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## Farmers urge import transparency

A FARMERS group is demanding transparency from the Department of Agriculture (DA) over its plan to import farm commodities, most especially rice.

The Federation of Free Farmers (FFF), in a statement on Wednesday, said that the DA should disclose shipping details, especially on rice coming from India, following the announcement of Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. of shipments of the staple arriving from that country.

"It is not clear if a government agency will undertake the shipment, notwithstanding the fact that the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) prohibits importation by the National Food Authority (NFA)," said FFF National Manager

Raul Montemayor.

Montemayor also demanded an explanation on how the rice coming from India will be allocated among importers if it is finalized that the private sector will do the importation.

After imposing an export ban in July, India has allowed exports of non-basmati white rice to seven countries, including the Philippines, which has been given the largest allocation of 295,000 metric tons (MT).

In October, India's Directorate General of Foreign Trade announced that exports would be allowed for Nepal (95,000 MT), Cameroon (190,000 MT), the Ivory Coast (142,000 MT), Guinea (142,000 MT), Malaysia (170,000 MT), the Philippines, and Seychelles (800 MT).

During the House committee hearing for his appointment on Tuesday, Laurel assured the public that rice supply, imports included, can cover until the end of January and February.

Data from the DA-Bureau of Plant Industry showed that inbound shipments of the staple as of November 16 totaled 2.93 million metric tons (MT), down 16.7 percent from the 3.25 million MT of the same period in 2022.

To ensure enough supply and proper compliance of traders, the Agriculture department has shortened the effectivity of import permits from 60 days to 30 days, regardless of the country of origin.

**JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL**



# Ilocos Norte gets P105M in farm equipment

BY LEANDER C. DOMINGO

**T**HE Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech) distributed around P105 million worth of agricultural machines in Ilocos Norte on December 1.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) office in Region 1 (Ilocos Region) said the machines were distributed under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF)-Mechanization Program and the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan Shared Processing Facility program both implemented by PHilMech.

The DA said P73.5 million were farm machines distributed to rice-based cooperatives while P26.8 million were for coconut-based farmer organizations. Since 2019, PHilMech has distributed P532.5 million worth of agricultural equipment in Ilocos Norte under the RCEF-Mechanization Program.

The turnover and awarding ceremony for the distribution of the agricultural equipment in

Laoag City was led by Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., Ilocos Norte Gov. Matthew Joseph Marcos Manotoc and PHilMech Executive Director Dionisio Alvindia.

In his message, Laurel challenged the recipients to be diligent in properly utilizing and maintaining the equipment they receive so they can provide years of service to them.

He also lauded PHilMech for its continuous effort in distributing farm machines to the province's rice and coconut-based farmers' cooperatives and associations.

"I congratulate PHilMech for their continued distribution of machinery and facilities to the best of their ability. It just proves that they are honest in serving our farmers," Laurel said.

■ Photo shows some of the farm equipment distributed to farmers in Ilocos Norte by the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Alvindia also highlighted that the machines and their implements can also help improve farmers' production operations other than rice.

"At PHilMech, we always think about what is appropriate and good to give to our beloved farmers so that we can further develop their productivity and farming," he said.

Manotoc said the distribution of the coconut processing facili-

ties is very appropriate and timely since coconut is one of the priority commodities of the province that needs government support.

Underscoring the importance of the Ilocos Norte provincial government's partnership with PHilMech and its role in mechanization in their province, the governor thanked PHilMech for a continued friendship and partnership.

"We are very grateful for you. We know that mechanization tech-

nologies are the keys to improving our yield and efficiency [in] Ilocos Norte," Manotoc said.

Elizabeth Benemerito, chairman of the Del Mar Shell Craft Multipurpose Cooperative, said PHilMech's assistance is "key to improving our business and transforming our lives and communities, and we are grateful with all our hearts because this will be a great help to us."

"With these facilities, we will be

able to do more and more quickly. This will not only change the way we do business but also transform the lives of our coconut farmers and our community," Benemerito added.

Through a video message, Sen. Cynthia Villar, Senate Committee on Agriculture and Food chairman and principal author of the Rice Tariffication Law, expressed her support for the farmers in Ilocos Norte.







## EDITORIAL

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**PPI** Philippine  
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### DA to tap science, modern tech

**N**OW that Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel has been confirmed by the Commission on Appointments, we can expect a much more permanent and forward-looking management and operation of the Department of Agriculture.

Secretary Laurel may now freely put to good use all his plans and ideas on how to make the DA a proactive agency with projects and programs that are responsive to the people's needs.

We noticed that recent announcements from the department were still about importation of onions and fish, aside from rice, which to us are more of the same policies and stop-gap measures and do not push forward the attainment of more desirable objectives such as food self-sufficiency and food security.

Even before Laurel took over, the department has firmed up plans and science-based tools to help farmers increase their productivity.

The DA's Climate Resilient Agriculture Office (CRAO) has launched an updated version of its National Color-Coded Agricultural Guide (NCCAG) Map which is expected to further help raise farmers' productivity and income as a science-based decision-support tool.

**'... we hope to see more projects  
such as the NCCAG that uses  
science and technology in  
the service of agriculture.'**

The DA said the map "is a database of map overlays that shows the natural suitability of economically important crops and eight major hazards based on projected climate scenarios for 2050" and "overlays data on soil properties, elevation, slope, rainfall pattern, temperature and climate change-induced multi-hazards."

The database also features maps that are vital to crop growth and survivability such as water availability and climate data, as well as location-specific information on socio-economic conditions.

CRAO Director Alicia Ilaga said updating the NC-CAG Map which was first launched in 2017 is crucial to maintaining the system's accuracy and reliability.

Some farm experts have pointed out before, and are still saying it now, that one of Philippine agriculture's problems is that it is too rice-centric. We have focused much of our research, energy and funding on producing rice, and yet we have not been so successful since we still have to import this staple food of Filipinos from India, Vietnam and Thailand. It is time, they say, to focus on other crops.

This may well be served by the latest version of NC-CAG, which features updated crop suitability, increasing it from the previous 20 to 21. As listed, the economically important crops featured in the database are abaca, banana, cacao, cassava, coconut, coffee, corn, garlic/onion, legumes, mango, palm oil, papaya, pineapple, rice, rubber, sugarcane, sweet potato, taro, vegetables, yam and bamboo.

With the new crop map, farmers will be able to match their areas with crops to be planted, guided by scientific studies on the type of soil, availability of water, weather and climate patterns, etc. CRAO said this initiative aligns with the department's commitment to assist farmers by providing valuable insights and facilitate well-informed planning and decision-making processes regarding agricultural suitability, climate hazards and land cover data.

It was reported that the latest version of the map also integrates the Climate Risk Vulnerability Assessment Maps of 63 provinces nationwide. This allows users to choose from three distinct types of statistical data – crops suitability and multi-hazards, crops suitability and land cover, and multi-hazards – to provide a tailored and more user-friendly experience.

Last but not the least, the NCCAG also has utility for rice farming as it introduces a new layer called Rice Suitability Zones which identifies current and potential expansion areas for rice cultivation and provides information on soil properties vital to rice growth.

As Secretary Laurel begins his work today with full authority from the President and the Commission on Appointments, we hope to see more projects such as the NCCAG that uses science and technology in the service of agriculture.





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## Farmers seek details of Indian rice import plan

THE Department of Agriculture has been asked to disclose the details of its plan to import Indian rice, the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) said on Wednesday.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. said during a Commission on Appointments hearing on Tuesday that the grain shipments would be sufficient to meet rice demand up to January or February.

The Indian government has allocated a quota of 295,000 metric tons (MT) of non-basmati white rice to the Philippines, after having declared a freeze on such exports to ensure its own domestic supply.

"It is not clear if a government agency

will undertake the shipment, notwithstanding the fact that the Rice Tariffication Law prohibits imports by the National Food Authority (NFA)... (or if) the private sector will do the importing," FFF National Manager Raul Q. Montemayor said in a statement.

Under Republic Act No. 11203, importing rice was removed from the NFA's functions. Private traders have instead been

allowed to bring in rice shipments while paying a 35% tariff on Southeast Asian grain.

As of Nov. 16, rice imports amounted to 2.93 million MT, according to the Bureau of Plant Industry. —  
**Adrian H. Halili**

### FULL STORY



Read the full story by scanning the QR code with your smartphone or by typing the link  
<tinyurl.com/y16jug8t>





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# Phl may import 200k MT of sugar next year

By DANESSA RIVERA

The Philippines may import 200,000 metric tons (MT) of sugar next year as the government projects less need to import amid ample stocks.

