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## Agri chief banks on S&T to boost rice production

By CATHERINE TALAVERA

The government is focused on improving rice production and reducing post-harvest losses through science and technology (S&T), according to Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

During his visit to the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) in the Science City of Muñoz, Nueva Ecija, Laurel highlighted to scientists and experts the importance of harmonized efforts from all sectors to attain food sufficiency.

"We just have to focus our efforts and synchronize with each other in implementing our rice programs with all agencies, local government units and stakeholders," Laurel said.

Following the directive of President Marcos to increase rice production, Laurel announced that the DA would launch a massive modernization program to increase rice recovery after milling from 62 percent and lessen wastage after harvest.

Laurel also committed to look into the staffing of PhilRice, with the aim of adding more employees to its current 297 personnel, as well as scientists to help improve the Philippine rice sector.

PhilRice executive director John de Leon said the agency now employs 1,500 as contractual workers, many of them highly capable in their respective fields.

With 140 hectares and eight stations throughout the country, Laurel noted that PhilRice is acutely undermanned, especially for its central role in producing seeds and developing technology that will help increase rice output.

At the 35th National Rice R4D (research for development) conference held at the Philippine Rice Research Institute in Nueva Ecija, Laurel said the DA is moving with urgency to improve infrastructure and mechanization, irrigation and drying facilities to increase efficiency in rice production.

"Ultimately, our aim is to minimize importation as soon as possible for the country's food security and to



Laurel

improve farmers' incomes," he said.

"We hope to attract a new generation of farmers, researchers and innovators who will ensure the country's food security in years to come. Together let us pursue a shared dream of a prosperous and food-secure Pilipinas," Laurel said.

De Leon reported to Laurel the rice business innovation system (RiceBIS) communities that PhilRice links up with private sector partners like BPI Foundation and Kiwanis International, which help rice farmers by buying the contracted volumes from farmers at better than market rates to be used for their corporate philanthropic activities.

PhilRice said it now has 23 RiceBIS communities, and this year the agency leveled it up to RiceBIS 2.0 by connecting communities with the markets.

In addition, PhilRice receives P3 billion from the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) to finance its numerous research and development programs, which eventually should be scaled to the farmers, and another P600 million for training and extension along with the Agricultural Training Institute and the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization or PhilMech.

De Leon explained that PhilRice has evolved from a purely R&D institution to an agency that executes operations properly and well with full transparency by digitalizing the process and involving all the partners in embracing digitalization.





## DA revamp in full swing as chief introduces reforms

By **BELLA CARIASO**

The reorganization in the

Department of Agriculture is now in full swing as newly installed **Secretary Francisco Tiu**

**Laurel Jr.** wants to introduce reforms in the DA, according to farmers' group Philippine

Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. (PCAFI).

"We support his plan to

reorganize the DA to be more aggressive, motivated and improve its absorptive capacity, including the disbursement as there was a delay on the support assistance to the farmers so he is well aware of that," PCAFI president Danilo Fausto said at a press conference.

Fausto added that it is sole discretion of Laurel if he will implement a total revamp at the DA.

He added that Laurel also committed to improve rice and vegetable production by providing irrigation systems in the upland areas.

"Some of our members brought to him the problem of upland vegetables and he said he already requested the President. He was able to get 10 percent of what is supposed to be given, about P25 million to irrigate our upland vegetables," he added.

At the same time, Fausto said that he submitted an eight-page recommendation to

Laurel including the reforms in the coconut industry.

"We need to replace 10 percent of our coconut trees. If we have 347 million trees, it's about 34 million that we need to replace and an additional six million coconut trees damaged during calamities, so that is 40 million trees that we need to replace," Laurel added.

Fausto added that he also recommended to Laurel the need to improve aquaculture as the production of commercial fishing is dwindling.

He added that Laurel also opposed the extension of Executive Order 10 extending EO 171 which reduced the Most Favored Nation tariff rates for key commodities such as meat of swine (fresh, chilled or frozen), maize (corn), rice and coal until Dec. 31.

"He opposed the definite extension of EO 10 as the recommendation is (a) one year extension," he said.





# DA chief: Rice self-sufficiency goal still doable

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS

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**T**HE new chief of the Department of Agriculture (DA) said the country's ever-elusive dream of rice self-sufficiency remains attainable.

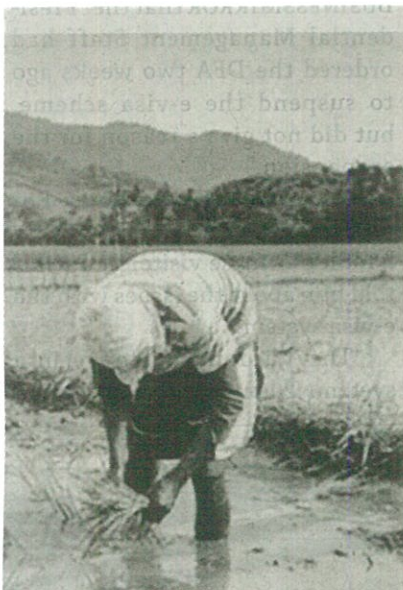
Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. on Thursday said the "dream of being rice sufficient is achievable."

Laurel said the rice self-sufficiency goal will be attained through the help of science and technology as well as "harmonious working relationship" with other agencies and stakeholders.

"We just have to focus our efforts and synchronize with each other in implementing our rice programs with all agencies, local government units, and stakeholders," he told rice experts and scientists from the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) in the Science City of Munoz, Nueva Ecija recently.

A FARMER in Central Luzon plants rice in this BUSINESSMIRROR file photo.

"The dream of being rice sufficient is achievable. We just have to work in harmony," he added.



Laurel said he would not have agreed to join the Cabinet and accept the agriculture portfolio,

if he "did not see any hope in the agriculture sector."

He reiterated one of President Marcos Jr.'s marching orders for him, which is to increase domestic rice production.

Laurel said the DA, under his term, would embark on a "massive" modernization program that seeks to improve rice milling recovery from the current 62 percent and reduce post-harvest losses.

Last month, the BUSINESSMIRROR broke the story that the country's self-sufficiency ratio (SSR) in rice fell to 77 percent in 2022, the lowest in more than two decades, as the country remained as one of the world's largest importers of the staple.

Latest data released by the

Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed that the country's rice SSR last year was lower than the 81.5 percent level recorded in 2021. **(Related story: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/10/10/rice-sufficiency-level-falls-to-24-year-low/>)**

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.

Earlier, Agriculture Undersecretary for Industry Rice Development Leocadio S. Sebastian said the DA is targeting to achieve a rice self-sufficiency level of about 85 percent to 87 percent this year.





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## DA modernization program aims to lower rice post-harvest losses

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) is set to launch a massive modernization program that will increase rice recovery after milling from the current 62 percent and lessen post-harvest wastage.

DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., in a statement yesterday, said this will be pursued by the government “through science and technology” that would improve local rice production.

Laurel said experts, scientists and the entire sector must implement “harmonized efforts” to attain food sufficiency, especially for rice.

Aside from the modernization program, Laurel said he will look into the staffing of the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) in Munoz, Nueva Ecija, to bring in more employees and scientists to its current 297 personnel.

Laurel said PhilRice currently employs 1,500 contractual workers, many of them highly capable in their respective fields.

However, Laurel said with eight offices throughout the country, PhilRice is “severely undermanned” in fulfilling its central role in producing seeds and developing technology that would help increase rice output.



**The old way.** Farmers take advantage of the sunny weather to dry palay on Camiling-Bayambang Road in Tarlac on Sept. 8, 2022. The DA plans to modernize rice farming to reduce losses and improve yield. (PNA photo)

Last October, the DA said the country can possibly experience a record palay harvest this year despite the expected effects of the El Niño phenomenon.

Leo Sebastian, DA Undersecretary for rice industry development,

earlier said local palay production this year can “hopefully” reach up to 20 million metric tons (MT) or just slightly below the said figure.

In 2021, Philippine local rice production hit a record 19.96 million MT but slightly dropped

to 19.76 million MT last year.

The DA said the optimistic projection is driven by the around 300,000 MT yield increase of palay for the first semester of the year compared to a similar period in 2022.





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## Data problem

As a result of inadequate, scattered and sometimes unreliable data on the agricultural sector, Secretary Francis Tiu Laurel Jr. articulated the need for the reestablishment of the Bureau of Agricultural Statistics (BAS) in the Department of Agriculture (DA).

The BAS and its function were absorbed by the Philippine Statistics (PSA) Authority when Republic Act (RA) 10625, otherwise known as the "Philippine Statistical Act of 2013," was enacted during the incumbency of President Benigno Aquino Jr. (PNoy).

RA 10625 actually merged four major government statistical agencies engaged in primary data collection and the compilation of secondary data: the BAS, the Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics, the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB), and the National Statistics Office (NSO).

The main reason given for the merger was to ensure efficiency and objectivity in data collection and interpretation. In other



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words, it aimed to guarantee data integrity as a means of improving the planning and decision-making process in the country.

In the past, when the BAS was in existence, I personally

witnessed how an Agriculture secretary lashed out at the agency's head because data on rice production did not match the rosy picture of a bountiful harvest he was conveying to the media. The poor friend of mine who headed BAS then had no choice but to fiddle with the data collection methodology so that the situation would not be as gloomy as the result of the previous data set.

The situation must have been worse during the PNoy administration as a politician headed the DA then. He promised to attain rice self-sufficiency and was even successful in convincing the President to double the DA's budget. Unfortunately, he proved to be a monumental failure, just like the series of Agriculture secretaries who promised to

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## Data problem

attain rice self-sufficiency for the country with much braggadocio.

It was partly through the

combined initiative of the economic managers of the PNoy administration that RA 10625



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was passed. They wanted to have a more reliable and robust data set from the agricultural sector to properly monitor its performance. They thought that the BAS staff would benefit from the in-house statistical experts of the NSCB and the NSO.

And truly, they did. Unfortunately, complaints abound that the PSA is not providing real-time data on the performance of the agriculture sector, that the agricultural indicators it is using do not sometimes jive with how the sector operates, and the smallness in the sample size that makes generalization dodgy, to cite a few.

My take on this is that the PSA is doing its job of data gathering and initial data analysis well but is severely constrained by inadequate resources. For instance, it cannot cover a bigger sample size because of budget limitations, it cannot conduct more frequent surveys due to resource constraints, and it sometimes cannot precisely measure key indicators because it lacks the budget to hire agricultural and fishery experts to advise on what to survey.

I can fully empathize with the predicament of Laurel, having once served as a senior DA official under the previous administration. For instance, during our incumbency, the DA's

National Corn Program was reporting a corn self-sufficiency ratio of more than a hundred percent. It even proposed to then Agriculture Secretary William Dar that the country be allowed to export corn to neighboring Asean countries.

Upon review of the data presented to the DA Management Committee, my team discovered that the reason why we were corn self-sufficient was that they included in their calculation the volume of feed wheat the country imported as part of the total supply. Feed wheat has a low protein content and is often used as animal feed instead.

When my team did a recalculation, we found out that our local corn production could only meet 57-60 percent of corn demand. This accounted for the ever-increasing volume of feed wheat and barley imports that are used by our feed millers as substitutes for corn.

Another example was a Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) report that claimed a high ratio of fish sufficiency. We found out that they violated a cardinal principle in statistics wherein instead of dividing supply by the total population, they removed non-fish eating Filipinos (which they assumed to be those 9 years

old below — devoid of any scientific evidence) and then used the remainder as a divisor. The result was obviously a higher self-sufficiency ratio.

I can go on with more examples, particularly with reports coming from DA regional offices. But the more important question to raise is: Will the reestablishment of the BAS provide better agricultural statistics or data?

I am afraid that my assessment is negative. The main reason is that a re-established BAS will not be able to attract competent statisticians and economists because government compensation for them is no longer competitive with what they can get from the private sector and donor agencies.

It will just become like the current Information and Communication Technology Services unit in the DA, which generates additional employment in the government service but cannot satisfactorily fulfill its mandate because of the lack of competent and experienced personnel.

Besides having most of the staff employed under contract-of-service (meaning temporary) in the absence of regular budget plantilla, salaries for information technology personnel are not competitive with those offered by the private sector, both

local and abroad.

What then is the solution?

The best option is to hire a technically competent chief economist in the DA, supported by 4-5 relatively senior staff who specialize in the fields of economics, statistics, and computer science or management information systems. After this, identify point persons in various bureaus (e.g., Bureau of Plant Industry, BFAR, etc.), attached agencies (e.g., Philippine Coconut Authority, Sugar Regulatory Administration, etc.), and regional offices who will be in charge of data gathering in their respective units.

In turn, these point persons should report to the chief economist and his/her team to get instructions on the data to be collected or gathered, what form, etc., while at the same time becoming recipients of capability-building training programs to be conducted upon the determination by the chief economist.

Properly compensating the chief economist and the team will be key to attracting the most competent ones for the job. This is an administrative matter that DA management can easily find ways of successfully addressing.

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## Foreign firms eyeing PH crops sector

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

**P**PRIVATE companies from Malaysia and China showed interest in investing in the Philippine crop sector as part of their market diversification strategy, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said on Thursday.

The DA said the companies expressed their interest during the Asian Seed Congress 2023 held in Christchurch, New Zealand, on November 24. It was attended by various private and government seed companies from 45 countries and over

1,000 delegates from private and government seed companies and organizations.

"Those that indicated interest to invest in the Philippines were from Malaysia and China," the DA said, adding they are willing to share their technologies.

