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DA bans Iowa poultry amid bird flu outbreaks

By **BELLA CARIASO**

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. has banned the importation of poultry products from Iowa in the US amid outbreaks of H5N1 high pathogenicity avian influenza.

Laurel signed Memorandum

Order 73 ordering the prohibition of the importation of domestic and wild birds and their products, including poultry meat, day-old chicks, eggs and semen originating from Iowa.

He cited the official report submitted by US agriculture

officials and the World Organization for Animal Health, in which there were several outbreaks of avian flu in the Mid-western US state that affected domestic birds, as confirmed by the National Veterinary Services Laboratories.

"The rapid spread of H5N1

highly pathogenic avian influenza in the United States in a short period of time since its first laboratory detection necessitates a wider coverage of trade restriction to prevent the entry of HPAI virus and protect the health of the local poultry population," Laurel

said.

He ordered the immediate suspension of the processing, evaluation and issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearance for poultry products from Iowa.

"All shipments coming from the mentioned areas of

the United States that are in transit unto port before the official communication of this order shall be allowed, provided that the products were slaughtered 14 days before the first outbreak in the particular locality dated Nov. 1, 2023," he added.

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DA recognizes partners, LGUs' support for Kadiwa

The Department of Agriculture (DA) recognized its long-time partners and local government units (LGU) for supporting the successful run of Kadiwa Program this year.

In a statement on Thursday, Dec. 20, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said that over 1,887 Kadiwa selling activities have been held in Metro Manila throughout 2023.

Laurel said the DA partners helped deliver the program's aim of supplying quality food and produce that is affordable for Filipinos.

The LGUs have also provided regular market hubs for local farmers and fishers to sell their goods.

"Today, we acknowledge the outstanding partnership and participation of the local governments of Quezon City, Las Piñas, Parañaque, and Muntinlupa City in the Kadiwa Program," Laurel said. "The Kadiwa program has established a strong, well-ordered collaboration with the national government, LGUs, and the communities they serve."

The Kadiwa program is a marketing strategy that helps food producers obtain free trading space for

selling, as well as give consumers low-cost fresh and nutritious food options.

They aim to give out enough food supply in different areas of the country.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the agriculture chief noted that the LGUs have been providing generous services to consumers and local suppliers.

"The Kadiwa centers and the people that man them ensured adequate public access to food in many areas hard-hit by COVID-19, and risked their own health and safety by performing their duties at the height of the pandemic," Laurel said.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Genevieve Guevarra highlighted the nearly 2,000 agribusiness events that transpired since January this year.

"These has opened [1,887] opportunities for Filipinos to access fresh, affordable, and delightful agri-fishery products directly from the hands of those who cultivated them: our dedicated farmers and fisherfolk," she said. (Gabriel Christel Galang)



Planters plead for help as sugar prices decline

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS

[@jearcalas](#)

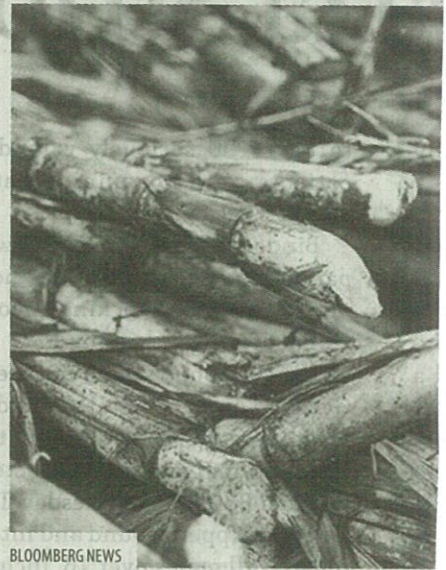
SUGAR groups are calling on the Marcos administration to undertake the necessary interventions that will prevent sugarcane farmers, particularly smallholders, from suffering losses as farmgate prices continue to decline.

"We urgently appeal to President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. thru Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr and Sugar Regulatory Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona to adopt measures to stop the decline in farmgate sugar prices and bring retail prices to more reasonable levels, even as the industry continues to seek ways to remain viable in the face of adversity," the Sugar Council said in a

recent statement.

The Sugar Council is a group composed of three sugar industry federations: the Confederation of Sugar Producers' Associations Inc. (Confed), the National Federation of Sugarcane Planters (NFSP) and the Panay Federation of Sugarcane Farmers (Panayfed). The group said they account for more than half of the national sugar output.

The Sugar Council lamented



BLOOMBERG NEWS

the continuous drop in the farmgate prices of raw sugar, which has fallen below break-even level.

"With production and labor costs on the rise, farmers are hard-pressed to remain viable at today's low millgate prices. Despite the price decline, however, the prevailing retail sugar prices have remained high at P80 [per

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kilogram] for raw and P100 [per kilogram] for refined, which benefit neither farmers nor consumers," the group said.

The group claimed that the domestic market is withdrawing more imported sugar than domestic stocks, resulting in lower demand for locally-produced sugar.

"When there is weak demand

for local refined sugar brought about by the abundance of cheaper imported sugar, it leads to weakened demand for raw sugar, which ultimately results in low millgate sugar prices."