During his confirmation hearing by the Commission on Appointments yesterday, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel said the 200,000-MT volume is the assessment of the sugar industry with the Department of

Agriculture (DA) and the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA).

The volume, however, is still subject to change "assuming there are no adverse weather conditions we face," he said.

"Based on estimates with the SRA, which we've been meeting for the last two weeks, we feel that next year, we won't need to import too much sugar. Because this year, we saw increased importation of sugar and we still have



plenty of sugar stocks in the market," Laurel said.

Based on SRA data, the latest total physical refined stock is at 506,307.75 MT as of Nov. 12. This is more than double than the 232,398.56 MT stock in the same period last year.

Last February, President Marcos approved Sugar Order (SO) No. 6 to bring in 440,000 metric tons (MT) of refined sugar into the country.

This was followed by another 150,000-MT refined imports also approved by President Marcos under SO7 in July.

Earlier, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) projected the Philippines will import 240,000 MT of refined sugar this crop year 2023-2024.

However, this forecast includes the 150,000-MT refined imports SO7, which were required to be in the country by Sept. 15 and was extended until Oct. 15.

The USDA said this projected sugar importation would fill in the supply gap and help maintain stable retail prices of the sweetener.

In its Sugar Semi-Annual report, the USDA forecasted raw sugar production to reach 1.8 million MT this crop year beginning September, lower by 100,000 MT from its previous projection.

The projection is below the Sugar Regulatory Administration's (SRA) forecast of 1.85 million MT as noted in SO1.

The USDA said declining sugarcane planting areas and the impact of weather disturbances, including the El Niño phenomenon, were the main factors for the lower forecast.

Meanwhile, the El Niño phenomenon increases the likelihood of below-normal rainfall and reduced yields.

The US agency also said SO6 and SO7 have failed to address the high retail prices affecting consumers and food manufacturers.

Based on the monitoring of the Department of Agriculture as of yesterday, the retail price of refined sugar was at P72 to P100 per kilo, washed sugar at P70 to P96 a kilo, and raw sugar at P65 to P96 per kilo.





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## DA distributes chicken starter kits in Masbate

**MASBATE CITY:** The Department of Agriculture (DA) office here recently distributed hybrid chickens to more than 400 high school students to help them jumpstart their venture into poultry raising.

"My fellow aspiring farm entrepreneurs and I have chosen to get involved in the poultry business because we all know that Filipinos love chicken and egg," said Geselle Roxas, a graduating student of Bayombon National High School in Masbate City.

Roxas said her Rhode Island

Reds chickens can be kept in small enclosures that are easy to maintain and provide plenty of fresh eggs and meat.

"Rearing chicken in our backyard makes me feel at ease and gives me hope for a better tomorrow," he said.

San Jacinto Municipal Agriculture officer Mona Clemente Porio said she and her staff would help the young chicken farmers in dealing with backyard raising challenges.

"We will help them come up

with good planning and take appropriate measures to prevent avian diseases that are a common problem in poultry farming," she said.

Roxas is one of the 420 teenagers who availed themselves of grants from Binhi ng Pagasa Program (BPP), a starter kit distribution program organized by the DA-Agricultural Training Institute to capacitate the youth and prepare them to become future agriculture leaders.

"This is part of the goal of gradually mending the constant decline of Filipinos engaged in agricul-

ture," ATI Bicol Center Director Elsa Parot said during a dialogue with BPP beneficiaries in Balud, Masbate.

Before the distribution of the starter kits, consisting of a rooster and eight hens, the beneficiaries underwent training in free-range raising, leadership in agriculture and values formation.

Brench Bartolata, a 19-year-old sophomore majoring in agriculture, said he is optimistic that his backyard poultry will be one of the success stories of BPP.

PIA





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## Vertical farming to boost food security

**W**HEN it comes to increasing crop output by utilizing advanced technology, vertical farming is one of the best solutions out there. Vertical farming is also very scalable, or can be started small and expanded dramatically.

For example, the most basic setup for vertical farming can utilize bamboo or wood for the frames and recycled containers for growing crops. Soil is also used in the most basic vertical farming setup, and irrigation of the plants is usually done manually.

The most advanced vertical farming system uses metal frames and employs hydroponics, aquaponics or aeroponics, and hence does not use soil for growing plants indoors or outdoors. Also, digital technology can also be utilized to control the exchange of water in hydroponic and aquaponic systems, and the spraying of water in aeroponic setups.

The wonder of vertical farming is it can be done outdoors or indoors, but the latter offers the advantage of protecting plants from bad weather and pests, negating the use of chemicals to control pests. Growing plants indoors vertically, however, will need artificial sunlight that adds to the cost of production.

There are also vertical farming systems done indoors that have equipment to maintain the optimum temperature to attain higher yields. Hence, vertical farming done indoors can also be called controlled environment agriculture.

Among the biggest advantages of vertical farming is the efficient use of water, which is no longer a finite source available to us. An article published on Nov. 29, 2023 on the website of EcoWatch ([ecowatch.com](http://ecowatch.com)) titled "Vertical Farming 101: Everything You



**MOVING  
FORWARD**

**WILLIAM  
D. DAR**

"Need to Know" states that vertical farming uses up to 95-percent less water and 99-percent less land compared to traditional agriculture utilizing farmlands.

The article added that fast-growing herbs, leafy greens, tomatoes and strawberries are the most popular crops cultivated in vertical farms.

The disadvantages of vertical farming are limited choice of crops to grow, and its highly technical nature if various technologies need to be applied to increase production.

However, vertical farming's potential to help ensure food supplies cannot be ignored, and innovations can be introduced to grow a wider variety of crops.

### **Practiced for thousands of years**

The article also stated that vertical farming dates back thousands of years, citing the example of the Babylonian Hanging Gardens built 2,500 years ago.

In Asia, the Sky Greens located in Singapore is one good example of an advanced vertical farming system, helping the country rely less on imports for its food supplies.

Also, Chinese state media recently reported that the country's scientists have established the world's tallest unmanned vertical farm in the southwestern province of Sichuan. Standing 20 stories, the vertical farm was built with oversight from the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences in a downtown part of the provincial capital Chengdu.

Chinese state broadcaster CCTV reported that Chengdu's vertical farm utilizes a range of technologies ranging from an automatic nutrient-supply system, energy-efficient artificial lighting that can emulate natural conditions and a control system based on artificial intelligence.

### **The local scene**

Among state universities and colleges in the Philippines, the Central Luzon State University (CLSU) in Muñoz, Nueva Ecija, has developed a vertical/urban farm technology demonstration system that occupies only 72 square meters and can accommodate 88 towers for growing crops. This makes the system developed by CLSU easier to start and scaled up because of its modular setup.

Christopher Pascual, faculty from the CLSU College of Engineering, also won First Place for the Banghay Award under the Outstanding Industrial Design category during the 2022 National Invention Contest and Exhibits in June last year. His innovation is the "ground heat exchanger system for aeroponics" that utilizes ground temperature to dissipate heat to maintain a cooler root zone for plants. CLSU claims this results in an increase in crop yield.

CLSU has clearly demonstrated that our country has the capability to improve, innovate and scale up vertical farming, which is one very good reason why this type of system for growing crops should be mainstreamed through policy support and investments from both the government and private sector.

During my watch at the Department of Agriculture, the adoption of vertical farming and hydropon-

ics formed part of the "Plant, Plant, Plant program" during the pandemic to help augment the country's food supplies and push for the adoption of nontraditional planting systems.

The **DA** also pushed for the adoption of aquaponics, or cultivating crops and raising fish simultaneously in a closed loop system, where the water used to irrigate the crops are also used to grow fish.

On the other hand, aeroponics sprays water onto the suspended roots of plants. While this system ensures optimum water use, it can be more expensive to set up as it will need pumps, sprays and electronic controls to deliver water to the plant roots.

So, in the near future, I see more vertical farming systems utilizing hydroponics and aquaponics being established on a wider scale, including here in the Philippines.

There is also a growing number of vertical indoor farms in the Philippines including Urban Greens in Taguig.

While I do not see vertical farming, especially those done indoors, displacing traditional outdoor soil-based farming, there will come a time when vertical farms will become a common fixture in cities as the demand for freshly harvested food grown with little or no chemicals increases among middle- and upper-class households.

That trend might also take root in the rural areas as soil and water resources get scarcer, and as household incomes in the countryside increase.

I also see the rapid development of farming technology lowering the cost of vertical farming and enabling the cultivation of a wider variety of food crops, boosting food security at the local and national levels.



