and international markets," Balanag said.

"Influencing farmers has become one of the challenges we are facing in our cooperative. Farmers know the benefits of planting

mung bean and yet very few have switched to mung bean farming," he added.

Mung bean (*Vigna radiata*) crop is one of the best plant-based sources of protein. It is rich in essential amino acids, antioxidants and nutrients that may help reduce blood pressure, low-density lipoprotein or "bad" cholesterol levels and heart disease risk.

In the Ilocos Region, the hard, dark green to yellow-green colored legume makes up the typical Filipino diet, especially during the rainy season.

Balanag said mung bean is also ideal for rotation with rice or corn as it helps increase the yield of the latter two crops by fixing nitrogen to the soil. Nitrogen is a macro-nutrient essential for plant growth and development.

LEANDER C. DOMINGO



■ Photo shows the mung bean produce of the San Fermin Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Multi-Purpose Cooperative. PHOTO FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Experts encourage urban farming



■ Vertical farming can be done indoors and in urban areas. PHOTO FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

EXPERTS from the agriculture sector are pushing urban and peri-urban agriculture to help address food security and sustainability challenges.

During the Pandesal Forum held at Kamuning Bakery Café in Quezon City on Monday, the experts urged Filipinos to go into outdoor and indoor farming, vertical or multilevel farming, and peri-urban agriculture where vegetables are planted in areas that are peripheral or near urban centers.

"It's a way of sustainable living," Glenn Panganiban, director of the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Plant Industry, said during the forum.

Panganiban emphasized the importance of adopting and supporting urban farming to ensure food sustainability, emphasizing this will not displace crop production in the rural areas.

"Urban and peri-urban agriculture do not replace rural production, but rather complements it. It is a way of sustainable living because we produce food in our cities and in our own communities," Panganiban said.

University of Arizona professor Joel Cuello said that urban and peri-urban farming can be done open-air or indoor, and highlighted the importance of vertical and indoor farming in the Philippines.

"For urban agriculture to really prosper, we need to incorporate some forms of vertical farming or indoor farming, so that it will be climate resilient," Cuello added.

Under a vertical farming set up, crops are cultivated using vertically stacked layers. The more advanced vertical farming systems use hydroponics to irrigate crops.

Cecilio Pedro, president of the Federation of Filipino Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry Inc., said that businessmen can invest in agriculture, but there is a need for the government, the academe and private sector to cooperate.

"We, the people involved in business, are willing to invest as long as we're going to see that it's going to be profitable in the future so that we can sustain the operation. It is a very tough job, and we need everyone's help," Pedro said.

For William Dar, senior adviser of Go Negosyo's Kapatid Angat Lahat Agriculture Program and *The Manila Times* columnist, farmers must be given access to technologies and organized into cooperatives so they can be part of the value chain.

"Let's make Philippine agriculture as a business proposition. Let's not plant without using technologies or innovations, and cluster ourselves into cooperatives so that we can partner with the private sector and be part of the value chain system," Dar added.

The DA said that it is partnering with the private sector and other government agencies to sustain urban farming and peri-urban farming. Also, it announced last August that it is leveling up its urban agriculture program with a higher budget and forging more partnerships to ensure food security.

Also, Panganiban has said that starting next year, the Agriculture department will forge more partnerships and seek a higher budget for its National Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture Program.

ALEXANDRA J. FURIO



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BRIEFS

Agri storm damage hits P202M

DAMAGE to agriculture wrought by rains and flooding caused by the shear line has reached P202.89 million, the Department of Agriculture (DA) reported on Wednesday.

The DA bulletin said crop damage and losses affected a total of 8,322 farmers in Western Visayas, Eastern Visayas, and the Bicol region with total crop losses hitting 7,521 metric tons (MT) across 8,446 hectares of farmland.

Rice crop damage was valued at P189.8 million with volume losses of 7,034MT across 8,278 hectares and accounted for 93.57% of the damage caused by the shear line.

The remaining 6.43% included damage and losses from high value crops, corn, cassava, livestock and poultry, and irrigation facilities.

In response, the DA will distribute about P29.30 million worth of rice, corn and assorted vegetable seeds to local producers in the affected areas once weather conditions improve. — **Adrian H. Halili**



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Sargassum can boost blue economy – study

BY CONRAD M. CARIÑO

SARGASSUM, a brownish seaweed, can have a big impact on the blue economy, a study from the University of San Carlos (USC) showed.

The study by Danilo Largo of USC titled "The Culture of Sargassum in the Philippines: Present and Future Prospects for Blue Economy" showed that the seaweed variety is not very visible, but its extract has applications in the food industry.

"Many of you may not be familiar with sargassum, perhaps because this marine organism is not easily seen, although it is very ubiquitous sometimes during the year, forming blooms that float around at the end of the year," Largo said.