Citing Sugar Regulatory Administration data, the Sugar Council said 67 percent of the 232,279 metric tons (MT) of refined sugar withdrawal, or about 156,025 MT, as of November 19 were imported stocks while the remaining 33 percent or about 76,254 MT were locally-produced supplies.

"This almost 70:30 ratio between imported and locally-refined sugar withdrawal has consequently dampened demand for domestically-produced sugar, as the Council noted that about 40 percent of domestic sugar consumption is normally converted to refined sugar for the consumption of food processors and industrial users."

The group urged the government to "exert its best efforts" in maintaining a "balanced"

supply-and-demand situation nationwide, citing the mandate of the SRA.

The group reiterated its call for a "transparent" and "rationally-calibrated" sugar importation program that is based on historical figures and current market movements. It added that the importation program must be a result of a "consultation with all stakeholders of the industry."

The Sugar Council also called on other sugarcane industry stakeholders to collaborate with the government in crafting the correct policy and regulations to "enhance the long-term viability of the industry."

"The survival of the industry rests on our ability to jointly adopt measures that ensure the viability of all its stakeholders, especially the small farmers. Towards this end, the Sugar Council seeks earnest and genuine solution-seeking dialogue with government and other stakeholders at the earliest possible time."



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Farmers get P209-M support

THE PHILIPPINE Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech) said it has distributed about P209 million worth of agricultural machineries to farmers' cooperatives and associations (FCAs) in the provinces of Camarines Sur, Zamboanga del Sur, and Davao del Sur.

For Camarines Sur, the PhilMech distributed about P19 million worth of combine harvesters to farmers in an event marking the agency's final turnover for the area in 2023.

Another 52 units of farm equipment worth a total of P47 million were handed out to Davao del Sur FCAs. There were 19 floating tillers, 10 hand tractors, seven combine harvesters, six four-wheel-drive tractors, four mobile rice mills, and two units each of walk-behind and riding-type transplanters, and rice threshers. — **Adrian H. Halili**



FULL ROUNDUP

Read the full story by typing the link
< bit.ly/BWTheNation >



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Wholesale price of rice up by P1 per kilo

The wholesale price of rice has gone up by P1 per kilo or P50 per 50-kilo sack amid the continued upward trend in the retail cost of the grains, Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) national chairman Raul Montemayor said yesterday.

"Based on the report I received, there was a P1 per kilo (increase) in the wholesale. It slightly decreased for a while and then it went up again," Montemayor told **The STAR**.

As of yesterday, the retail price of local regular milled rice in Metro Manila markets was as high as P52 per kilo; local well-milled rice, P55 per kilo; local premium rice, P62 per kilo and local special rice, P68 per kilo.

Imported well-milled rice was sold at a high of P58 per kilo; imported premium rice, P60 per kilo and imported special rice, P66 per kilo.

Questioning the abrupt increase, Montemayor said there is no reason for traders to increase their price as they bought the palay in October and November 2023.

"There may be speculation in the market that there would be tightness in supply in the coming months because of high prices of imported rice," the farmers' group chair added.

He said there was a decline in volume of imported rice, and there is also apprehension on the possible impact of the El Niño phenomenon.

"Although the effect (of El Niño) will be in the second quarter of next year, traders limit the release of the supply as they are anticipating an increase (in the price of rice) in the next few months," Montemayor said.

He said that while the National Food Authority (NFA)

increased its buying price of palay to P23, traders offered higher prices of P25 per kilo or more.

"That's the problem, the government lost its regulatory power because of the Rice Tariffication Law. The NFA failed to procure more," he noted.

Montemayor maintained that there should be no movement in retail prices as the country has ample supply of rice.

"The peak harvest has just been completed," he said.

At the same time, he said the 20 million metric tons of palay projection of the **Department of Agriculture** only represent an increase of one percent compared to the previous harvest in 2021.

"The increase is just minimal and even its 20 million metric tons...is still not enough to supply our total consumption. We still need to import at least three million metric tons of rice," he said.

Montemayor said the public should conserve not only water but also rice amid the threat of the El Niño phenomenon.

"The average consumption of an individual is one-third kilo. It means that in three days, a person consumes one kilo but much rice is also wasted. Even if we don't have a shortage, there must be a public campaign to conserve rice," he added.

Montemayor said the preparation for El Niño may be too late, as it takes time to ensure readiness against drought.

"It's too late. We need long preparation. If they only act now, it may be too late," he said after President Marcos revived a government task force to lessen the impact of the drought. — **Bella Carioso**



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DOST chief: El Niño to peak in April 2024

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

DROUGHT and dry spell in parts of the country due to the El Niño phenomenon will peak in April 2024, or a month earlier than initially predicted, Science and Technology Secretary Renato Solidum said yesterday.

This developed as President Marcos Jr. announced he will issue an executive order within the week reactivating the Task Force El Niño that would be co-chaired by secretaries of the Departments of Defense (DND) and Science and Technology (DOST).

Solidum, in a briefing after the sectoral meeting presided by the President in Malacañang, said 63 provinces, down from 65, will be affected by the drought, while the dry spell will be experienced in 12 provinces, instead of six.