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AFTER INDIA ANNOUNCES GRAIN SALE TO PH

## FARMERS SEEK TRANSPARENCY IN RICE IMPORT PLAN

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**  
@jordeenelagare

The Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) is urging the Marcos administration to be transparent in its importation plan after the Department of Agriculture (DA) disclosed that shipments from India are set to proceed.

"It is not clear if a government agency will undertake the shipment, notwithstanding the fact that the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) prohibits importation by the National Food Authority (NFA)," FFF national manager Raul Montemayor said in a statement on Wednesday.

"If the private sector will do the importation, how will the Indian quota be allocated among importers?" Montemayor said.

In his confirmation appointment on Tuesday, Agriculture Secretary Francisco

Laurel said shipments from India would arrive in the country through a prior arrangement brokered by President Marcos.

"I would not like to say the quantities because when I say them, prices of the commodity go up and down so I want to protect the people from speculators," he said.

"What I can say is we are covered until the end of January until early February," he added.

Laurel is referring to the 295,000 metric tons (MT) of rice from India that would enter the country, the largest allocation to be provided by the Indian government.

In a notification issued by India's Ministry of Commerce and Industry, a total of 1.03 million MT of nonbasmati white rice would be exported to Nepal, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Republic of Guinea,

Malaysia, the Philippines and Seychelles.

This government-to-government arrangement would be facilitated by India's National Cooperative Exports Ltd.

The DA had said prices of rice would stabilize, especially during the holiday season, on the back of projected improvement in domestic production and the arrival of rice shipments from India.

As of Tuesday, local regular milled retailed from P33 to P52 per kilogram compared to P38 per kg a year prior, based on the agency's price monitoring. Local well-milled rice is sold from P45 to P55 per kg, higher than last year's P40 per kg.

Regular milled rice sourced from abroad is not available in the markets but imported well-milled rice is priced at P52 per kg, also higher than P42 per kg previously. **INQ**





## Farm group seeks more details on planned Indian rice imports

LOCAL farm group Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) is urging the Department of Agriculture (DA) to disclose more details on its plan to import rice from India, apart from encouraging more imports from other countries.

"It is not clear if a government agency will undertake the shipment, notwithstanding the fact that the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) prohibits importation by the National Food Authority. If the private sector will do the importation, how will the Indian quota be allocated among importers?" said Raul Montemayor, FFF national manager, in a statement.

Last October, India has allocated as much as 295,000 metric tons (MT) of non-basmati white rice for the Philippines.

FFF also urged the reinstatement of the 50 percent tariff on rice sourced

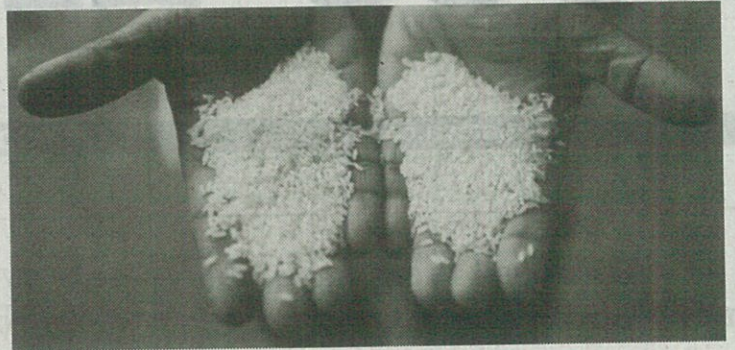
from non-Asean suppliers.

"Based on data from the Philippine Statistics Authority, imports from non-Asean countries have not increased significantly despite the tariff reduction. Retail prices have not dropped and most of the rice imports are for premium grades for sale to well-off consumers," Montemayor added.

Starting in 2021, tariffs on non-Asean rice were cut to 35 percent, or equal to the preferential rate given to Asean suppliers like Vietnam and Thailand.

The said reduction was also repeatedly extended, with the latest extension under Executive Order No. 10 set to expire by year-end.

"Since 2021, government lost over a billion pesos in foregone tariff collections. Under the RTL, these funds should have been used for programs for rice farmers.



A man compares different grains of rice at a wholesale market in Navi Mumbai, India. (Reuters Photo)

Why are we allowing importers and traders to pocket a billion pesos, with practically no benefit to consumers, while depriving farmers of much needed funding?" Montemayor said.

According to data from the Bureau of Plant Industry's National Plant

Quarantine Services Division, as much as 2.94 million MT of imported rice has arrived in the country as of November 16.

Bulk of the said volume at 2.62 million MT equivalent to 89 percent of the total shipments were from Vietnam. —Jed Macapagal





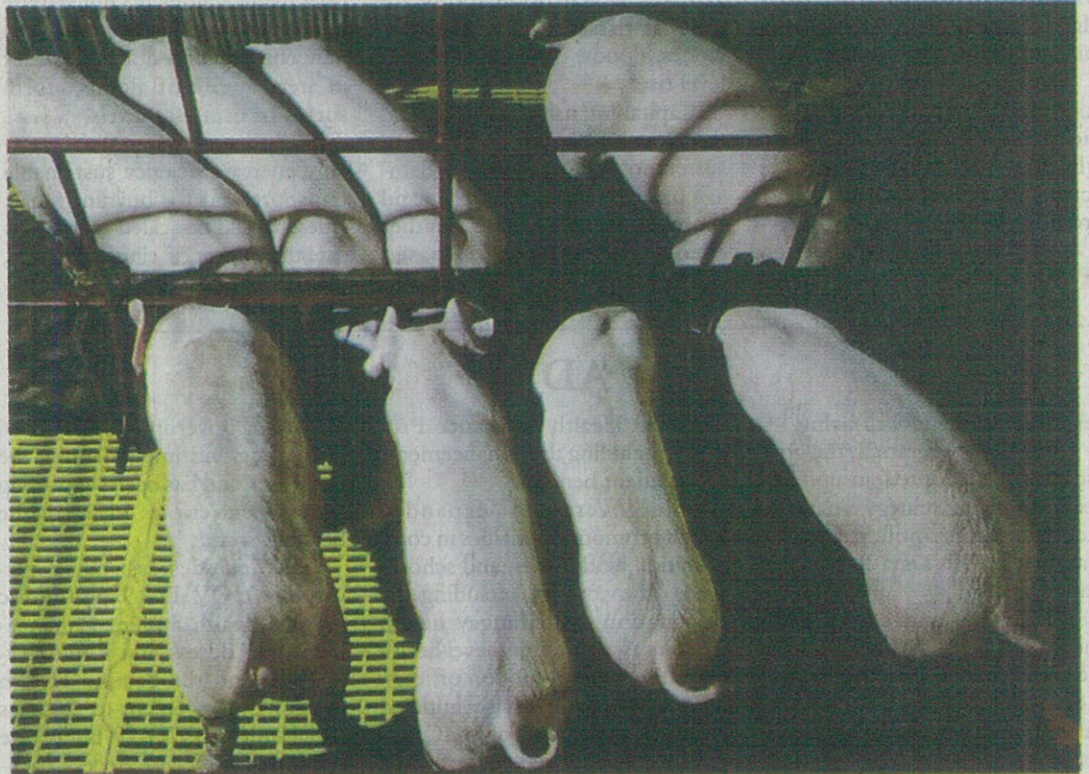
## World animal health body warns of swine fever vaccine risks

HANOI/MANILA- The World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) is warning that more testing of African swine fever vaccines is needed, triggered by Vietnam's plans to export doses in coming months to fight a disease that regularly ravages pig farms worldwide.

WOAH says AVAC Vietnam JSC, the producer of one of the two vaccines, has not shared sufficient data with international researchers and bodies.

Gregorio Torres, head of the science department at WOAH, urged countries interested in using AVAC's vaccines to conduct their own trials before approving it.

In a world first, Vietnam authorized in July two attenuated live-virus vaccines against the disease, which is not deadly to humans but is extremely infectious among pigs and has



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Pigs are seen at a farm outside Hanoi, Vietnam. (Reuters Photo)



# Malaya Business Insight

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## WORLD

caused repeated disruptions to the global pork market, which data provider Research and Markets said was worth about \$250 billion in 2022.

In October, as AVAC was about to announce deals with importers of its vaccine in the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, India and Myanmar, WOAHA warned of risks "from use of sub-standard vaccines".

Torres said that Vietnam's announcements led to the warning, but that it was not linked to concerns about specific vaccines.

AVAC says that its vaccine is not dangerous and that widespread use will demonstrate it.