He identified some potential products that can be extracted from the brownish seaweed, including sargassum alginate, which can be used in the food industry as an emulsifier, thickener or stabilizing agent or in the biomedical industry as a microencapsulating or radiography agent.

It is also being used to create bioplastics, which can be used in food packaging to reduce the use of synthetic plastics.

"So, why are we interested in sargassum? What caught our

attention? It is so abundant in other parts of the world, but on this side of the Pacific, we are trying to culture them. They form an underwater forest. They allow organisms to thrive — serving as habitat, shelter, feeding ground, nursery, spawning and breeding grounds for a lot of marine organisms. No other seaweed in the tropics can compare to the size and biomass of sargassum. Other countries have already utilized it for a wide range of applications," he said.

Sargassum is also believed to have anti-cancer and prebiotic properties as well as antioxidative and antimicrobial properties.

Another important potential use of sargassum is seaweed-based animal feed, which can reduce

methane gas emissions in cattle and substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Studies have also shown that aquatic animals fed with sargassum-based feed had improved immune systems, Largo said.

However, despite the potential of the brownish seaweed, it is still not utilized widely in the Philippines.

"There is still a standing policy of prohibiting harvesting, whether it comes from the natural population or from the cultured sargassum. The solution here is really to introduce the culture of sargassum for a sustainable supply of seaweed," Largo said.

He added that the cultivation and utilization of sargassum can contribute to the development of the country's blue economy.

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House bill pushes for grant of incentives to young farmers

By JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ

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IN response to the current trend of younger generations leaving the agricultural sector, a lawmaker has introduced a bill that aims to encourage and support young farmers.

In filing House Bill 9329, or the Magna Carta of Young Farmers Act of 2023, Davao City Rep. Paolo Duterte said his bill seeks to give incentives to young farmers.

"The Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA] reports on the employment drop in the agricultural sector, accounting for a total employment fall of 24.5 percent, or 9.7 million, in October 2020, 24.6 percent [10.77 million] in October 2021, and 22.5 percent [10.60 million] in October 2022,"

Duterte said.

Citing a 2020 study by former University of the Philippines (UP) Anthropology professor Florencia Palis, Duterte said the average age of a Filipino farmer is 53, suggesting a potential shortage of farmers in the next 12 years.

His bill aims to formalize the Magna Carta to protect the rights of young farmers, covering aspects such as food security, education, training, and land access.

"Considering the consistently high poverty incidence rates in the agricultural sector, the shift out of the sector will continue, and food security will be endangered if the recuperation of the sector is not given the utmost priority."

He added that agricultural development initiatives should extend beyond increasing production

and subsidies, emphasizing the need to "incentivize" the youth who are opting for more lucrative professions in urban areas.

"The Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) attributes the long-term movement of workers out of agriculture to the correlation between average daily basic pay and level of education, which tends to be stronger in other sectors than agriculture."

The proposed legislation also includes the establishment of the National Young Farmers and Fishermen Council, which will serve as an advisory, recommendatory, and consultative body to ensure the success of programs and activities for young farmers.

Additionally, it suggests ensuring equal access to quality education and training and encourag-

ing partnerships with state universities and colleges (SUCs) for technology transfer. Graduates with an agriculture and fisheries specialization under the K-12 curriculum would be eligible for scholarship grants in related courses at any SUC.

The bill also aims to ensure that young farmers are given equal access to farm technologies and mechanization; ensure innovation, development, and proliferation of young farmer-friendly technologies and mechanization in agricultural production and processing; equal access to formal sources of credit and capital, including forms of clean loans and mortgage, redemption, and insurance; and an equitable share of the produce of farms and aquatic resources.

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Bangsamoro farmers, fishers undergo training on halal production

BY MANUEL T. CAYON

✉@awimailbox

DAVAO City—The Bangsamoro Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Agrarian Reform (Mafar) announced that it is training farmers and fishermen to make sure that halal practices are being observed down to where food is being produced.

The first training involving 35 farmers and fishers from Barangay Pakias of Bongao, Tawi-Tawi was held last November 25 and 26. The participants belonged

to or were facilitated by the Tarbilang Foundation Inc. (TFI), a Tawi-Tawi based nongovernment organization.

The "Training on Halal Agri-Fishery Production," focused on the basic concepts and principles of Halal, animal health care and maintenance, and halal fishery good practices, the Mafar said. It said it wanted to enhance the knowledge of local farmers and fisherfolks "and provide innovative insights in the trending and latest practices to boost their products and income."

Mafar Tawi-Tawi Provincial Director Aidarus Nami and Municipal Officer Nurphy Ayub conducted the training.

Nami said that unlike in the past, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) would now reach the grassroots level.