Solidum said the El Niño will continue to affect the country until the second quarter of 2024 but normal to slightly below normal levels of rainfall can still be expected by May to June.

"Hence, we can still prepare for the effects of El Niño as we have

spoken last week... the drought will peak again in April 2024 with 63 provinces possibly experiencing drought conditions and 12 provinces experiencing dry spell condition," he said.

Solidum defined a dry spell as having three consecutive months of below normal rainfall - or 21 to 60 percent reduction from average rainfall - and two months of way below rainfall - or more than 60 percent reduction of average rainfall.

Drought, on the other hand, is having three consecutive months of way below normal rainfall condition and five consecutive months of below normal rainfall.

He said some parts of the Caraga and Davao regions, or those in the eastern side of Mindanao, are not expected to be affected by the drought or dry spell.

Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. said the President has already reactivated the Task Force on El Niño ahead of the issuance of the new executive order that would amend EO 16 that was issued in 2001.

The task force shall lead the country's preparation and imple-

mentation of measures to cushion the effects of El Niño.

Teodoro said a national action plan (NAP) has already been crafted and submitted by the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) to the President.

He said the government would focus on "water security, food security, energy security, health security and public safety."

Among the government interventions include the fast tracking of permits for water projects and other infrastructure programs that would help secure the energy supply, particularly for critical infrastructure for standby power, the cloud seeding, and the changes in seed planting to be able to still plant crops that need less water during the dry months.

The Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) will form an El Niño platform that will be used to collect data for inter-agency coordination and decision making, and for the information dissemination to the public.

Other agencies such as the Department of Agriculture, Department of Health and the De-

partment of the Interior and Government, are expected to release guidelines to guide the sectors or industries under their departments.

Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, meanwhile, said the water supply level at the Angat dam, which is the main supply of potable water in many parts of Luzon including Metro Manila, is still at its normal level.

"We still have a supply, but we need to produce the water as potable and usable," Yulo-Loyzaga said.

She said there are currently several infrastructure projects that would help improve the water supply in the country in the future, such as the water plants that are set to be inaugurated in June and August next year in Cavite and two additional water plants in Bacoor in 2025.

Teodoro said the government is also already conducting rainwater collection programs in power plants in some provinces, as well as fast tracking the improvement of irrigation canals and construction or improvement of some small-scale irrigation projects in other areas in a bid to increase the water supply.



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Priority bill seeks salt self-sufficiency

A MEASURE already ratified by both houses of Congress seeks to make the country self-sufficient in salt.

Bicol Saro Party-list Rep. Brian Raymund Yamsuan said the Philippine Salt Industry Development Act would establish a five-year road map aimed at revitalizing and modernizing the dying salt industry in the country. The Philippines currently imports 93 percent of its salt requirements.

The bill is a priority measure of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. through the Legislative Executive Development Advisory Council.

"Our key goals in approving this measure is to make the Philippines self-sufficient in salt, and subsequently, a net exporter of this vital commodity. By promoting public and private investments in the salt industry, as outlined under the Salt Industry Development Act, we are

confident that the government under the Marcos Jr. administration would be able to fulfill these goals," Yamsuan said.

He said the proposed law also provides the necessary support to small salt producers and cooperatives to boost their production by providing them inputs and equipment for salt development, establishing salt farm warehouses and developing modern salt production and processing technologies.

"The timely enactment of this measure will revitalize the salt industry and create tens of thousands of jobs in the agriculture sector, especially if we are able to modernize the industry and export salt for industrial purposes," Yamsuan said.

The bill identifies 13 provinces as priority areas for salt production including Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Pangasinan, Zambales, Bataan, Occidental

Mindoro, Oriental Mindoro, Palawan, Marinduque, Quezon province, Misamis Oriental and Antique.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources, National Mapping and Resource Information Authority and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources of the Department of Agriculture (DA) shall be tasked to identify and designate public lands as salt production areas in these provinces.

Salt, whether in processed or unprocessed form, is classified as an aquatic resource product and shall be exempted from all taxes under the measure, the measure states.

Yamsuan said that a Philippine Salt Industry Development road map will also be formulated and established to accelerate the modernization and industrialization of the salt industry.

He also highlighted that a

Philippine Salt Industry Development Council, chaired by the DA and with the Department of Trade and Industry as vice chairman, shall be tasked to formulate, unify and integrate the implementation of the road map.

Citing figures from the Philippine Association of Salt Industry Networks (PhilASIN), Yamsuan said the country has 36,000 kilometers (km) of shoreline, compared to Vietnam's 3,200 km.

"Yet Vietnam is able to produce an average of 1.1 million metric tons (MT) of salt each year from 12,000 hectares, which is a far cry from the Philippines' 60,000 MT from only 2,100 hectares of land," he said.

He warned that if the situation is not corrected soon, the Philippines is projected to import 96 percent of its salt requirements by 2030, according to PhilASIN.

PNA

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IAs get excavators worth P776M from govt

THE National Irrigation Administration (NIA) recently distributed excavators costing P776 million to various irrigators' associations (IAs) in the country. The excavators were turned over to the IAs during a ceremony held at the Naval Supply Depot Compound in Subic Bay Freeport Zone, Olongapo City.