"We have proven our product is safe and effective and we need some time to prove that to all, including those showing concern," Nguyen Van Diep, AVAC's chief operating officer, told Reuters.

He did not respond to questions about whether the company was sharing data with international researchers.

Diep said that the vaccine had been safely used in farms in 17 provinces in Vietnam since its approval and that sales were increasing.

Scientists at the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) discovered the AVAC vaccine, which was then

developed in Vietnam because the virus is not present in the United States. The agency did not have access to Vietnam's trials data, a USDA spokesperson told Reuters.

"If somebody puts in the market a vaccine which is suboptimal, it will impact everybody," Torres said, noting that it is harder to assess vaccines in countries with ongoing epidemics, such as Vietnam, because pigs could be infected by the attenuated virus in the vaccine alongside the wild virus.

Countries are eager for vaccines against African swine fever (ASF), which is incurable and has a high fatality rate, resulting in heavy loss-

es for farms that become infected.

China has also developed several vaccines but none has gotten commercial approval.

AVAC is producing between 2.5 and 5 million doses a month and was planning to export 5 million, pending approval from the countries where the company signed commercial deals, Diep said, noting that a green light from the Philippines might come early next year.

Torres said the agency was discussing a new global standard for evaluating ASF vaccines, with possible approval coming in May at the WOAHA general assembly. The

intergovernmental organization, based in Paris, has 183 member states.

The standard would not be compulsory, as national regulators decide on approvals, but it could lead to trade restrictions against pork-exporting countries that vaccinate pigs with sub-standard shots.

The AVAC vaccine was trialled in the Philippines with 300,000 doses. The Food and Drug Administration of the Philippines, which is in charge of the vaccine approval, did not reply to requests for comment.

Philippines Agriculture Un-

dersecretary Deogracias Victor Savellano told Reuters his country had not approved or purchased the vaccine yet, noting the regulator's authorization was critical to food security, as the country faces a national emergency caused by the spread of ASF.

Regulators from India, Indonesia, Myanmar and Malaysia did not respond to requests for comment.

The second approved ASF vaccine, produced by Vietnam's Navetco Central Veterinary Medicine from a USDA platform, had shared positive trial data and is being tested in the Dominican Republic, the USDA said. -Reuters





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## Agri damage from quake hits P2.5M

AGRICULTURAL damage from the magnitude 7.6 earthquake that jolted Surigao del Sur in southern Philippines has reached P2.5 million, according to a Department of Agriculture bulletin.

It said 72.4% of damage and loss mainly affected the fishery sector of the Caraga Region. They include damaged equipment of the agency's laboratories, production facilities and stock lines from seaweed farms.

Farm structures accounted for 23.9% of the reported damage, followed by agricultural machinery and equipment at 3.7%.

The Agriculture department said its regional offices were coordinating with local governments and disaster offices to monitor the impact of the quake and help farmers and fishermen.

The earthquake occurred on Saturday, with a depth of 26 kilometers off the coast of Hinatuan, Surigao del Sur. The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology earlier recorded 2,491 aftershocks. — **Adrian H. Halili**





## Unrestricted hog trade blamed for ASF spread in Cordilleras

**BAGUIO CITY** – The office of the Department of Agriculture (DA) in the Cordilleras is blaming unrestricted hog trading for the rapid spread of African swine fever (ASF) in the region.

The DA appealed for cooperation in curbing the further spread of the disease anywhere in the country.

Despite reminders, ASF cases persisted, according to Leisley Deligen, officer-in-charge of the DA-Cordillera regulatory division.

In October, officials of Tabuk City, Kalinga's capital, declared a state of animal health emergency as ASF outbreaks were noted in several barangays.

"The main reason for the spread of

the disease is because of the continuous trade of hogs coming from ASF-stricken areas. The second is the feeding of swill or food scraps and refuse to the pigs," Deligen said.

The virus can also be spread by people, especially those who attend community feasts and large gatherings where pork dishes are served.

Deligen said most of the meat used during feasts and gatherings do not undergo sanitary inspection and may be infected with ASF.

He said the DA is appealing for immediate reporting of ill and dead pigs, so it can investigate and implement appropriate measures. – **Artemio Dumlao**





# Lawmakers ask DA to explain high rice prices

By JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ

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**L**AWMAKERS on Wednesday raised concerns over the Department of Agriculture's (DA) "unfulfilled promise" of stabilizing rice prices after the harvest season.

In a House Committee on Agriculture and Food briefing, representatives from the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the National Food Authority (NFA) were called upon to explain the disparities between the "promised stabilization" and the current market prices of rice.

House Deputy Majority Leader for Communications and ACT-CIS Rep. Erwin Tulfo expressed apprehensions about the unfulfilled commitment made by DA officials in July, August, and September regarding the anticipated reduction in rice prices.

The briefing followed a recent surprise visit by Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez and Tulfo to the Farmers Market in Cubao, Quezon City, to evaluate essential commodity prices and ensure compliance with suggested retail prices.

Tulfo observed that despite the promised stabilization, rice prices have remained high, fluctuating between P52 and P60 per kilogram.

"Whatever happened to that promise that [the price of rice] would go down because people were waiting? Why didn't it go down?"

For his part, NFA chief Roderico Bioco cited various factors contributing to the surge in rice prices, including a production shortfall between 2021 and 2022, low fertilizer uptake affecting yields, and international factors, such as Indonesia's announcement to buy 2 million tons of rice.

He said the combination of these factors, along with import parity being higher than the landed cost, has led to higher rice prices in the local market.

At the hearing, House Committee on Agriculture and Food Chairman Mark Enverga said they expect that the information presented by the DA and its attached agencies will guide the committee in taking the necessary steps to address concerns about the escalating prices of agricultural commodities, particularly rice and chicken eggs, and prevent further complications.

"It is our duty to inform the consuming public of the real situation as reports vary. We know that this time of the year is one of the busiest for all of us, but please bear with us. We need to keep everyone informed," Enverga said.

"We need correct information for us to assess the situation and help make the necessary steps to address such concerns and avoid the same mistakes."

Amid high rice prices due to external market pressures, DA Undersecretary Leocadio Sebastian reported an increase in domestic rice production, leading many importers to cease importing as buying locally became more cost-effective.

With the current price scenario, he noted that farmers can sell their produce at a higher margin, bringing increased income compared to the previous year when high fertilizer costs impacted their earnings.

While Nueva Ecija Rep. Ria Vergara welcomed this, she raised concerns about traders manipulating prices.

"I'm very happy for the farmers. They deserve that. But we cannot

also just allow the capitalists to dictate those high prices at the expense of the consumers."

She emphasized the crucial role of the NFA as a market stabilizer and proposed that it act as a buffer, setting reasonable prices to maintain equilibrium and prevent unjustifiable price hikes by capitalists.

By having the NFA sell rice at a certain price, Vergara said it would discourage capitalists from selling at exorbitant rates, creating a balanced and fair environment for all stakeholders.

"No one's going to buy it because NFA is selling at P29 or P32. That way, these capitalists will buy at the right [farmgate] price, not below P19 but P22 or P23. So everyone's happy. No one's making absurd amounts of money."

Earlier in the hearing, Bioco said

the NFA, which is tasked with providing stability in palay prices, revealed challenges in purchasing local rice due to the government-set guaranteed floor and ceiling prices.

He said that while the NFA can't follow market prices, strategies were proposed to alleviate pressure, including expanding production and exploring alternative sources like India, which allows the exemption of 295,000 metric tons of white rice from the export ban.

Meanwhile, Speaker Ferdinand Romualdez reiterated Congress's commitment to ensuring that traders do not exploit the holiday season to increase prices of basic commodities.

"The Christmas season is meant to be a time of giving and compassion, and we want to make sure that the prices of goods are affordable to a great majority of our people."





## PHL will have enough eggs during the holidays—BAI

WHILE the Philippine egg industry is navigating through various challenges—from disease outbreaks affecting bird populations to fluctuations in consumer demand—the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) on Wednesday assured the public that there will be enough supply of eggs this holiday season.

During a hearing of the House Committee on Agriculture, Paul Limson, agricultural center chief at the Bureau of Animal Industry, said there is a projected total supply of 15 billion eggs for 2023, with a total demand of 11.2 billion.

He said the beginning stock for local production in the fourth quarter is estimated at 3.9 billion, versus the demand pegged at 2.8 billion.

Assuming production is increased, Limson said, this could result in a surplus, potentially spanning 130 days.

However, Limson said the weekly farmgate price for medium-sized eggs as of December 1 is P7.16. This reflects a slight increase from last week's P7.12 and the previous month's P6.99.