According to Dr. Frisco Malabanan, who represented the DA's National Rice Program and is also an executive committee member of the Asian Seed Congress, they are pushing for high-quality seeds for

different crops in the Asia-Pacific region.

This will include seeds of different vegetables, cut flowers, ornamentals, herbs and spices, rice and corn.

The DA added that the Philippines was able to buy seeds directly from suppliers in Thailand, Korea, Japan, China, the United States, New Zealand and the Netherlands. Seed companies that participated in the Congress were those from SL Agritech, East-West

Seed Co., Caneco Seeds, Allied Botanical, Haverson, Ramgo Seeds, Bayer, Syngenta, Seedworks and BioSeeds.

Malabanan also discussed practices from the study tour held in the country last September 17 to 24 in Nueva Ecija, Pangasinan, Laguna, Davao Oriental, Davao del Sur and Davao del Norte.

The Congress also highlighted technical sessions on seed technologies available in the Asia-Pacific region, from pro-

duction to harvesting, processing, storage, seed treatment and packaging, and marketing across the region.

The newest technologies, storage, packaging and marketing strategies for improving the quality of seeds bought by farmers were also discussed during the event.

"An example of this is the seed pelleting technology wherein the fertilizer and pesticide are incorporated into the seed until their maturity," said the DA.





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## SRA calls for sugar SRP to be set at P85 per kilo

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said on Thursday that it is pushing for a suggested retail price (SRP) for refined sugar at P85 per kilogram.

Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona told reporters that the SRA and the Department of Agriculture (DA) are currently studying an SRP scheme following the failure of prices to drop despite increased supply.

"We have been pushing for an P85 SRP. The only (snag) there is how it will be enforced," Mr. Azcona added.

He said government agencies need to be able to enforce the SRP for refined sugar at retail.

The SRA has said that retail prices for refined sugar have remained stable since February last year at P80 per kilo to P110 per kilo in supermarkets.

"They said before that price (of sugar) went up because the supply was not enough; the supply is here, and we are also milling. But the retail price has not yet decreased," he added.

According to the regulator's Sugar Order No. 1, raw sugar production was estimated at 1.85 million metric tons during the 2023 to 2024 crop year.

Mr. Azcona said that the farmgate price of raw sugar had declined by about P10 per kilo to an average of P2,620 per 50-kilo bag.

"One thing that is being talked about is getting the other agencies involved; they are the ones who have control on the retail side. The DA and SRA charter say that we cannot participate in the market price of sugar," he added.

He said that sugar prices are not reflecting the decline in the farmgate price of the commodity.

The SRA had projected earlier that the farmgate price of raw sugar will hit P3,000 per 50-kilo bag.

"We will see how we can fix it, but that's an immediate concern because prices are sliding and farmers are being affected," Mr. Azcona added. — **Adrian H. Halili**



PHILIPPINE STAR/EDO GUMBAN





## CTALK CITO BELTRAN

### Untold stories

What President Bongbong Marcos could not achieve, Cebu Governor Gwen Garcia has done, selling rice at P20 per kilo. But here's the catch: The rice was bought from the NFA at P25 and Cebu province subsidized the P5 difference.



The NFA is not allowed to sell rice commercially under the Rice Tariffication Law except when disposing of rice or palay that are approaching their "due date" or expiry period. Chances are the rice offered at the Sugbo Merkadong Barato, if bought from the NFA, was meant for disposal and is not a regular or reliable supply for P20 rice.

Unfortunately, the P20 rice in Cebu is not the first of its kind. Rosendo So of Sinag shared with us the practice of LGUs and politicians of giving away rice to constituents and my DA sources call this practice MR or Maharlika Rice, a political investment on voters. The risk now is if other governors decide to copy Gov. Gwen Garcia and demand that the NFA sell them P25 rice.

The President has been closely monitoring the situation and is trying to find a solution that is "not offensive" to one and all. While the public believe that "the end justifies the means," those in government, even PBBM, has to consider a solution that does not violate laws or requires a complicated political/economic/financial solution.

Just as important, the solution has to be politically correct and not lay blame on others for the problem inherited by the new administration and does not trigger or challenge the position or legislation authored by a senator or congressional leader.

If the government, the DA or the NFA was to be gung-ho about it for *pogi* points, buying locally or importing several hundred thousand metric tons of palay and rice will disturb the supply chain and create inflationary prices in the "market."

When the NFA moved to be more "competitive" by buying palay at P2 more, traders reacted by buying higher than the NFA. That situation resulted in the NFA not being able to buy enough for emergency or buffer stocks and left the supply of palay and ultimately rice prices in the control of traders and retailers.

If the President used strong-arm tactics, as some congressmen have suggested, by way of raiding rice mills and warehouses, that will result in zero importation, empty warehouses, depleted supplies and no buffer stocks. Why?

When traders buy palay they have to buy in volume. They have to fill their 5-, 10-, 20-thousand metric ton warehouses. Only the private sector traders are allowed by the RTL to import rice, and they usually import 5,000 metric tons per shipment equivalent to 100,000 bags of rice. Much of these stocks are contracted or committed to regular customers.

What's to stop publicity seeking politicians, law enforcers and media from "raiding" a warehouse, scandalizing the establishment and owners and padlocking the warehouses until documents are submitted? This has happened once too often in various industries and the scandal and lost opportunity is too much.

There is now a growing number of rice traders that have opted to lay low. The global and local uncertainties in the rice industry in terms of food security and increased prices, and the threat of being "inspected" or "raided," have all but discouraged traders from stocking up. If the private sector won't import, and the NFA can't, then it is safe to assume that we won't have a lot of rice in the country.

In relation to that, another untold story is that there have been almost violent arguments between government officials concerning the actual state of palay and rice stocks.

On one side there are the long-term bureaucrats at the Department of Agriculture who have relied on traditional sources of data, historical observations and statistics collected from unverified, delayed and poorly updated reports. On the other side are farm practitioners, agricultural engineers as well as business owners engaged in the trading of rice and corn who use computers and drone technology.

The older bureaucrats anchor their confidence in a stable supply of palay and rice based on the traditional two to three annual harvests, multiplied by the historical land area or hectares planted to rice plus the usual importations that are done to augment any shortages. The introduction of the RTL or Rice Tariffication Law further added to their confidence, presuming that there would be a flood of rice as traders and importers would fill the void that occurred when RTL took away the authority of the NFA to buy or import rice as needed.

As confident as the older bureaucrats were, their "data" have not accurately studied the effects of climate change, global conflict resulting in inflationary effects on the price of fertilizers, seeds, transport, urbanization and land conversion. To quote a commercial farmer, "My budget for fertilizer used to fill a truck. Now I only need a pick-up because that's all I can buy."