The NIA, an attached corporation of the Department of Agriculture (DA), procured 141 units of excavators under the first tranche, specifically: 102 units of 0.5 cubic excavators, 17 units of 1 cubic excavators, 17 units of long arm excavators, and 5 units of amphibious excavators.

"Ang mga ito po ay gagamitin ng ating irrigators' associations para sa desilting ng kanilang canals, para sa pag-repair ng kanilang irrigation, para po ito ay lalong makatulong sa pagpapaunlad ng ating food security," DA-NIA Acting Administrator Eduardo Eddie Guillen said.

Aside from augmenting the country's inventory of machines and resources, the equipment refueling program also aims to undertake and intensify regular operation and maintenance of national irrigation systems. The program seeks to immediately repair or construct irrigation facilities damaged by natural disasters.

With a total budget of P2.59 billion, the 3-year program is divided into three tranches.

For the implementation of the second tranche, more than P782 million was dedicated to the purchase of 138 units of excavators of various models, 28 units of dump trucks, and 17 units of truck-tractors with trailer. Meanwhile, the third and final

tranche will entail the procurement of various types of heavy equipment with a funding of over P1.03 billion.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said effective irrigation systems can boost local agricultural production by 30 percent. The 141 units of NIA-procured excavators will also improve the country's 257 NIS and 10,144 communal irrigation, further increase productivity and profitability of local farmers nationwide.

"[The Equipment Refueling Program] reflects our continuing commitment to develop and utilize our land to the fullest—a commitment that we embrace and take very seriously. To ensure productive and efficient use of our agricultural land, it is imperative for us to continue restoring and maintaining our irrigation systems," the President said.

Taking on a whole-of-nation approach, Marcos also urged various government agencies—specifically DA, the NIA, Department of National Defense, and Department of Environment and Natural Resources—to accelerate construction of irrigation facilities and ensure continuous water supply, especially with the forecasted El Niño phenomenon by the first quarter of 2024.

"Rest assured that we will continue to explore all possibilities for the continuous distribution of water to ensure that our lands remain fertile and productive. Let us continue to unite and work together. Let us develop, modernize, and improve our agriculture sector so we can achieve a food-secure and prosperous future for all Filipinos."

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OPA, BFAR assistance boost Antique's fish production

SAN JOSE DE BUENAVISTA, Antique – The various forms of assistance provided by the Antique Office of the Provincial Agriculturist (OPA) and Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) to fisherfolk have increased marine production in the province.

Alette Gayatin, Senior Aquaculturist at the OPA, said in an interview Tuesday that the province has increased its fish production compared with last year's, owing to government interventions.

"Through the OPA, there are Lambaklad projects in the six coastal municipalities of Antique that have reported 57.53 metric tons of fish production as of October 2023," she said.

She enumerated the towns as Libertad, Pandan, Sebaste, Barbaza, Bugasong and Tibiao.

The Lambaklad project employs the "otoshi-ami" method using fishing gear and nets.

Gayatin added that although she could not ascertain the amount of assistance the BFAR has extended to the fisherfolk, but the fishing gear, boats, nets and other equipment have contributed greatly to the fish production.

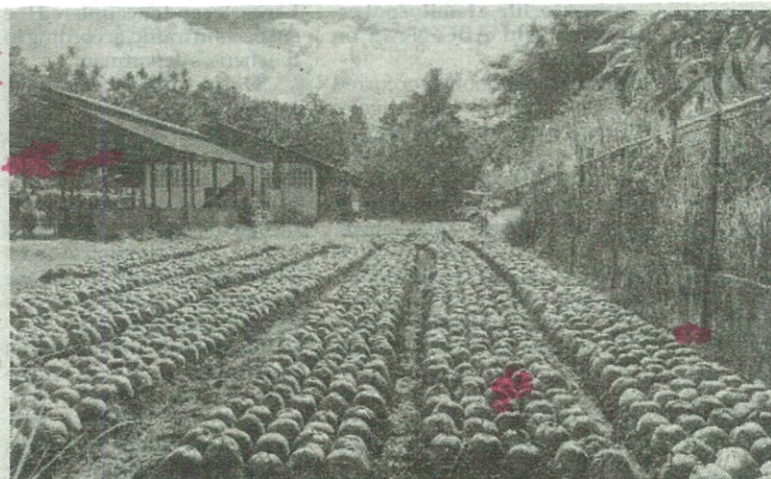
"Based on our available data, the fish production in Antique for the first quarter of 2023 is already 6,623.82 metric tons," she said.

Gayatin said they are still waiting for reports from the municipalities so they can update the data on the total fish production for the year.

Antique has a total of 18 towns – 15 are coastal municipalities and three are inland or mountainside towns.

"The fish consumption in Antique is 18-20 kilos per year per person," Gayatin noted.

PNA



Over 44K hybrid coco seedlings up for planting in Eastern Visayas

TACLOBAN CITY – The Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) is eyeing to plant 44,200 high-quality seed nuts in the next few months under its hybridization program, which is included in the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan (CFIDP).

PCA Eastern Visayas Regional Manager Joel Pilapil said in a phone interview on Tuesday that nurseries have been established in eight sites of the region to make seedlings available in all six provinces.