"BARMM is working to ensure that all Bangsamoro will have equal opportunity for progress and development. I am also thankful to the participants for letting us serve you and sharing your time with us," he added.

He thanked the Tarbilang Foundation "for initiating this collaboration for our farmers and fisherfolks because inclusive development is BARMM's goal, meaning all of us are part of this development."

TFI Executive Director Jurma Tikmasan also expressed her gratitude to the provincial director of Mafar Tawi-Tawi for the prompt approval of their request.

"We should be very happy because the BARMM government is with us, their support is felt by the people," she said.



USDA: KATAS NG MANOK MAY HALONG BAKTERYA

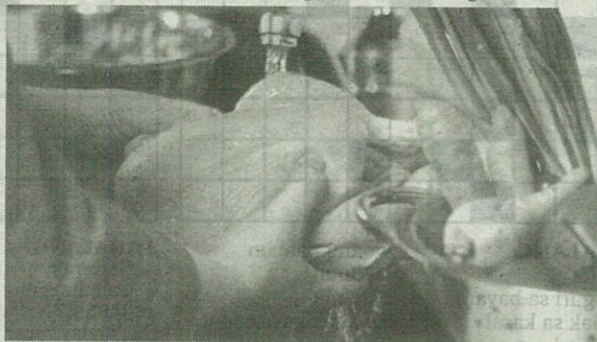
NAGBABALA sa publiko, ang United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) matapos lumabas sa pinakahuling pag-aaral nitong Agosto na ang paghuhugas ng 'raw poultry' ay may mga 'germs' na nagbibigay ng panganib sa mga tao na magkaroon ng food-borne illness.

Sa pag-aaral ng USDA, natuklasan na ang paghuhugas ng raw poultry ay nakakakuha ng 60% ng bacteria sa kanilang lababo at kahit na nilinis na ang lababo may 14% pa umanong bacteria na naiwan.

Nabatid rin sa 26% na lumahok sa pag-aaral ay naililipat umano ang mga bacteria sa ready to eat na salad lettuce.

Kaugnay nito, sinabi naman ni Chef at educator mula sa Institute of Culinary Education na si Palak Patel kung paano maiwasan ang bacteria sa mga

mga kamay. Gawin ang paglilinis sa kutsilyo, tools at cutting boards bago at matapos na linisin ang manok.



Hindi rin inirerekomenda ang paglalagay sa container ng manok bago ito ilagay sa freezer dahil maaring matapon ang katas nito na may bacteria.

Mas mainam na ilagay ito sa package bag at ilagay sa iba-ba ng freezer.

Lutuin ang manok sa loob ng 48 oras at hindi na dapat ibalik sa freezer ang tinanggal na manok dahil maaring makapag-develop ito ng mapanganib na bacteria. (Juliet de Loza-Cudia)

manok. Dapat aniya itong linisin sa malinis na lugar, kasama ang inyong



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Soybeans, wheat rise

CHICAGO- Chicago soybean futures climbed more than 1 percent on Tuesday on concerns that scorching weather conditions in South America were taking a toll on crops, while the market also drew support from a fresh round of private sales by US exporters.

Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) wheat also rose more than 2 percent, recovering from contract lows on Monday while corn declined on burdensome supplies.

CBOT January soybeans jumped 16-3/4 cents to close at \$13.46-1/2 per bushel. Soybeans were supported by drought conditions in Brazil that are threatening crops as a recent bout of rains has not diminished ongoing concerns over the hot and arid weather in key growing areas.

"For soybeans, it may be over-sold a little bit and weather-related (with) uncertainty in the northern areas of Brazil and Argentina," said Bill Lapp of Advanced Economic Solutions. - *Reuters*



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Brisk export orders stoke basmati rice prices in India

NEW DELHI- New season basmati rice prices in India have surged this year due to robust demand from the world's top buyers in the Middle East and Europe, forcing bulk buyers in wholesale grain markets to pay 10 percent to 15 percent more than last year.

Last month's decision to cut a floor price for basmati rice exports to \$950 a ton from \$1,200 a ton has spurred a flurry of export contracts, boosting demand and pushing up prices in most wholesale markets of top grain growing states, farmers said.

This month, Reuters reported that India signed contracts to export about 500,000 metric tons of new season basmati rice, indicating brisk overseas sales of the premium aromatic variety.

Wholesale prices of one of the top basmati rice varieties have jumped to around 50,000 rupees (\$599.93) a ton, up from 45,000 rupees a ton last year, said Sukrampal Beniwal, a basmati rice grower from the northern state of



Workers weighing and pack paddy bags at Sitapur market, in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. (Reuters Photo)

Haryana.

Prices of some other varieties have touched 46,000 rupees a ton against last year's 40,000 rupees, he said.