Now we have traders from Isabela going down to Pangasinan and Nueva Ecija to buy rice in order to fill their half-empty warehouses. A big chain of malls in the GenSan area has openly said they can't fill orders for rice.

Finally, another untold story has to do the Board of Directors of the FTI. By the end of December, all members of the FTI Board of Directors will be overstaying by one year and a half. The practice is that these political appointees are coterminous with the previous administration and should have submitted their resignations. But instead, some cite a law that they must remain until new appointees have been named.

Perhaps the Executive Secretary could act on the long pending appointments of new nominees or else all hope of cleaning up and modernizing the FTI will take forever and ever.







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## Malaysia, China seed companies eye Phl investments

By CATHERINE TALAVERA

Several seed companies of different crops particularly from Malaysia and China have expressed interest in investing in the Philippines, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

In a statement yesterday, the DA said this expression of interest was made at the recently-concluded Asian Seed Congress 2023 held in Christ church, New Zealand.

"Those that indicated interest to invest in the Philippines were from Malaysia and China to share their

new technologies," the DA said.

It said their investment is part of their market diversification strategy.

"The idea is to make high quality seeds of different crops (vegetables, cutflower, ornamentals, herbs and spices, rice and corn) in Asia Pacific region to help solve the food security problems of the world, harping on the slogan seed is life, according to," Frisco Malabanan, a member of the executive committee of the Asian Seed Congress, who is also with the National Rice Program of the DA.

The annual Congress gathers together members in 45 countries

of the world and this year saw the attendance and participation of over 1,000 delegates coming from private and government seed companies and organizations.

The highlight of the Congress was the technical session about different seed technologies available in the Asia Pacific region from production to harvesting, processing, storage, seed treatment and packaging and marketing across the region.

Seed companies that participated in the Congress were those from SL Agritech, East West Seed Company, Caneco Seeds, Allied Botanical, Ha-

version, Ramgo Seeds, Bayer, Syngenta, Seedworks and BioSeeds.

During the Congress, Malabanan reported on the learnings of the study tour held in the country last Sept. 17 to 24 in Nueva Ecija, Pangasinan, Laguna, Davao Oriental, Davao del Sur and Davao del Norte.

In addition to the technological sessions, the Congress also had exhibits showcasing the most up to date technologies, products, equipment, storage, packaging and marketing strategies to improve the quality of seeds being bought by farmers in the region.

"An example of this is the seed pelleting technology wherein the fertilizer and pesticide is incorporated into the seed until their maturity," the DA said.

The Congress also served as the venue for different private and government seed companies to do trading of seeds like the Philippines being able to buy directly from Asia Pacific seeds companies subtropical varieties of carrots, cabbage, lettuce, broccoli and cauliflower from suppliers in Thailand, Korea, Japan, China, America, New Zealand and Holland.





**EDITORIAL**

## Eat your greens, grow them, too

It comes as no surprise to learn that Filipino families eat only 60 kilograms of vegetables a year, half of the world's average of 120 kg.

Blame it partly on the unique place of pork in our history, cultural practice, and diet. Aside from pigs being indigenous in the Philippines where killing the animal is part of some animistic rituals, our appetite for pork was reinforced by our colonizer Spain, which, incidentally, is among the world's top meat-eating country. At the time of Spain's inquisition in Europe from the 13th to the 19th century, when Jews, Muslims, Protestants, and other individuals suspected of being in conflict with Catholic beliefs were targeted, eating pork—which is anathema to both Islam and Judaism—became proof that one did not subscribe to either religion, and was therefore safe from execution.

In more recent times and with scores of affordable and tasty food options available, vegetables became a last choice on the table, obligatory in one's diet only because of their nutritive value, but seldom served as the main dish. The onslaught of some 20 typhoons a year that regularly drown vegetable farms in the country has also resulted in a spike in prices, further dooming this healthy alternative.

In a recent forum, former **Department of Agriculture** secretary William Dar pointed out the need for a bigger budget to encourage urban farming, which he introduced during his term at the DA in 2020.

As the Philippines is "rice-centric," Dar said 60 to 65 percent of the DA budget has been devoted to this staple crop.

### Urban farming

For this year, Gerald Glenn Panganiban of the Bureau of Plant Industry said the DA had allocated P430 million for urban farming, hardly enough to be able to encourage and support community efforts to sustain this food security initiative.

Which is a pity considering the benefits of urban farming, among them its steadfast survival amid the possible impact of the El Niño phenomenon. "Urban farming minimizes use of water and because the environment is controlled, it is not affected by drought or typhoon," Panganiban said.

In its Special Area for Agricultural Development program website, the DA gave an overview on urban agriculture, and how it can exist in even densely populated cities in many forms: as community and backyard gardens; on rooftops, balconies, and vacant lots, as vertical gardens, and through hydroponics, a soilless method of growing food using mineral nutrient solutions in water.

### Weekend farmers

Small or limited space in the urban jungle has not stopped some local government units from starting community gardens, as Bonifacio Global City did, with its BGC Urban Farm launched in March this year. For a certain monthly fee, ordinary folk can adopt a vegetable plot, or volunteer as a weekend farmer. Partner farmers are around to teach the ropes of urban farming to those interested, while fresh farm harvests and farming essentials are sold on-site.

The lockdown and resulting job loss during the COVID-19 pandemic meanwhile prompted the Food Security Task Force of the Quezon City government to visit urban poor communities and distribute free seed starter kits, as part of #GrowQC's urban farming and food security program that the city mayor started some 10 years back. The kit contained seeds of various vegetables, pots, and other planting materials that helped turn a previously vacant lot being used as a dump site into a vegetable garden. It now provides not only food to the community but also dignity and hope to the planters.

To encourage more people to engage in urban agriculture, Quezon City also offers tax exemptions to residents willing to use vacant or idle lands for planting food crops, an incentive that other cities can adopt. It's also a starter project that newly elected barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan officials can emulate.

### Vegetable plots in schools

And, as Dar noted, urban gardening can be part of the school curriculum, with vegetable plots in the campus providing students a hands-on learning experience. Tending such greens should also lead children to consume more vegetables if only out of pride over growing their own food. Character-building could be an inadvertent fruit of this school subject as well, since patience and hard work are needed to coax plants and vegetables to grow and flourish.

While offering a solution to the threat of food shortage by providing fresh and healthy food, urban farming can also help reduce the harmful effects of climate change. The livestock industry has been identified as among the significant contributors to greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, and water pollution. Eating less meat and more greens would thus reduce such calamitous environmental impact. It would also help produce a healthier nation, since a meat-based diet has been linked to chronic lifestyle ailments, such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer.

The DA apparently has its work cut out for it. It's just a matter of having the political will to lead this worthy initiative.





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# What's happening with the coco levy fund?

**W**ith P75 billion in cash and P50 billion in assets, the coco levy fund holds the promise of reversing the deplorable state of 2.5 million coconut farmers and their families. But without the proper structure and support, there is a great peril that these funds will be misused.