"These nurseries are specifically designed to ensure the distribution of high-quality coconut seedlings to coconut farmer beneficiaries under the CFIDP. This is to enhance the productivity of coconuts by providing farmers with access to superior-quality seedlings," Pilapil said.

The sites of the bigger nurseries are in Bobon, Northern Samar; Salcedo, Eastern Samar; Liloan and Bontoc towns in Southern Leyte; Sta. Fe, Leyte; and Calbayog City in Samar. Each site can house about 7,000 seed nuts.

Other locations are in Kananga, Leyte and Naval, Biliran, with about 3,000 seed nuts each.

The PCA is upbeat to plant 44,200 hybrid seedlings in the region within the first half of 2024.

"The program specifically focuses on coconut hybridization, which involves the development and promotion of hybrid coconut varieties. This program aims to enhance the productivity and resilience of coconut trees, leading to improved yields and quality of coconut products," Pilapil added.

He said that by 2040, the contribution of the hybrids to the total yield of nuts in the country will potentially increase to 28 percent. This amounts to 8.45 billion of the hybrid's nut yield out of the expected total nut production of 30 billion.

From April to June 2023, Eastern Visayas is the sixth largest coconut producing region in the country with an output of 260,114 metric tons of coconut, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).



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'Pork shortage looms in Oriental Mindoro'

A hog raisers' group has warned the public of a shortage in the supply of pork in Oriental Mindoro due to the outbreak of African swine fever (ASF) in the province.

In a radio interview, Mindoro Free Range Association president John Ong said only five towns in Oriental Mindoro have remained under the green zone or ASF-free. These are Naujan, Baco, Puerto Galera, Gloria and Victoria.

"It is possible that we cannot supply even the island of Mindoro. The supply of pork in the five municipalities is limited," Ong said.

He said many hog raisers were forced to sell their hogs at low prices due to the fear of ASF.

"The supply of pork in Mindoro has dwindled. We expect that by end of January to March 2024, there will be scarcity in supply as many hog raisers sold their breeder pig and those weighing 20 kilos and up," Ong said.

He said ASF in the province was first detected in Roxas town.

"Farmers are afraid that their hogs will be affected (by ASF). We used to transport at least 80,000 a month... Now, traders are having difficulty looking for pigs," Ong said.

He said traders now buy hogs at P100 per kilo compared to the previous P4,000 to P4,500 per head.

A kilo of pork in Oriental Mindoro could reach P400 per kilo by next year, Ong said.

He said it would take up to two years before hog farmers could raise pigs again.

"By next year, we will have no supply in Mindoro as we need to wait for one year to two years before the recovery," Ong said.

- Bella Cariaso



■ The Jollibee Group Foundation Inc. has partnered with Mariano Marcos State University to empower smallholder farmers and foster sustainable agro-enterprises. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Jollibee, MMSU forge program for farmers

BY LEANDER C. DOMINGO

THE Jollibee Group Foundation Inc. (JGF) has partnered with the Mariano Marcos State University (MMSU) for a program to train farmers in entrepreneurship.

The partnership was formalized at the MMSU Center for Flexible Learning on Monday, December 18, with the signing of a memorandum of agreement (MoA) between MMSU President Shirley Agrupis and JGF President Ma. Gisela Tiongson.

Other MoA signatories were Nathaniel Alibuyog, MMSU vice president for research, development and innovation; and Arianne Aldeza, the program manager.

Agrupis said that the initiative that the program primarily focuses on enhancing the capacity of local implementing partners (LIPs) "to support farmer groups through an agro-enterprise clustering approach."

She explained that the agro-enterprise clustering approach emphasizes good agricultural practices, agricultural technology and related expertise.

"Farmer groups will receive

direct coaching to position themselves as preferred suppliers for institutional markets such as Jollibee Foods Corp.," Agrupis added.

Crisdeniele Clemente of the MMSU Strategic Communication Office said the university, being one of the LIPs, will follow a set of key responsibilities.

Clemente said these include the co-implementation of various activities for the program and the establishment of an Onion Demonstration Farm, or ODE, at the MMSU Main Campus in Batac City through the university's research and extension directorates.

He said this aims to showcase various onion varieties and determine the most suitable for both

lowland and upland ecosystems.

Meanwhile, Agrupis expressed her gratitude to JGF for partnering with MMSU.

"We are honored for the trust and confidence of Jollibee, one of the most trusted brands in the Philippines," she said.

Expressing confidence that the collaboration will bear impactful results, Tiongson also thanked MMSU for joining JGF in its goal to empower farmers.

JGF also has other programs to empower farmers who are tapped to supply the raw material needs of Jollibee Foods Corp., the leading quick-service restaurant chain the Philippines with branches in parts of the globe.



COP28 is a call for global action

THE 28th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, or COP28, served as a wake-up for all nations to do their share in building a resilient and sustainable global food system amid challenges from climate change.

I can even call COP28 a call for global action to avert the deterioration or destruction of our food production system amid the scourge of extreme weather changes.

Hosted by the government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from November 30 to January 12, COP28 also highlighted the need to shift to new paradigms in food production, including regenerative agriculture.