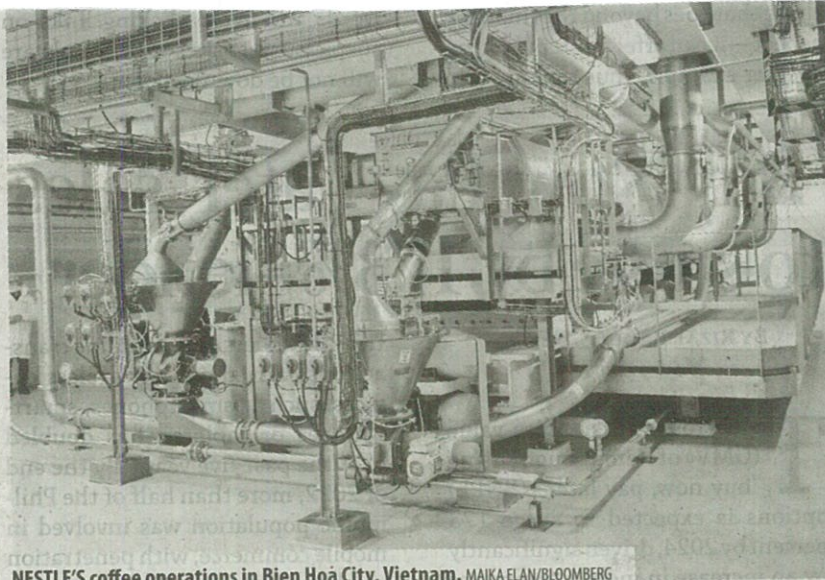
"Rice millers and exporters are flocking to wholesale markets to buy basmati from us to meet their export obligations and it looks like

demand is likely to be strong," Beniwal said.

Households, especially in urban areas, are spending 20 percent to 40 percent more on their basmati rice consumption, according to the latest survey by Local Circles, a New Delhi-based consultancy.

India annually exports more than 4 million tons of basmati - a premium long-grain variety famed for its aroma - to Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the United States, among others.

Europe is another big market for the rice. - Reuters



NESTLE'S coffee operations in Bien Hoà City, Vietnam. MAIKA ELAN/BLOOMBERG

Nestle says India and China are 'big focus' for coffee growth

INDIA and China are key coffee markets for Nestle SA, with the food giant bullish on the outlook for consumption growth in the world's most populous countries, according to the global head of strategy.

"We have a really strong footprint in Asia and we are really bullish about those markets that have very low per capita consumption," Philipp Navratil, head of Nestle's coffee strategic business unit, said in an interview in Vietnam's Dak Lak province. "China is really a big focus, and India is a big focus."

Nestle's presence in Asia includes instant coffee operations in Vietnam, which is the world's biggest producer of robusta beans. Futures for the variety in London surged to a record earlier this year on concerns around tightening supply, and the onset of El Niño is expected to bring drier conditions in growing areas.

Navratil said the Philippines and Thailand are key markets for the Swiss maker of Nespresso and Nescafe, including for soluble and ready-to-drink products. He added that Pakistan and Africa are other regions for consumption growth.

"In India, China, sub-Saharan Africa, there's 4 billion people that drink less than 20 cups per year" on average, Navratil said. There's an opportunity "to really build coffee markets out of those huge populations," he said.

Tyson's plant

TYSON Foods Inc. officially opened one of its most advanced plants in the United States, where robots will help boost the company's capacity to turn chicken meat into value-added items such as nuggets and fully cooked wings.

The \$300-million plant in Danville, Virginia will produce roughly 4 million pounds of Tyson-brand chicken products a week when it reaches full capacity early next year, according to a company spokesperson. The first of five lines at the 325,000-square-foot plant began production in mid September, about two years after construction began, and a second line was put into service earlier this month.

"This brand new Danville facility represents a pivotable move in our company's history," Tyson's Chief Executive Officer Donnie King said Tuesday at a ribbon-cutting event at the plant. "It represents a strategic growth drive, which is key for us as we continue to build positive momentum and drive profitability in our business."

Tyson is seeking to expand its value-added business, which is typically seen as more resilient in economic downturns, as part of efforts to accelerate long-term growth. The push comes when the meat giant is struggling with an unusual combination of headwinds that sent profits at its beef, chicken and pork operations to the lowest levels in more than a decade last year. The company has closed or announced shutdowns of six chicken plants as it seeks to slash costs and become more efficient.

The Danville plant is part of Tyson's 2021 plan to invest \$1.3 billion in automation, with the goal of reducing labor costs and increasing yields. The facility uses robots to execute some of the most difficult roles on the production floor, including packing and lifting boxes on pallets, King said. Still, the project is expected to create nearly 400 jobs for the southern Virginia region, the CEO said. *Bloomberg News*