The original vision of helping the coconut industry was to have organizations support production (Philippine Coconut Authority), processing (CIIF-Oil Mills Group), and financing (United Coconut Planters Bank). Last Nov. 22, at the conference of the public-private Philippine Council of Agriculture and Fisheries, coconut committee chair Charlie Avila spoke about the altered direction and actions that have made this vision unattainable.

To restore such, Avila highlighted the need for strong political will and decisive action.

## Unified direction

Last Nov. 26, at the meeting of the Alyansa Agrikultura (AA), co-convenor Romeo Royandoyan decried the slow release and misuse of coco levy funds, both of which have been documented. While the law mandates that the funds be distributed to 12 government agencies, no organization is responsible for

## COMMENTARY

ERNESTO M. ORDOÑEZ

coordination and ensuring that these agencies follow the same goal and objectives. Each agency is now using the levy funds in the way it so wishes.

When a farmer leader told **Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA)** officials that one specific agency was misusing the funds, he was told they could do nothing about this. They claimed that they did not have the authority to intervene in any agency's fund releases.

A specific complaint about this agency was that it was spending money on projects that had unclear goals and harnessed the wrong people, clearly a waste of money.

It was suggested that an executive directive be issued identifying the PCA as the responsible institution to coordinate and guide the fund use of the 12 agencies.

The agencies were also asked not to add unnecessary regulations in the law.

Last Nov. 27, Zenaida Mansilohan, a farmer leader from Agusan del Sur, said several farm-

ers could not avail of the funds because they did not meet an additional requirement of being a member of a cooperative. She recommended that there should be more flexibility, such as allowing coconut farmers officially recognized by PCA as a sufficient requirement for fund access.

## Farmer empowerment

Earlier this month, the Pambansang Koalisyon ng Kababaihan sa Kanayunan (PKKK), also known as the National Rural Women Coalition with 426 member-organizations in 42 provinces, also recommended harnessing the municipal coconut councils. These councils will supplement head office initiatives in helping monitor and manage the funds, while also ensuring women empowerment at the grass roots level.

Following the same direction of more meaningful participation by coconut stakeholders, AA recommended that a farmer representative be present at all meetings of the Coconut Trust Fund Management Committee.

This committee has one member each from the departments of Finance, Budget and Management, and Justice. Its objective is to "provide efficient utilization of the trust fund."

Since this fund is for the benefit of the coconut farmers, there should be at least one farmer representative in all the meetings to ensure that their viewpoint is considered.

Another point: the law states that only P10 billion of the available P75-billion coconut levy cash is to be used every year for the first three years of implementation. It has been argued that this is too small, given the urgent enormous need of coconut farmers. After contributing to the fund for more than four decades, they should receive a bigger amount to improve their lives.

Lastly, we must also give our full support to the PCA.

The perils of the coconut levy must be addressed. Significant and urgent recommendations should be immediately considered and decisive action must be taken. Only then will the promise of the coconut levy become reality. **INQ**



The author is Agriwatch chair, former secretary of presidential flagship programs and projects, and former undersecretary of the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Trade and Industry. Contact is [agriwatch\\_phil@yahoo.com](mailto:agriwatch_phil@yahoo.com).





Tonite

## SPY ON THE JOB

Hindi na raw kailangang maging "bright" ng mga ayudanatics nating tropapips para magtanong na kung "one to sawa" na ang pag-import ng bigas, nasaan ang mga bigas at bakit lalo pang nagmamahal ang bigas?

Ang mahiwagang tanong na 'yan eh dahil sa mahal pa rin nga ang presyo ng bigas na naglalaro sa P50 per kilo ang pinakamura. Wala na raw mabili sa presyong P40 per kilo na kahit papaano raw noon eh pangtao na ang kalidad at hindi mabantot at durog na panghayop.

Bago nga maupong pangulo si PBBM, may litanya pa noon ang dating Finance Secretary ni ex-President Digong Duterte na si Carlos Dominguez III, laban sa planong ibasura ang Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), na nag-alis sa import quota o quantitative restriction.

Kaya naman itinuturing na one to sawa na ang pag-import ng bigas ng nasa pribadong sektor. Kasabay niyan, naetsapuwera pa sa pag-import ng bigas ang **National Food Authority (NFA)**.

Dati kasi, ang NFA ang nag-i-import ng bi-

gas at ibinebenta nila sa mga tao sa mas murang halaga. Ang kinalabasan naman, nabaon sa utang ang NFA dahil nga naman sa bibili ka ng bigas na mas mataas na presyo at ibebenta sa mas mababang halaga.

Ang dahilan kaya ginagawa noon ng NFA na mag-import at magbenta ng murang bigas ay para labanan daw ang "monopoly" ng mga trader o negosyante ng commercial rice. Hinala kasi noon, may nagmamaniipula sa suplay ng bigas kaya nagmamahal. Abay hindi ba kahit ngayon din naman?

Para malutas ang problema, nagbebenta ng bigas ang NFA at binaha nila ng NFA rice ang merkado para mapababa ang presyo kontra sa commercial rice ng mga trader. Sabi ng ilang ayudanatics nating tropapips, may nabibili pa noon na NFA rice na P27 ang kilo.

Ang problema nga lang, may mga ulat na may mga kulokoy din na nagbebenta ng NFA rice na hinaharuan ng pangit na kalidad. O kaya naman, ang murang NFA rice, inililipat ng sako para maging commercial at ibebenta sa mahal na presyo. Ibig sabihin, nagkagaguhang.

Bago nga maupong pangulo si PBBM noong July 2022, ibinida ni Dominguez na bumaba raw sa P39 per kilo ang bigas sa merkado dahil sa RTL. Kaya raw dapat maghinay-hinay sa plano na ibasura ang naturang batas dahil baka magkaroon ng epekto sa presyo ng bigas.

Abay isang taon na sa puwesto si PBBM,

bakit sumirit pa lalo ang presyo ng bigas kahit hindi naman niya ginagalaw ang RTL? Kung ang layunin ng pag-import eh bumaha ng bigas sa merkado para bumaba ang presyo, ang tanong ng mahilig sa unli rice, anyare?

Ang pangarap ni PBBM na kahit gising, maibaba sa P20 per kilo ang bigas. Pero hanggang pangarap na nga lang ba 'yon? Mukhang hindi.

Sa Cebu, inilunsad ang programang Sugbo Merkadong Barato na magbebenta ng P20 per kilo na bigas sa mga tukoy na mahihirap na pamilya.

Sa isang linggo, puwedeng bumili ang pamilyang purdoy ng hanggang limang kilo. Hindi pa ginawang pitong kilo para kahit man lang isang kilo bawat araw ang alokasyon na puwedeng kumasya sa pamilya na lima ang miyembro.