At the end of the conference, 198 parties including heads of states united behind the UAE Consensus that outlines, among many others, the measures and actions that we must take to create climate-resilient food systems to ensure food security over the long term for a growing global population.

Specifically, the parties made a declaration "to work collaboratively and expeditiously to pursue the following objective," which are:

- Scale up the adaptation of activities and responses to reduce the vulnerability of farmers, fisherfolk and food producers to the impacts of climate change or extreme weather conditions.

- Promote food security and nutrition by increasing efforts to support vulnerable groups through social protection systems and safety nets, among many others.

- Support workers in agriculture and food systems, including women and youth, whose livelihoods are threatened by climate change.

- Strengthen water management in agriculture and food systems.

- Adopt complementary measures such as reducing food wastage and promoting sustainable aquatic blue foods, among many others,



MOVING FORWARD

WILLIAM D. DAR

Specific actions

In scaling-up activities to protect food producers from the impacts of climate change, there are already ongoing efforts in the Philippines to provide financial and technical support to food producers to make them resilient amid extreme weather changes.

However, more that needs to be done in this area.

Specifically, more must be undertaken in also conserving and protecting our environment, including soil and water resources. And this is where the paradigm shift to regenerative agriculture must be made, as the current or traditional system of growing food has done more harm to the environment.

Hence, food producers need to be trained and capacitated to shift to adopt regenerative agriculture practices. Also, their communities or areas are provided with infrastructure like farm-to-market roads and irrigation, and early weather warning systems to make the food producers even more resilient to extreme weather changes.

I also back the declaration that

promoting food security and nutrition should include programs targeting vulnerable groups like Indigenous peoples, small food producers, senior citizens, persons with disabilities, among others. Also, these groups of people are provided with social protection systems and safety nets, including school feeding projects for their children.

Furthermore, the workers in agriculture and food production, including women and the youth, are assisted, so they can have decent work and diversified incomes. The latter is very important as extreme weather events

can wipe out the incomes of food producers who do not have any other sources of livelihood.

Now, let me discuss strengthening the integrated management of water in food systems that I believe is of great urgency not only in the Philippines but globally. First, let me state that water is no longer a finite resource, and we all must consciously strive to optimize its utilization in growing food. This can be done by adopting technologies that optimize water utilization like drip irrigation or the alternate wetting-drying method in cultivating rice.

Regenerative agriculture also provides the system to rejuvenate sources of water like rehabilitating watershed areas and recharging aquifers.

And lastly, after successfully making food production systems resilient to climate change, we must also put in place complementary measures such as restoring and reviving the natural ecosystem, enhancing soil health, maintaining biodiversity, reducing food wastage and promoting sustainable aquatic blue foods.

Moving forward

The participants of COP28 have set 2030 as the year to attain all the five objectives and this needs concerted action.

Hence, I believe it is necessary for all countries to convene conferences and workshops at the national and local levels to realize the goals and objectives set forth by COP28 for 2030.

More importantly, these conferences and workshops must gather not only the farmers, fisherfolk or food producers but also policymakers, bureaucrats, the business community, members of the academe, among others. I say this because we must involve as many sectors and actors to ensure that the global community by 2030 has made significant strides in establishing a food production system that is resilient to climate change, not destructive to ecosystems and biodiversity, and benefiting the producers themselves and their communities.

And while science and technology will have a big role in attaining those goals, let me state what will count more is humanity uniting as one to build a resilient and sustainable global food system.

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PRUDENT DEBT TACK: PBBM'S VOW AS HE SIGNS 2024 BUDGET

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA
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PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. on Wednesday assured the nation his administration will implement sound "fiscal stewardship" in the spending of the over P5.768-trillion 2024 national budget.

The chief executive made the commitment as he signed Republic Act (RA) No. 11975 or An Act

Appropriating Funds for the operations of the government of the Republic of the Philippines from January 1 to December 31 2024 in Malacañang.

He noted part of the said good spending practice is for the government not to engage in "reckless borrowing."

"Good fiscal stewardship imposes upon us discipline not to be

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PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. shows the 2024 General Appropriations Act (GAA), which contains the P5.768 trillion national budget, after signing it in a ceremony at Malacañang Palace in Manila on Wednesday, December 20, 2023. Cheering him on are (from left) Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin, Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri, Speaker Martin Romualdez, and Budget Secretary Amenah Pangandaman.

REY BANIQUET/NIB

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led into the temptation of bloating what we owe," Marcos said.

"Good government dictates upon us the duty to spend the appropriations we have cobbled together for the correct purposes, the right way, on time, and on budget," he added.

No direct veto

IN an interview with reporters in Malacañang, Budget Secretary Amenah F. Pangandaman said the President did not make any direct veto in the provisions of RA 11975.

She disclosed the chief executive merely gave conditional and general observations in his veto message for the 2024 GAA.

"Usually there are general provisions indicated there subject to implementing rules and regulation or guidelines to be issued by their respective departments so those were cleared in the veto message," Pangandaman said.

She noted the message also included the President's reiteration of existing laws in the veto he made.

Based on DBM's initial browsing of the 2024 GAA, Pangandaman said they found its provisions consistent with the priority programs of the Marcos administration.