On the retail front, he said the price remains steady at P8, a trend observed since September 2023.

As the industry prepares for the holiday season, BAI vowed to "remain vigilant" in ensuring a stable



PHOTO BY NONOY LACZA

and sustainable egg market for consumers.

PEB President Francis Uyehara, meanwhile, discussed the factors influencing the recent fluctuations in egg prices.

He points to a drop in the quantity of layer birds due to the lingering impact of bird flu outbreaks in the past few years.

"The recovery from such outbreaks typically takes around a year."

Uyehara said that by mid-year, egg prices were below cost as farmers reduced their layer bird population out of fear of bird flu.

"This resulted in a supply deficit,

causing prices to gradually rise. But farmers responded to the increased demand, but the lead time for layer bird production ranges from 4 to 6 months."

Over the past six weeks, Uyehara said egg prices have stabilized, with some farmers gradually increasing production.

"This is seen as a preparation for the heightened demand during the holiday season. However, we noted a decline in demand compared to December [last year]."

In the same hearing, House Deputy Majority Leader for Communications and ACT-CIS Rep. Erwin Tulfo expressed concerns about escalating

retail prices of chicken eggs, which play a crucial role in many Filipino households as a breakfast staple.

He said there is a need for "prompt action" to address the issue and make eggs more affordable for the public, particularly those who rely on eggs as a primary source of morning sustenance.

Tulfo said swift action in addressing both the immediate pricing concerns and long-term challenges, such as bird flu, was seen as crucial to maintaining a stable and affordable supply of eggs for Filipino consumers.

Meanwhile, Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez said the lower chamber will continue to monitor the prices of rice and other staples.

"If we notice an unreasonable and unjustified increase, we will not hesitate to recommend to the President the reimposition of a price limit," said Romualdez in a separate statement.

He said the House, when necessary, would launch inquiries to address issues such as hoarding, profiteering, price manipulation, smuggling, and other practices that disrupt the value chain.

He also said the House is committed to exercising its oversight power to protect the public from illegal activities.

Jovee Marie N. Dela Cruz





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## DA sinupalpal sa ₱52-60 per kilong bigas

Nagpahayag ng pagkabahala at kinuwestiyon ng mga mambabatas ang hindi natupad na sinabi ng mga opisyal ng Department of Agriculture (DA) na huhupa ang taas-presyo ng bigas kapag nagsimula na ang anihan.

Sa briefing ng House committee on agriculture and food nitong Miyerkoles, Disyembre 6, sinabi ni Deputy Majority Leader for Communications at ACT-CIS Party-list Rep. Erwin Tulfo na mataas pa rin ang presyo ng bigas kahit na natapos na ang anihan.

Sinabi ni Tulfo na ang presyo ng bigas ay naglalaro sa P52 hanggang P60 kada kilo.

"Whatever happened to that promise na bababa [ang presyo ng bigas], because people were waiting? Bakit hindi po bumaba?" tanong ni Tulfo.

Ipinatawag ang briefing matapos pumunta sina Tulfo at Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez sa Farmers' Market sa Cubao, Quezon City upang tingnan ang presyo ng mga pagkain.

Ayon kay National Food Authority

(NFA) Administrator Roderico Bioco, nakaapekto sa presyo ang mababang produksiyon ng bigas noong 2021 at 2022, ang paggamit ng mga lokal na magsasaka ng konting pataba dahil mataas ang presyo nito at ang mga international factor gaya ng anunsiyo ng Indonesia na mag-aangkat ito ng dalawang milyong tonelada ng bigas.

Sinabi pa ni Bioco na mas mataas ang landed cost ng imported na bigas kaya mataas din ang naging bentahan sa mga palengke.

Iginiit naman ng chairperson ng komite na si Quezon Rep. Mark Enverga ang kahalagahan na makapagbigay ang DA at mga attached agency nito ng tamang impormasyon sa komite upang makagawa ng wastong hakbang at maibsan ang pagtaas ng presyo ng pagkain.

Ayon naman kay DA Undersecretary Leocadio Sebastian, tumaas ang produksiyon ng bigas sa bansa kaya hindi na itinuloy ng mga negosyante ang kanilang planong mag-aangkat dahil mas makakamura sila kung bibili sa mga magsasaka. **(Billy Begas)**





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## Tariff cuts extension up for NEDA approval

THE National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Board is set to approve another extension of reduced tariffs on rice, pork and corn, Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan indicated on Wednesday.

"We're talking about EO (Executive Order) 10? It will go to the NEDA Board next week," Balisacan told reporters.

EO 10, issued in December last year, approved the extension of reduced most favored nation tariffs on rice, corn, pork and coal that were implemented by the previous administration to combat stubborn inflation.

The lower tariffs on rice, corn and pork are scheduled to expire at the end of this year, while those

for coal will remain in effect but subject to a periodic review.

An interagency committee created by Malacañang has already recommended the move and Balisacan said this had been endorsed by the NEDA's Committee on Tariff and Related Matters.

"We have to sustain the gains in inflation reduction," he said. "To us, it's critical to ensure that we achieve [the 2.0- to 4.0-percent target]."

Inflation slowed to 4.1 percent in November, due largely to lower price growth for some key food items. Rice inflation, however, picked up to 15.8 percent from 13.2 percent.

Emilio Neri, senior economist at

► **NEDA B3**

### ■ NEDA FROM B1

## Tariff cuts

Bank of the Philippine Islands, said that this suggested that the country's problem with rice was not yet over and that supplies would remain tight in the coming months.

A farmers group, however, said it was against an extension as lower tariffs had not led to lower prices for consumers.

"We have supplied the Tariff Commission with PSA (Philippine Statistics Authority) data showing that imports from non-Asean (Association of Southeast Asian Nation) countries did not significantly increase despite the

reduction in tariffs," Federation of Free Farmers national manager Raul Montemayor said on Wednesday.

"Retail prices have not dropped, and most of the rice imports are for premium grades for sale to well-off consumers," he added.

Montemayor claimed that EO 10 had also cost the government over a billion pesos in foregone tariffs.

"It deprived rice farmers of an equal amount in terms of supplemental support based on the RTL (Rice Tariffication Law) provision that tariff collections in excess of P10 billion a year should go to support programs for farmers," he added.

**NIÑA MYKA PAULINE ARCEO  
AND JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL**





## Searca hosts carbon farming workshop

THE Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca) conducted a training workshop on carbon farming that provided an in-depth discussion on the importance of the available platforms for monitoring, reporting and verification in carbon emissions.

This is the second installment of the training workshop series on Carbon Wise Rice-based Farming held on November 21-22 at the Searca Headquarters in Los Baños, Laguna, in collaboration with Newfields Consulting Ltd. (NFC) and Macon Ltd.

The training was attended by 28 participants from the provincial and municipal agricultural offices of Laguna, faculty and researchers from the University of the Philippines Los Baños, Central Luzon State University and the private sector representatives.

Glenn Gregorio, Searca director, said the training workshop, in particular, introduced the Carbon Wise Rice Information Management System (CWRIMS), a web-based application that allows farm-level data collection of carbon emissions.

Highlighting the Southeast Asian initiatives advocating carbon farming practices, Gregorio, along with Eero Nissila, Searca-NFC managing director, emphasized the significance of carbon credits and green funds, and heightened the importance of disseminating climate-smart agriculture technologies at the grassroots level.

In his presentation on the principles of carbon-wise farming systems, Nissila expounded on the potential of out-grower coop systems and consolidation of farms to increase access to financing, processing, marketing resources, technologies and training.

In introducing the CWRIMS, a general platform for managing various carbon emission data applications, he explained that the system aims to streamline data collection, facilitating the transition to decarbonization, enhancing profitability and aligning with the objectives of the Paris Agreement.

During the event, Searca also presented its current initiatives on carbon emission measurement and reduction.

Eric Reynoso, Searca Emerging Innovation for Growth Department program head, said these include implementing a program on carbon farming as one of the

nature-based solutions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in agriculture.

"The program is currently benchmarking policies and methodologies related to carbon farming in selected Southeast Asian countries," Reynoso said.

The project intends to measure the center's baseline carbon footprint and develop a carbon footprint calculator to estimate the carbon footprint for succeeding years, he said.

Macon Ltd. also presented the transformative potential of bio- and circular economy in community development, emphasizing significant contributions to environmental sustainability, economic growth and innovation, social benefits and cultural integration.

