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Farmers' group laments lack of action vs onion hoarders

By **BELLA CARIASO**

Farmers' group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura yesterday lamented the Office of the Ombudsman's order to file charges against Department of Agriculture (DA) Assistant Secretary Kristine Evangelista, but excluding hoarders who profited from excessive onion prices last year.

"It is very unfortunate that Assistant Secretary Evangelista was first to be charged while... those already identified by the marathon hearings of Congress that hoarded and profited from excessive onion prices last year up to early this year remain untouched," SINAG executive director Jayson Cainglet said.

"The government officials who were remiss of their duties and did nothing to go after importers and cold storage owners had their way in controlling the release of stocks and created

the scenario of artificial supply shortage were identified during the congressional hearings," Cainglet added.

Aside from Evangelista, the ombudsman has also ordered the filing of graft and falsification charges against Food Terminal Inc. (FTI) vice president for operations John Gabriel Benedict Trinidad III and 16 other individuals.

Retail prices of onions reached as high as P720 per kilo last year amid hoarding and manipulation.

"The BPI (Bureau of Plant Industry) did not import white onions when the onion stakeholders asked them to import since stocks were dwindling. They have no actual monitoring and control of onions, whether imported or locally produced," Cainglet said.

Due diligence should have alerted these officials of the inherent relationships of these companies and personalities as trader, importer, consolidator and cold

storage owners, according to the SINAG official.

"Some of these personalities have pending cases since 2014 filed by the NBI (National Bureau of Investigation) against certain BPI officials then and members of the then national garlic action team (NGAT). The same modus was used, when only a handful of traders and cold storage owners, including onion farmers that acted as conduit and importers, are controlling the supply," he said.

"Why were certain individuals already charged by the National Bureau of Investigation and named by the Senate in 2014 as involved in uncompetitive behavior still allowed to import onions and continue with their trading activities?" he added.

Cainglet said that SINAG would rather see those that truly manipulated onion prices and their cohorts in the government to be charged and convicted.



Higher tobacco buying prices seen in 2024, 2025

By **DANESSA RIVERA**

The government is raising the minimum buying prices for tobacco for the next two years following an agreement among stakeholders in a recent tripartite conference conducted by the National Tobacco Administration (NTA).

The floor price of Virginia tobacco, which makes up almost 60 percent of total local production, is seen increasing by an unprecedented P9.90 per kilo in its various grades.

The minimum buying price for Burley and Native type tobacco would also be raised by P5.90 per kilo and P3.90 per kilo, respectively.

"The NTA Governing Board is set to release the full details of the floor price increases across the board of all the grades of the three types of tobacco upon approval in their session next week," Agriculture undersecretary Deogracias Victor Savellano said.

The NTA convenes the tripartite conference every two years to review and fix reasonable tobacco floor prices on prevailing factors and conditions like world market situations, production costs, and a reasonable margin of profit for the farmers, dealers, manufacturers, and exporters.

Savellano, who sits as the NTA oversight official and alternate chairperson, said the P9.90 per kilo increase on floor prices for Virginia tobacco is the second highest in 16 years.

The highest agreed increase on the floor price of Virginia tobacco, which was P10 a kilo, was achieved during the tripartite conference on Dec. 10, 2007, with his intervention then as governor of Ilocos Sur.

In the succeeding conferences, the increase in floor prices of Vir-

ginia tobacco only ranged from P1 to P3 per kilo.

Last August, farmers were asking for at least a P5-per kilogram increase in floor prices across all types and grades of tobacco.

The proposed increase would allow farmers to recover higher input and labor costs, which surged in the past two years.

In the previous tripartite agreement struck in 2021, the tobacco floor price was raised by P3 per kilogram across all grades for Virginia and Burley. Likewise, the floor price of Native tobacco increased by P4 per kilogram.

Savellano said the tripartite forum aims to strengthen the tobacco industry to attain the goal of President Marcos, which is to increase the income of the tobacco farmers and to sustain tobacco production by lessening the importation while increasing the tobacco exports in the future.

"We aim to improve our industry by helping one another to balance the economic significance of tobacco as one of the highest contributors to the government coffer," he said.

The floor price is the minimum price allowed by the government for the procurement of tobacco from farmers. This is based on the prevailing market conditions such as production cost, reasonable margin of profit for stakeholders and growing conditions.

The setting of the minimum floor price provides tobacco farmers a guaranteed minimum return on investment of at least 25 percent for expenses incurred in production.

The tobacco industry provides livelihood to at least 2.1 million people, including more than 430,000 farmers, farm workers and their family members.



PPA: Pork, other products banned at ports

By **GHIO ONG**

Pork and other agricultural products will be confiscated at certain ports in the country during this week's exodus of passengers who are out to enjoy the holidays, the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) warned.

It cited as reason the order of several local government units to ban the entry of meat products to prevent African swine fever (ASF) from spreading into their localities.

The ban is imposed at the PPA-managed ports in Batangas, Marinduque, Quezon, Mindoro, Bicol, Masbate, Palawan, Negros Oriental, Siquijor, Panay, Guimaras, Negros Occidental, Bohol, Western Leyte, Biliran, Davao, Misamis Oriental, Cagayan de Oro, Zamboanga, Misamis Occidental, Ozamiz, Lanao del Norte and Iligan.

Many Filipinos want to take the opportunity to reunite with their loved ones after Oct. 30 and Nov.

1 and 2 were declared as holidays in observance of the barangay and youth elections tomorrow and the *Undas* on Wednesday and Thursday.

Meanwhile, the Port of Ormoc also prohibited the entry of coconut seeds and parts and other plants and fruits from Luzon, as well as hemp and similar crops from parts of Mindanao.

Also, the PPA Davao office reminded the public that the transport of endangered species and wildlife, corals, shells and sand from the port of Babak in Samal Island to Davao is still banned. It noted that the ban was first imposed in April this year.

For those who wish to bring their pets with them, the PPA advised them to secure shipping permits and veterinary health certificates ahead of time.

Shipping permits can be acquired from the offices of the Bureau of Animal Industry's National Quarantine Services or through its website.