Battle plan

MARCOS reminded the concerned government agencies not to underspend or overspend so public funds will be well-spent and benefit every Filipino.

"Implementation delay and illegal deviations inflict the same havoc of denying the people of the progress and development that they deserve," Marcos said.

"Honor the taxpayers who make the budget possible and in doing so we will bring closer to the brighter tomorrow that we aspire—for Bagong Pilipinas that we all envi-

sion for our people," he added.

The President made the reminder after government underspending during the second quarter of the year dragged down the country's economic growth.

Currently, Pangandaman said the government has released almost 98 percent of its P5.268 trillion budget this year. Of which, about 80 percent were already disbursed due to the catch-up plan of the concerned government agencies.

The 2024 GAA, the President said, will serve as the government's "battle plan" in fighting poverty and illiteracy, in producing food and ending hunger, in securing the country's border, keeping the people healthy, creating jobs, and funding livelihoods.

"It is wrong to say that the budget merely pays for the overhead of the bureaucracy, it is more than that. It funds the elimination of problems that we as a nation must overcome," Marcos said.

Social protection

HOUSE Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez and Camarines Sur Rep. Luis Raymund "L-Ray" Villafuerte lauded the swift passage of the 2024 GAA, since it ensures the government will have the resources for its social protection programs for poor, agricultural programs, and maritime security.

"With this pro-poor, pro-growth national budget plan for next year, the President will get closer to his vision of a prosperous and peaceful Philippines where nobody is left behind," Villafuerte said.

The National Unity Party (NUP) president pointed out among the salient provisions of the 2024 GAA is that it doubled the funding for the pension program for 4.1 million indigent elderly Filipinos to P49.8 billion.

It also includes funding for the Department of Social Welfare

and Development's Ayuda sa Kapos sa Kita Program (AKAP) that provides P5,000 for every "near poor" target-beneficiary earning P23,000 or less per month.

Romualdez said AKAP is part of an almost P500-billion social amelioration program for at least 12 million poor and low-income families.

For agriculture, Villafuerte said the national budget next year provides a P10-billion support program for farmers in the form of production inputs like high-yield seeds and fertilizers and P60 billion for irrigation projects.

Security funds

THE lawmaker also noted that the final version of RA 11975 removed P1.237 billion-worth of confidential and intelligence funds (CIF) from "civilian agencies not actually dealing with intelligence work and law enforcement."

He said the concerned CIF were realigned to security- or defense-related offices in need of such resources.

Romualdez said P1.5 billion of the GAA will be used for the expansion and development of the airport in Pag-asa Island and the construction of a shelter port in Lawak, the island closest to Ayungin Shoal.

The initiative, he said, is part of the government's efforts to secure the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

He said Congress will also provide the needed budget for the defense of the West Philippine Sea, from Scarborough Shoal or Bajo de Masinloc off Zambales and Pangasinan in the north to Ayungin Shoal in Palawan in the south.

"These areas are inside our 200-mile exclusive economic zone. They belong to no one but us. Again, we are one with President Marcos, our armed forces and our Coast Guard in protecting and defending what is ours," Romualdez said.

Malaya Business Insight

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Soybeans turn lower

CHICAGO- Chicago soybean futures turned lower on Tuesday, as weather forecasts called for Brazil's dry crop belts getting some much-needed rainfall in the coming days.

Kansas City hard red winter wheat futures rose on a technical bounce, as did Chicago wheat futures, traders said, even as Egypt's purchase of Russian wheat underscored Russia's sizeable and lower priced supplies.

Corn futures dipped to a nearly three-week low, pressured in part by crude oil prices extending gains

on Red Sea security risks.

The most active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) settled down 14-1/2 cents at \$13.12-1/2 a bushel.

The contract touched a one-week high, extending Monday's gains, as Chicago futures rose on crude oil prices and news that Argentina plans to raise export taxes on soymeal and soyoil.

Gains were capped by forecasts showing increased chances of showers in dry parts of central and northern Brazil in the week ahead. - *Reuters*



PHL, other states pledge funds to replenish Ifad resources

THE Philippines and 47 other member states have pledged \$1.076 billion to replenish the core resources of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (Ifad).

Manila has committed to contribute \$1 million to Ifad's fund. Ifad said the pledges of member states will put the organization on track to "positively impact the lives of millions of rural people across the globe."

"Many of the pledges were made during a fourth replenishment session hosted in Paris over the last two days by Angola and France," Ifad said in a statement it released last December 15.

Ifad said 10 countries have increased by more than 50 percent from their previous contribution, and 31 countries have committed to their highest contribution ever, marking a record level of financing achieved for its 2025-2027 program of work.

"This is a clear sign of the confidence member states have in Ifad, and the importance they place on our ability to deliver results

and impact through targeted investments that transform agriculture, rural economies and food systems," said Alvaro Lario, president of Ifad, following the pledging session in Paris.

"They understand that investing in rural people and small-scale producers, who produce one third of the world's food and up to 70 percent of the food in low and middle-income countries, is the only path to a food secure future."

Ifad launched its 13th replenishment in February 2023, calling for increased investments in small-scale farmers and rural people across developing countries.