Chief Executive Officer Mikko Ahokas and Sanna Taskila, both of Macon Ltd., established an interlink between the two economies, encompassing standard measures for enhancing energy efficiency, decreasing dependence on fossil fuels, implementing climate-related initiatives and exerting influence through urban planning, land use policies and support for renewable energy initiatives.

Gregorio noted that in showcasing notable accomplishments such as emission reduction, heightened energy efficiency and positive community impacts, there were success stories of municipalities employing practical approaches and exemplifying the 10 best practices presented.

Gregorio said the training workshop also included hands-on exercises that provided participants an opportunity for comprehensive interaction with the web application.

The Searca director said participants shared their individual experiences, feedback and suggestions on the web application's usability and functionality to enhance the web application.

Reiterating the crucial significance of collaboration among local government units, the academic community and the private sector, Nur Azura Binti Adam, Searca deputy director for programs, announced the possibility of organizing a third training workshop in March or April 2024.

Nur said the improved version of CWRIMS will be presented and explore the potential of implementing the app in field trials.

**LEANDER C. DOMINGO**



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RATE CUTS MAY BE DELAYED UNTIL NEXT YEAR

## INFLATION THREAT FROM RICE PRICES TO KEEP BSP HAWKISH

By Ian Nicolas P. Cigaral  
@ipcigaral

Resurgent rice prices continued to highlight the Philippines' delicate economic condition, which should prompt the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) to stay hawkish in order to prevent inflation from adding more dam-

age to growth, ING Bank said.

Inflation for rice, the main staple in the Philippines, rose 15.8 percent year-on-year in November after easing to 13.2 percent in the previous month, which showed the "vulnerability to supply-side shocks," Nicholas Mapa, senior economist at ING Bank in Manila, said in an

emailed commentary.

Government data showed the average price of regular milled rice jumped to P46.73 per kilo in November from P45.42 kilo per kilo in the preceding month.

Meanwhile, well-milled rice cost P51.99 per kilo on average last month, higher than October's P51 per kilo.

That rice prices went up at a faster rate in the wake of peak harvest season showed the volatility of food supply in the Philippines.

That said, Mapa believes the BSP will stay hawkish, "possibly extending its pause well into 2024" to keep inflation expectations in check. **INQ**





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## EO on lower agri tariffs up for approval

THE National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) has endorsed an executive order (EO) that would extend the temporary reduction of tariff rates on rice, pork, corn, and coal until Dec. 31, 2024, to help further bring down inflation.

"(The EO) will go to the NEDA Board next week. The Committee on Tariff and Related Matters (CTRM) endorsed it... to extend it for one

year," NEDA Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said on Wednesday.

If approved, the EO would extend by one year the implementation of lower tariff rates on rice, pork, corn, and coal.

In December 2022, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. signed EO 10, which had extended the lower tariff rates on key commodities to address rising prices.

EO 10 is set to expire on Dec. 31, 2023.

Tariff rates for imports of swine meat were kept at 15% for shipments within the minimum access volume (MAV) quota and 25% for those exceeding the quota. The corresponding rates for corn remained at 5% (within the MAV quota) and 15% (exceeding the MAV quota), and rice at 35% in both cases.

The EO also kept the zero-import duty for coal.

Mr. Balisacan said it is important to sustain the slowdown in inflation and ensure that inflation goes down to within the 2-4% government target range.

"Inflation continues to fall, now down to 4.1% in November 2023, bringing us closer to our target band of 2-4% and nearer

to our peers in Southeast Asia," Mr. Balisacan said in an event hosted by the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines.

Headline consumer price index (CPI) fell to 4.1% in November from 4.9% in October and 8% in November 2022. It marked the slowest in 20 months or since the 4% seen in March 2022.

In the eleven months to November, inflation averaged 6.2%, faster than 5.6% in the same period a year ago. This is still above the central bank's full-year baseline forecast of 6%.

"Still, we remain committed to bringing inflation down further through interagency efforts to address its root causes in the market

*Tariffs, S1/5*





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## Tariffs, from S1/1

without relying on the monetary response or cure from our central bank," Mr. Balisacan said.

Last month, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) kept its benchmark interest rate at a 16-year high of 6.5%. The BSP raised borrowing costs by a total of 450 basis points (bps) from May 2022 to October 2023 to tame inflation.

Meanwhile, analysts said headline inflation may further decelerate in December to within the BSP's 2-4% target.

"After 20 months staying above BSP's target range of 2-4%, we expect headline inflation in December 2023 to be within the target range," Maybank Investment Banking Group said in a note.

The bank sees Philippine inflation averaging at 6% this

year, before easing to 3.5% in 2024.

"The recent trend in headline and core inflation enhanced our view that BSP will keep interest rate at 6.5% during the last monetary policy meeting for the year, scheduled on Dec. 14," Maybank said.

BSP Governor Eli M. Remolona, Jr. earlier said the Monetary Board intends to keep rates tighter for longer until the downtrend in inflation has become more evident.

He also said rate cuts are not on the table this year, as inflation may still pick up in the second quarter of next year.

Pantheon Macroeconomics said headline inflation may hit 4% this month, barring any unforeseen supply shocks, as base effects will remain favorable until January.

"We're sticking to our forecast for a big slowdown in average inflation next year to 2.8% from 6% this year," it said in a note.

However, Maybank noted there are still upside risks to the inflation outlook such as the El Niño weather event, which may cripple agricultural production and supply, and higher minimum wage adjustments.

Broader geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and further production cuts in global oil output next year may also risk domestic transport inflation to pick up again, it added.

## 'MOST EXPOSED'

In Asia, the Philippines is the most vulnerable to spikes in food and oil prices, Nomura Global Markets Research said in a report.

"Within Asia, the Philippines is the most exposed, as food and energy account for 43.9% of its CPI basket (rice alone has an 8.9% weighting), and the absence of fuel subsidies implies a direct pass-through to consumers," Nomura said.

It also said that in every 10% increase in oil prices, there would be a 0.4-percentage-point rise in headline inflation.

"Fiscal policy and supply-side interventions will likely be the first lines of defense. The role of monetary policy is limited in the face of supply-driven pressures but could be activated if second-round effects materialize," Nomura said.

"This is especially true in the Philippines, where BSP follows its inflation mandate more strictly," it added. — **Keisha B. Ta-asan**





## NEDA board to approve reduced tariffs on agri products

A proposed executive order (EO) to extend the reduced tariffs on essential commodities like rice, corn, pork and coal until 2024 will be presented for approval by the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Board chaired by President Marcos next week.

"It will go to the NEDA Board next week. The CTRM (Committee on Tariff and Related Matters) endorsed it," NEDA Secretary Arsenio Balisacan told reporters yesterday.

The CTRM, which is chaired by Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual and co-chaired by the NEDA secretary, advises the President on tariff and related matters.

Balisacan said the proposal is to extend the implementation of the reduced tariffs for one year or until December 2024.

Under EO 10 signed by Marcos in December last year, the implementation of lower tariffs on swine meat, rice, corn and coal was extended until the end of this year in order to augment supply and make these commodities affordable amid high inflation.

While inflation has slowed down, Balisacan said there is a need to sustain the gains.

Inflation eased to a 20-month low of 4.1 percent in November from 4.9 percent in the previous month, mainly due to the slower food price upticks.

This is the second straight month that the inflation rate slowed down.

In the January to November period, inflation averaged 6.2 percent, still above the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas' two to four percent target range.

Balisacan said it is critical to bring inflation to the two to four percent target.

"As we have seen, inflation is a major drag in slow growth. It has an impact on consumption," he said.

He pointed out that it is the poor that get hurt the most by inflation, especially food inflation.

Balisacan said the goal is to issue the EO extending the reduced tariffs before the current one expires.

As rice registered a higher inflation rate of 15.8 percent in November from 13.2 percent in October, he said the Inter-Agency Committee on Inflation and Market Outlook is monitoring the situation and looking at recommendations that can be made to the Cabinet and the President.

- Louella Desiderio





# CTRM WANTS TO KEEP LOW TARIFFS ON FOOD

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**T**HE Committee on Tariff Related Matters (CTRM) has recommended the extension of reduced tariff rates on select agriculture commodities to maintain the recent gains in inflation reduction, according to the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda).

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said the CTRM, co-chaired by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and Neda, is expected to present its recommendation to the Neda Board, chaired by the President, next week. Balisacan said Executive Order (EO) 10 was recommended for extension for another year or until December 2024.

"Yes, because we have to sustain the gains in inflation reduction. Because to us, it's so critical in ensuring that we achieve our objectives. Especially because inflation hurts the poor so

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## Tariff...