Ang bigas na ibebenta, mula sa NFA na sa mga lokal na magsasaka na lang puwedeng bumili ng bigas. Gaya ng dati, palugi ang naturang programa para matulungan lang ang mga mahihirap na pamilya.

Hirit ng ilang tropapips natin, tatal kasama si Speaker Martin Romualdez nang pasimulan ang naturang programa sa Cebu, baka panahon na raw para suriin na ang RTL at pag-aralan muli ang papel ng NFA para makamit ang pangarap ng kaniyang pinsan na P20 per kilo na bigas kahit para sa mga mahihirap lang. Tandaan: "Bata mo 'ko at Ako ang Spy n'yo".





## Pangasinan Salt Center to harvest in 3 weeks

**LINGAYEN, Pangasinan:** After almost five months of rehabilitation work, the provincial government-run salt farm in Bolinao town is now ready to produce salt.

"We'll finally have our first harvest by the third week of December," said Gov. Ramon Guico 3rd in a recent conversation with reporters.

Last June, the provincial government began rehabilitating the 473-hectare salt farm in Barangay Zaragoza, a coastal village in Bolinao, almost three years after it stopped its operations in 2020.

The salt farm used to be run by Pacific Farms Inc., the country's largest salt producer, contributing up to 25,000 metric tons (MT) a year to the country's total salt production.

However, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) closed the farm after the company's lease contract expired and was not renewed.

In December 2022, Guico signed a memorandum of agreement with the DENR for the "interim management" of the foreshore area for salt production and other related activities, such as bangus production.

Assistant provincial agriculturist Nestor Batalla, who is in charge of the salt farm now known as Pangasinan Salt Center, said rehabilitation work included repair of farm facilities, such as the administrative office, pump houses, warehouses, and workers' barracks.

He said they also repaired the cableway, a facility where baskets loaded with salt are hung during harvests and manually pulled from the salt beds to the warehouses.

Guico said the province had to buy new water pumps, which were used to drain the water that submerged the salt beds during this year's rainy season.

He said that before rehabilitation began, the province sent Batalla to Indonesia and China to observe how the country produced salt.

"In Indonesia, we have the same technology because we have the same climate. The only new thing I learned there is the use of plastic-roofed tunnels to protect the salt beds from the rain," Batalla said.

He said the tunnels will be used in the province during the rainy season next year.

Batalla said that another innovation is the use of high-density polyethylene (HDPE) sheets, instead of ceramic tiles, as linings of the salt beds. This way, he said, there will be higher yield, and a better quality of salt will be produced.

But Batalla said that the ceramic-tiled salt beds at the farm were saved because it was expensive to build them.

"So, we opened an area where we can use HDPE and retained those with ceramic tiles," Batalla said.

Salt production in Pangasinan is at its peak during the sunny months. During rainy months, the salt beds are turned into fish ponds.

Batalla said that initially, the farm will produce 10,000 MT to 15,000 MT in five months.

Guico's decision for the provincial government to venture into salt production in 2022 was in response to President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s call to help resolve the salt crisis.

"We have a crisis in salt, and with this development, we are able to respond to the call of the President (Marcos Jr.) to contribute to national food security," said Guico.

Industry experts said the country imports 93 percent of its salt requirements of 600,000 MT per year.

Pangasinan, whose name is derived from "asin," the local term for salt, is the country's largest salt producer.

In 2021, the province produced 64,156 MT from its 1,432.4-hectare salt farms located in seven towns and Alaminos City, according to the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist.

**GABRIEL CARDINOZA**



**ALL SET** A worker flattens the ceramic tiles in one of the salt beds at the Pangasinan Salt Center in Barangay Zaragoza, Bolinao town. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

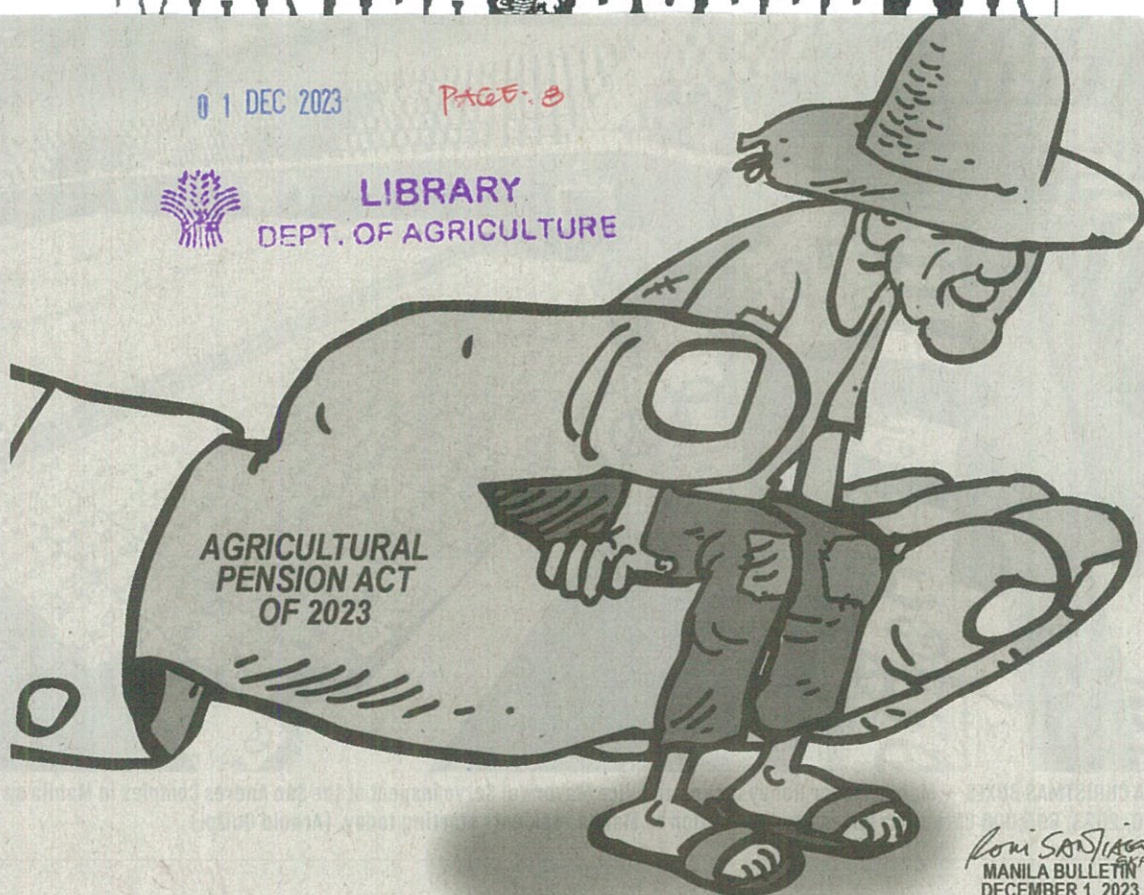


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Roni Sanjaya  
MANILA BULLETIN  
DECEMBER 1, 2023

## Our farmers and fisherfolk deserve gov't care

**A** bill seeking to create a pension fund for farmers and fisherfolk has been filed in the House of Representatives.

Under the proposed Agricultural Pension Act of 2023, contributions of farmers and fisherfolk who are identified as "extremely poor" will enjoy full subsidy from the national and local governments until such time that they have been found to be non-extremely poor. In the case of non-extremely poor agricultural workers, they shall give personal contributions with counterpart subsidies from the national and local governments set forth by the Social Security System, which will be mandated to manage the fund.