CONTINUED FROM A1

much, especially food inflation, it hurts the poor. And as we have seen it, the inflation for the poorest 30 percent is higher than the [all households]," Balisacan said.

He said the government intends to have the extension of the EO approved by the President before the existing one expires at the end of the

year.

Under Marcos's EO 10, the lower tariff rates on imported rice, corn and pork were extended until the end of 2023.

Under existing rules and regulations governing the President's power on modifying tariff rates, the Neda is the one that will make the necessary recommendation to the President on tariff adjustments.

"Encouragingly, however, inflation continues to fall—now down to 4.1 percent in November 2023, bringing us closer to our target





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band of 2 to 4 percent and nearer to our peers in Southeast Asia," Balisacan said in a speech at the 2024 Philippine Economic Outlook of the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines on Wednesday.

"Still, we remain committed to bringing inflation down further through inter-agency efforts to address its root causes in the market without relying on a monetary response from our central bank," he added.

### Pros and cons

THE Meat Importers and Traders Association (MITA) urged President Marcos Jr. to adopt the recommendation of the Committee on Tariff and Related Matters to extend EO 10.

"MITA applauds the courage and wisdom of the CTRM in recommending the extension of EO10 covering lower tariff on rice, corn and pork," MITA said in a statement sent to the BusinessMirror.

"The lower cost of imported rice, corn and pork will bring respite not only to consumers, but also to the livestock and poultry sector who grapple with high costs of inputs," it added.

MITA argued that African swine fever (ASF) would remain as the "biggest challenge" of the domestic hog industry in producing affordable pork products.

"The experience of the developed countries, and of our Asian neighbors, testify that ASF will be extremely difficult to eradicate," it said.

"We pray [President Marcos Jr.] will adopt the recommendation and issue a new Executive Order as soon as possible," it added.

Meanwhile, the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) reiterated its opposition to the extension of EO 10 arguing that it is high time to revert the tariff levied on rice imports from non-Asean countries to 50 percent since the lowered rates did not benefit consumers.

FFF was one of the oppositors during the

Tariff Commission hearing on the proposal to extend EO 10 by the economic managers.

FFF also pointed out that the lower rice tariff rates diminished the national government's possible tariff collection from rice imports that could have gone to the fund pool earmarked to local rice farmers:

"[It] cost the government over a billion pesos in foregone tariffs since the tariffs were reduced in 2021, and deprived rice farmers of an equal amount in terms of supplemental support based on the RTL provision that tariff collections in excess of P10 billion a year should go to support programs for farmers. Despite this, Balisacan insists on extending the reduction," FFF National Manager Raul Q. Montemayor said.

"What is his reason? Where is the data that supports his position? If he cannot provide answers, then he is no less liable than a corrupt government official who is stealing money from the government and depriving farmers of much needed support at the same time," Montemayor added.

### High inflation threat

IN a separate briefing on Wednesday, Maybank Philippines said the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) is expected to keep policy rates at 6.5 percent this year.

Maybank said it expects headline inflation in December 2023 to be within the target range of 2 to 4 percent. In November, inflation slowed to 4.1 percent. (<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/12/05/inflation-slows-to-4-1-in-november-psa/>).

Given this, Maybank maintained its inflation outlook remained 6 percent in 2023 and 3.5 percent in 2024. It also said GDP growth will likely average 5.8 percent this year and 6.5 percent next year, the same forecast it made earlier in the year.

However, it noted upside risks to the out-

look stemming from the onset of El Niño and export ban on rice and other food items as well as the potential for a nationwide daily minimum wage hike.

Maybank also noted there is also a possibility that transport costs will increase on account of the Israel-Hamas war. The OPEC also decided to cut an additional 900,000bbl/day of oil output in the first quarter of 2024.

This is on top of the existing voluntary 1 million bbl/day cut implemented by Saudi Arabia. It can be noted that the Philippines remains a net oil and food importer.

Inflation may have slowed in November, but local economists warned that higher rice prices as well as Christmas spending in December may keep commodity prices elevated, according to local economists. (Full story here: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/12/06/november-inflation-slows-to-4-1-but-risks-cited/>).

PSA data showed that despite the slower headline inflation, certain commodities, such as rice posted an inflation rate of 15.8 percent in November, higher than the 13.2 percent posted in October 2023 and the 3.1 percent posted in November 2022.

Based on the latest data, the three rice varieties being monitored by the PSA showed higher rates in November compared to the October 2023 and November 2022 rates.

Regular milled rice prices increased to P46.73 per kilo in November 2023, higher than the P45.42 per kilo in October 2023 and P39.57 per kilo in November last year.

Well-milled rice, meanwhile, averaged P51.99 per kilo in November 2023. This was also higher than the average of P51 per kilo in October 2023 and P43.86 per kilo in November 2022.

Special rice varieties also showed higher prices at an average of P61.47 per kilo. This is higher than the P60.95 per kilo in October 2023 and P53.53 per kilo in November 2022.



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## 'Gender equality in rural areas essential to climate change adaptation'

**I**N the face of escalating climate change impacts on vulnerable rural populations globally, the chief of the United Nation's International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) said promoting gender equality in rural communities is essential to climate change adaptation.

"We call on the international community to increase investments geared towards building rural women and girls' skills and capacity to adapt to climate change," said Alvaro Lario, IFAD president, during an event held at the climate change conference in Dubai.

IFAD's call comes as the latest data has confirmed that the financing gap between mitigation and adaptation is widening. Despite an overall increase of climate funds, finance directed towards adaptation efforts has dropped by as much as 44 percent during 2019-2020, according to the Climate Policy Index.

Rural women are persistently left out of climate finance activities despite their key role in rural economies, reinforcing existing inequalities. Official climate development assistance dedicated to gender equality as the "principal" objective represented 2.4 percent of the total during 2018-2019, according to OECD data.

The concept that "climate change is not gender neutral" was a key takeaway at the event; "Untangling the nexus between gender and climate" at COP28 led by the Gender Transformative Mechanism (GTM), one of IFAD's most innovative initiatives. Panelists recognized the challenge lies in bringing about systemic change. "This requires doing things differently," said Lario.

Climate change is amplifying gender inequalities and posing unique threats to women's livelihoods, health, and safety. In rural settings, women often bear the responsibility for fetching food, water and fuel for their families, making them more vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Women are also more affected by extreme weather events, such as floods and droughts, because of discriminatory gender norms that hinder or prevent women's access to extension services, education, finance, land ownership and climate information needed to adapt.

Given the significant role that women play in agriculture, biodiversity conservation and food security, they have the potential to actively participate and implement adaptation measures. However, rural women and gender equality issues are not often a priority for governments. Women are often underrepresented in climate policy decision-making at all levels.

"Investing in the nexus of gender equality and climate change to transform the whole food value chain from farm to fork, is a unique opportunity to unlock women's potential as drivers of socio-economic change, while we address many interconnected challenges at the same time," said Alvaro Lario, referring to the mechanism.

Lario and Fatoumata BAKO/TRAORE, Minister Delegate to the Minister of Economy, Burkina Faso, committed to working together on gender equality in the context of climate change through the GTM partnership. This initiative is currently being implemented in Burkina Faso with a budget of \$5.84 million, Ethiopia (\$4.5 million) and India (\$5.25 million) to support a total of 1 million women across the three countries.

Funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation with \$23 million since 2021, GTM is the biggest IFAD facility on gender equality. The mechanism aims to mobilize \$180 million by 2030 to promote investments, skills-building and activities to achieve gender-transformative results at scale in rural areas, and increase women and girls' capacity and participation in climate change adaptation.

Tefera Tadesse, Natural Resource Management director at the Ministry of Agriculture, Ethiopia; Yvonne Pétronille YAMEOGO, Focal Point on Gender and Climate Change, Ministry of Environment, Energy, Water and Sanitation, Burkina Faso; and Kehkashan Basu, Founder of Green Hope Foundation, environmental and human rights activist, also attended the event.





## Indonesia expects 10M tons of rice

JAKARTA- Indonesia is targeting ten million metric tons of rice output during peak harvest in March to April next year, the agriculture ministry said on Tuesday.

Rice harvested in March is projected at around 5.56 million tons, with harvest in April seen at 4.51 million tons, the ministry said on a statement.

"National rice production has been affected by the El Nino phenomenon," said Arnen Sri Gemala, an official from the agricultural ministry.

The ministry plans to plant rice on 10.54 million hectare areas, with output expected to reach 32 million tons in 2024.

Based on temporary data from the statistics agency (BPS), rice planting from September to November in 2023 has reached a total area of 840,298 hectares, a decline of 53.61 percent from last year.

Rice is a staple for most of Indonesia's 270 million people and price movement is politically sensitive, especially with elections due in February.

The extreme El Nino phenomenon has disrupted rice production in Southeast Asia's largest economy, which has resorted to imports to secure domestic stocks.

Indonesia's state food procurement agency (BULOG) said it has imported a total of 3.3 million tons of rice as of Nov. 26, 87.15 percent of the 3.8 million tons imports quota for the year. - Reuters



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## Wheat, corn rally

CHICAGO- Chicago Board of Trade wheat futures rallied on Tuesday, extending a six-day ascent to highs not seen in three months, after the US government announced another hefty private sale of US wheat to China.

Soybeans ended narrowly mixed as traders monitored crop weather in top soy producer Brazil, while corn rose for a fifth straight session.

Benchmark CBOT March wheat finished up 10-3/4 cents at \$6.31-1/4 per bushel after reaching \$6.36-1/4, the contract's highest since Sept. 7.

Wheat rose after US Department of Agriculture (USDA) confirmed private sales of 198,000 metric tons of US soft red winter wheat to China, the second such sale in as many days. Monday's announcement that China had purchased 440,000 tons of the grain, the largest one-off US wheat export sale to China since at least 2020, added impetus to a recent rally.

"China typically doesn't import wheat from us. We typically don't sell wheat to anybody," said Ed Duggan, a risk management specialist at Top Third Ag Marketing. - Reuters





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## Raw sugar sinks more than 3%; arabica coffee recovers

NEW YORK — Raw sugar futures on ICE closed sharply lower on Tuesday as funds liquidated long positions against the backdrop of a strong flow of supplies from Brazil, while coffee recovered from losses earlier in the session.

**SUGAR:** March raw sugar settled down 0.85 cent or 3.3% at 24.96 cents per pound (lb), sliding back down toward a 3-1/2-month low of 24.58 cents set on Monday.

Dealers said the strong flow of supplies from Brazil had created a more bearish mood with production in the key Center-South region well above last season and logistical bottlenecks easing.

One US-based broker estimated funds liquidated up to 35,000 lots from their long position in recent days.

Higher production in Brazil and good beet crops in Europe prompted broker and supply chain services provider Czarnikow earlier this week to project a small sugar surplus in 2023/24, changing its forecast from a deficit.

March white sugar fell 2.5% to \$691.50 a metric ton.

**COFFEE:** March arabica coffee settled up 4.35 cents or 2.4% at \$1.8375 per lb, with a session high of \$1.8570 that was just shy of Friday's six-month high of \$1.8850.

Dealers said, however, that the recent run-up in prices had triggered a pick-up in producer selling in top grower Brazil, which could eventually drive the market down again.

ICE said after the session that 6,475 bags passed grading to enter arabica certified stocks, but they remain at 24-year lows.

January robusta coffee rose 1.5% at \$2,585 a ton.

Dealers said the harvest in top robusta producer Vietnam was making good progress with about a third of the beans now collected.

**COCOA:** March London cocoa settled down £52 or 1.5% to £3,427 a metric ton, slipping further from last week's record high of £3,572.

Dealers said the modest pullback during the past few days was not unexpected given the extent of gains this year, but the market remained underpinned by the prospect of a third successive global deficit in the 2023/2024 season.

March New York cocoa fell 1.6% to \$4,106 a ton. — **Reuters**





## Chocolate prices are rising everywhere as cocoa rots in West Africa

**T**HE muck from incessant rain sloshes around Nestor N'Guessan's feet as he points to a plot of cocoa trees ravaged by rot on his farm in Ivory Coast.

The 52-year-old grower can't save those plants from black pod disease, so he's focusing efforts on quarantining whatever healthy ones he has left. The soakings of recent months mean fewer pods on his trees, with some supporting just a handful of cocoa buds.

"I had to create a boundary to prevent the rest of the plantation from being contaminated," he said while pruning the healthy thicket. "Yields are low. The weather hasn't helped us."

It's a climate crisis playing out across Ivory Coast and Ghana, the heavyweights of cocoa, with consequences for global food inflation and the cost-of-living squeeze. Too much rain is lowering output and delaying harvests, with the resulting shortfall catapulting wholesale prices in New York to their highest in 46 years.

The total precipitation in West Africa since the rainy season started May 1 has been more than double the 30-year average, according to Maxar Technologies Inc. The damage to yields is compounded by growers' long struggle over pay, leaving them little money to pour back into their plots.

This is the main harvest period, and the constant deluge turns dirt roads into impassable swamps, knocks flowers off before they bud and fosters breeding of a fungal infection that turns rugby ball-sized pods into black mush.

Ghana's output is expected to be the lowest in 13 years, and Ivory Coast's the

smallest in seven, based on totals provided by traders and exporters. Together, the countries produce about 60 percent of the world's beans, according to the International Cocoa Organization.

The most-active futures are trading at the highest since 1977 in New York, soaring past \$4,200 a ton. At that price, you could buy about 50 barrels of oil.

"This is a bull market, and it hasn't peaked yet," said Fuad Mohammed Abubakar, head of government-affiliated Ghana Cocoa Marketing Co. (UK) Ltd., which sells and exports premium cocoa. "More risks lie ahead."

With sugar also reaching a decade high, consumers likely will spend more for their chocolate bars, cookies and hot cocoa as Christmas approaches. The United States Department of Agriculture forecasts prices for sugar and sweets rising 8.9 percent this year and another 5.6 percent next year, outpacing total food inflation.

Citing higher supply costs, Mondelez International Inc., maker of Toblerone bars and Oreo cookies, will raise some prices next year, Chief Executive Officer Dirk Van de Put told Bloomberg Television on November 6. Nestle SA, owner of Haagen-Dazs ice cream and Quality Street candies, said it will do the same.

It would be logical to conclude that farmers benefit from the bounty, but in reality they're not—even with the \$400-a-ton premium tacked onto the market price as the living income differential.

The cocoa markets in Ivory Coast and Ghana are strictly controlled by the governments, and regulators typically sell

beans to foreign buyers at least 12 months in advance.

That means the money being paid to farmers for this season's crop was locked in about a year ago, when futures were about \$2,500 a ton.

"At current farmgate prices, farmers aren't incentivized to go into the farms," said Mahmoud Khayat, senior trader at Ivory Cocoa Products, a bean processing company. "If prices were high, he would swim to get the cocoa."

Right now, growers are waiting on the government's negotiations for next season with top buyers such as Barry Callebaut AG, Cargill Inc. and Olam International Ltd. The sides are in a standoff, with the companies holding off purchases because they want a discount, according to people familiar with the matter.

Typically, there would be a push to plant more seedlings to capitalize on the boom, but many growers are prisoners to the rain and can't afford to hire more hands, use more fertilizer or buy the necessary chemicals to ward off black pod.

The soil on Samuel Addo's 12-acre plot in Suhum district, Ghana—about 65 kilometers (40 miles) north of the capital, Accra—has a sandy consistency, making it a bit more difficult to grow cocoa even in the best conditions.

After a heavy downpour, nearly every tree sprouted a pod that was either rotting or turning black. The only way to tame the spread is for Addo to spray his buds, called cherelles, every two weeks, but that expense is out of reach.

"It's never attacked my farm this bad since I started farming cocoa," Addo, 52, said. "What I'm earning is not enough to invest back into the farm."

The El Nino weather pattern could trigger more hardship ahead as dry conditions typically set in across West Africa. Global output hasn't met demand for the past two seasons, and it's expected to stay that way for several more years, Abubakar said.

"The supply response will not be instant," he said. "It will take time for higher prices to boost production."

Plus, deforestation regulations coming from the European Union—a major hub for West Africa's crop—are likely to escalate costs as beans are tracked through the supply chain.

At this time of the year, processing plants in San Pedro, Ivory Coast's main export hub, should be running at full tilt to clean, fumigate and pack the beans into 65-kilogram (143-pound) jute bags ready for shipment.

Yet total port arrivals in the season that started Oct. 1 total 479,449 tons, compared with an estimated 707,200 tons a year ago. That's a 32-percent drop.

The dearth of supply forced Societe Ivoirienne de Transformation de Produits Agricoles, which can process more than 1,500 tons a day, to idle one of its machines the day a Bloomberg reporter visited.

The exporter is receiving about 20 cargo trucks daily, compared with about 24-26 trucks a year ago. The artery to the cocoa basket—a rugged road to begin with—is now pocked by holes, brimming with rainwater, making the journey even more treacherous. **Bloomberg News**