Benefits and entitlements under the measure are: a ₱2,000 monthly retirement benefit upon reaching 65 years old, not less than ₱18,000 death benefit, and conditional disability benefit if the farmer or fisherman becomes disabled before reaching 65 years old, among others.

The move to create a pension fund for the country's agricultural workers is a step in the right direction to address their needs after their productive years.

Their contribution to nation building cannot be quantified. Agriculture remains the main driver of the country's economy. In fact, President Marcos has made it a point for his administration to focus on agriculture.

"Agriculture is and will always be an important contributor to our national economy. In the first quarter of 2023, the agriculture sector grew by 2.2 percent while contributing 9.1 percent

to our total gross domestic product," Marcos stressed at the 125th anniversary of the Department of Agriculture in June 2023.

But while agriculture plays a crucial role, farmers and fishermen remain among the poorest sectors of the society and their future — after their productive years — remains uncertain.

This is why it is necessary for the state to recognize the roles played by our farmers and fishermen in nation building, and provide them support after their productive years. Our farmers and fishermen deserve the care of the state after toiling in the farms and the seas even under extreme weather conditions just so Filipinos will have sufficient food on their tables.

While the measure, filed by United Senior Citizens Party-list Rep. Milagros Aquino Mag-saysay, recognizes that agricultural workers labor their whole lives, yet still "suffer the uncertainty of economic security and financial stability," it still has a long way to go. As of now, the proposed Agricultural Pension Act of 2023 remains pending in the House Committee on Agriculture and Food.

We look forward to the expeditious passage of this measure to enable our farmers and fisherfolk to enjoy the care of the state and the fruits of their labor, as well.

Let's give our farmers and fisherfolk the care and the financial stability they deserve after years of toiling in the farms and seas to feed us and contribute their share in the country's economic growth.





## So long, but not farewell

**T**his is my last column as Agriculture editor of the Manila Bulletin and editor-in-chief of Agriculture Magazine.

It has been my honor and pleasure to helm Agriculture Online for the past six years, and the Agriculture Section of the Manila Bulletin and Agriculture Magazine for the past three.

Working in agriculture wasn't something I fell into, but something I sought out at least two years before working in Manila Bulletin. I was a lifestyle writer who had gotten frustrated with the commodification of food without fair compensation to the people who produce its ingredients—the farmers and fishers and everyone in between.

What spurred me to work in agriculture was having to interview a restaurant owner who didn't seem to understand the precarious position Filipino agricultural workers have to live with. I remember going home that night livid, vowing to find a way to write about the agriculture industry in a way that highlighted the truth of it, from the words of practitioners themselves. I am thankful to Manila Bulletin for giving me that opportunity.

I have endeavored to tell the story



**AVANT GARDENER**

YVETTE TAN

of small farmers and fishers, agribusinessfolk, academics, gardeners, enthusiasts, and allies. I've tried to spotlight young farmers and farms and farmers from Mindanao, both underrepresented in agriculture media. My main concern has always been food security/ sovereignty/ justice, something that I tried to highlight as often as possible beyond talking points.

I've also trained young agrijournalists and given new writers the opportunity to write about agriculture. One of my writers won three awards in two years under my watch, and a contributor has recently won an award for articles that have appeared in the magazine and on the website. I also managed to grow Agriculture Online from zero to one of the top ten science websites in the country.

As you can tell, I'm quite proud of what I've achieved in six years. My journey as Agricultural editor has been interesting and fulfilling, especially since I was following in the footsteps of Zac Sarian, the grandfather of agrijournalism and a personality

in the agriculture industry. I remember the last time I saw him before he retired. He gave me a container full of his famous pomelo, and I think that counts as his blessing. I hope he likes how I've kept to his legacy.

I am grateful to Manila Bulletin for being my home these past six years, and for supporting me as I told the stories of one of the country's most problematic yet most promising sectors.

But while I have relinquished my title as Manila Bulletin's Agriculture editor and Agriculture magazine's editor-in-chief, I'll still be keeping this column, so it's not like I'll be going away.

I'll end with how I began my first column, which is to express the belief that farming is every Filipino's dream; they've just forgotten about it.

I still believe this is true, and I still hope that circumstances arise so that it may become a possibility for more Filipinos not just to farm, but to earn excellently from it.

This is Yvette Tan, signing off.





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CHEN MIZRACH-UNSPLASH

## Hike in coco biodiesel blend seen to affect D&L's margins

LISTED D&L Industries, Inc. said the government's plan to increase the country's coco biodiesel blend to 3% from the current 2% is expected to have a substantial effect on the company's margins.

"The increase [in biodiesel blend] would mean the demand would go up automatically by 50% from 2% to 3%. The effect on volume and margin, we expect that it will be substantial," D&L Industries President and Chief Executive Officer Alvin D. Lao said during a media briefing in Mandaluyong City on Nov. 29.

According to Mr. Lao, there is a low utilization rate as the local biodiesel industry is currently ca-

pable of supplying up to 5% biodiesel blend, which is far from the government's mandated 2% blend.

"If you look at the biodiesel industry, we're actually ready to provide even up to the 5% blend. What that means is the capacity to supply is the 5% blend, but the actual demand is only at 2% [blend]. If you have roughly 40% utilization, low utilization means that the margin is low and everyone is underutilized and operating at very low capacity," Mr. Lao said.

"We think that when that increase comes, it will likely be gradual. But the effect is going to be significant," he added.

D&L Industries has a presence in the Philippine

biodiesel industry via its subsidiary Chemrez Technologies, Inc., which operates a biodiesel plant.

Some of the claimed benefits of a higher biodiesel blend include lower pollution and better value-added for coconut oil products.

"The biodiesel blend increase, I'd say, is one big factor for us," Mr. Lao said. "Most biodiesel manufacturers now barely make any money from that product due to oversupply and demand has not been growing that much. The increase would be quite impactful."

On Thursday, shares of D&L Industries at the local bourse improved by 21 centavos or 3.48% to P6.24 apiece.

— **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**





## Extension of preferential tariff on pork backed

BRITISH businesses in the Philippines are hopeful government will extend the preferential tariff on pork and called for the passage of a legislation addressing agricultural smuggling.

"British pork has made inroads here...our supply has increased significantly and has helped with food security and inflation. We see that trend continuing," said Chris Nelson, executive director of the British Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines (BCCP), in a televised interview.

Nelson said this depends on

the trends as pork prices have gone up globally due to a reduction in herds caused by feeds supply issues arising from the Ukraine-Russia conflict.

"But this is cyclical, so we'll see it pick up," he said.

Nelson said the BCCP has forwarded its position to the Tariff Commission on extending the validity of Executive Order (EO) 10 that expires at the end of the year. The EO reduced most favored nation tariff rates on meat of swine fresh chilled or frozen to 15 percent in-quota and 25 percent

out-quota.

"The economic team is in favor of extending this...clearly extending the lower tariffs will help in the fight (against) inflation.... And there was an indication that could be a shortage of pork at this time of the year," Nelson said.

The Philippines is the second largest market for British pork after China in Asia.

BCCP is currently holding a Philippine-British meat trade mission attended by 50 delegates mostly from large meat importers.

Nelson also expressed hope

Senate will pass the Anti-agricultural Smuggling Act, a priority measure of the government, to reinforce and strengthen the agriculture sector.

According to Nelson, the House version has already been passed.

"It's good to see that inflation had moderated last month. We're optimistic or hopeful that the growth will recover," said Nelson, adding continuing interest is expressed by UK businesses in the Philippines in cybersecurity, food and beverage, renewable energy.





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NEWS

## Luzon drought seen amid sparse rainfall

The provinces of Batangas, Cavite and Oriental Mindoro are forecast to experience drought in December due to El Niño phenomenon, the state weather bureau said on Thursday. Pagasa weather specialist Joey Figuracion said the three provinces have seen "below normal" rainfall for the past five months. "We are connecting it to the effects of the El Niño that is now ongoing," Figuracion said. —STORY BY JEROME ANING

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# Luzon drought seen after subnormal rain

By Jerome Aning  
@JeromeAningINQ

The provinces of Batangas, Cavite and Oriental Mindoro are forecast to experience drought in December due to the El Niño weather phenomenon, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) said on Thursday.

Speaking at the Bagong Pilipinas Ngayon news briefing on state television, Pagasa weather specialist Joey Figuracion said the three provinces have "below normal" rainfall for the past five months.

"There is lack of rainfall in Batangas, Cavite and Oriental Mindoro and we are connecting it to the effects of the El Niño that is now ongoing," Figuracion said.

He added that several provinces in four Luzon regions are also experiencing "dry spell condition" due to below normal rainfall in the past three months. These are Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga, Apayao, Mountain Province, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Pangasinan, Cagayan, Isabela,



DRY SPELL A young boy inspects rice plants in a parched field in Tanza, Cavite, last May. —INQUIRER PHOTO

Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Tarlac, Aurora and Palawan.

Citing Pagasa standards, Figuracion said an area is said to be experiencing dry condition if it receives 41 to 80 percent of normal rainfall for two consecutive months. An area that gets that same range of rainfall for three consecutive months, or "way below" the range for two consecutive months, is said to be in a "dry spell condition."

A drought occurs when rainfall in an area is below normal

for five consecutive months, or if the area receives 40 percent or less rainfall for two consecutive months, he added.

### 'Lower number of typhoons'

The weather specialist said the areas under dry spell and drought will experience "higher than normal" temperatures this month depending on their location and the amount of rainfall they get.

Figuracion said the lower number of typhoons reaching the country is also an effect of

El Niño. He said that during the weather phenomenon, typhoons form farther out in the Pacific Ocean and often no longer make landfall or cross over the country.

"If there is a reduction in the number of typhoons, there is also reduction of rainfall in the country. Actually, in the Luzon area during this time of the year, up to 70 percent of rainfall come from typhoons," he said.

In previous weeks, he noted that rainfall in local areas were brought about by low pressure areas and shear lines. He said Pagasa projects no typhoons affecting the country in next two weeks but for the month of December, the country might experience one or two typhoons.

Figuracion said that the dry period might last until May next year, and that there is a possibility that El Niño will still have a "lag effect" until the onset of the rainy season.

Nevertheless, from December to February, the country will experience "cold surges" due to the intensifying northeast monsoon, he added. INQ





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## NY cocoa hits 46-year peak

NEW YORK — New York cocoa futures rose to a 46-year high on Tuesday as a generally weak dollar added to persistent concerns over supply, while raw sugar fell.

COCOA: March New York cocoa settled up \$72 or 1.7% to \$4,273 a metric ton after touching a 46-year high of \$4,287, which was also a contract high.

The market broke resistance levels seen around \$4,224 to easily climb to higher territory.

Talk of US Federal Reserve interest rate cuts has weakened the dollar, making dollar-priced cocoa cheaper for non-US investors and tempting them to buy, given a third successive cocoa deficit remains on the cards this season.

Nestlé said it will invest \$1.2 billion in Brazil in the next two years to expand production capacity, including a new line for KitKat chocolate.

March London cocoa rose £37 or 1% to £3,564 a ton.

COFFEE: March arabica coffee settled down 0.4 cent or 0.2% at \$1.727 per pound (lb).

Dealers said weather conditions in Brazil remain adverse, including high temperatures, hail and storms, and that this is already affecting the first flowers of the 2024/2025 season.

January robusta coffee fell 0.6% to \$2,523 a ton.

Coffee exports from top robusta producer Vietnam are estimated to have fallen 11.7% in the year to Nov. 15 from 1.33 million metric tons, government data showed.

SUGAR: March raw sugar settled down 0.13 cent or 0.5% at 26.86 cents per lb.

Top producer Brazil's sugar production is expected to grow by an annual 27.4% in 2023/2024 to a record 46.88 million tons, government agency Conab said, noting favorable weather and increasing yields.

The US government is reallocating a large volume of low-tariff quotas for countries to supply it with sugar.

March white sugar fell \$3.50 or 0.5% to \$734.70 a ton. — **Reuters**





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## Wheat, corn climb

CANBERRA- Chicago wheat futures rose for a third day on Thursday and were poised for their biggest monthly gain since June as traders covered short positions ahead of weekly US export sales data.

Soybean and corn futures also climbed, with beans set to end the month slightly higher and corn lower.

The most-active wheat contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) was up 0.4 percent at \$5.88-1/4 a bushel, after rising 4.4 percent in the previous two sessions.

The contract gained nearly 6 percent so far this month.

Prices rose due to short covering amid rumors of Chinese buying of US wheat and ahead of month-end and first notice day for the spot December contract, traders and analysts said.

The most recent CBOT exchange data showed that money managers held a net short position of 108,176 futures and options contracts, as of Nov. 21, their biggest in 23 weeks, leaving the market vulnerable to a correction. - *Reuters*