Its resources are replenished every three years by member states. The consultation culminated in a pledging session in Paris. Fundraising will then continue during 2024.

Typically, over 100 countries contribute to Ifad's replenishments, making it the most widely supported of all the major international financial institution replenishments.

"I am humbled by the positive momentum from

today's session and confident that Ifad's ambitious call to mobilize \$2 billion in new funding to support a \$10-billion program of work and impacting over 100 million rural people will be achieved in the coming months," said Lario.

Ifad's member states have demonstrated their record-breaking support and Ifad's pivotal role in revitalizing the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals through investing in rural people.

"We rely on Ifad to ensure the resilience we seek to build, taking into account climate change and all other factors that hinder our development," said Carmen do Sacramento Neto, Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources, Angola, at the opening of the session.

"There has been an improvement in the living conditions of rural and fishing populations where the Ifad project [was implemented] and it has had a significant impact. We announce that Angola will maintain its contribution and increase it in the coming years as a clear sign of our

commitment."

"Developing countries don't need external support, but agricultural and food independence. This is where Ifad must play a key role in reversing the trend. Ifad is a decisive player. It enables the development of the most vulnerable countries, and above all it supports what is at the heart of our ambition: structural transformations in agriculture," said Bruno Le Maire, Minister of Economy, Finance and Industrial and Digital Sovereignty, France, at the high-level session.

Collaborating with member states, Ifad invests in rural development and across food systems to help small-scale farmers produce more food and in greater variety, access markets, apply new technologies and adapt to climate change.

"Ifad ensures that member state contributions reach those who need it the most, with 45 percent in total concessional financing going to low-income countries and at least 30 percent of core resources dedicated to fragile situations."

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Brazil pulls ahead of US as biggest supplier of corn to China

BRAZIL has overtaken the United States as the leading shipper of corn to China, just a year after the world's top importer gave the go-ahead for supplies from the South American country.

Cargoes from Brazil amounted to 8.79 million tons in the 11 months through November, or 40 percent of the overall total of 22.18 million tons, according to customs data. US shipments came in at 6.50 million tons, almost 30 percent of the total, and down by more than half from a year earlier.

Once dependent on the US and Ukraine, China sought to diversify suppliers as purchases surged, a move that coincided with a record crop in Brazil. Chinese imports have exceeded 20 million tons for three straight years as the country looked to replenish stockpiles, while satisfying demand from the livestock feed and processing industries.

"Brazil had a bumper harvest

and their corn was cheap," said Cherry Zhang, an analyst with Shanghai JC Intelligence Co. "The countries also have friendly relations." Traders booked a large amount of the grain from the country earlier this year and now those cargoes are arriving, she said. Overall corn imports in November were the highest on record in data going back to 2005.

Beijing signed a deal with Brazil last year to buy the country's corn, with the first shipment arriving in January. Imports from Brazil in December are expected to total at least 1.5 million tons, and they are likely to stay high in the new year, according to Shanghai JC estimates.

Lower corn prices in Chicago and logistical issues restricting Brazilian exports could start to push traders back to US supplies, traders and analysts said.

Whichever origin is more attractive, suppliers will have to grapple with a weak domestic

market. Corn futures on the Dalian Commodity Exchange are down 16 percent in 2023, and at their lowest level in more than three years.

"Pessimism is pervading the market," China brokerage Holly Futures said in a note. "Farmers face a lot of pressure selling their grain, while downstream traders are reluctant to build stockpiles."

Even though China has an enormous appetite for the grain, the main consumers—livestock farmers and processors—are struggling to make profit, casting a shadow over the strength of demand going forward.

Critical minerals

AUSTRALIA wants to compete with China in producing and refining resources vital to the next phase of high-tech manufacturing around the world, according to Minister Madeleine King, backing the country's bid to build its critical minerals capability.

When asked about the possibility of greater Chinese investment in the sector, Resources Minister King said while Australia was receptive to proposals, the government sought to build up the domestic industry.

"The reason we want to make sure that we hold more critical minerals capabilities here, in refining, in processing, and further down the line, is to compete with China," King said in a phone interview on Tuesday. "That's not a bad thing."

Since coming to power in May 2022, Australia's center-left Labor government has ramped up investment in minerals including lithium, cobalt and titanium, which are vital for global green energy infrastructure and the defense manufacturing.

King's remarks come days after Australia expanded its list of resources deemed crucial to its energy transition and national security needs. Australia has some

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A FARMER picks corn during a harvest at a farm in Correntina, Bahia state, Brazil, on Monday, September 20, 2021. DADO GALDIERI/BLOOMBERG

of the world's largest reserves of the critical resources, sparking interest from nations keen to diversify their supply chains given China's substantial head start in processing.

In recent months, Australia has boosted cooperation with countries including the US on critical minerals. However as relations between Beijing and Canberra warmed, China has pushed for greater access for its investors, including in the mining sector.

Ambassador Xiao Qian said in October he wanted to see a more hospitable environment for Chinese investors while top diplomat Liu Jianchao warned during a November visit that his country's

firms didn't see "a clear future" for investment.

About half of the government's A\$4 billion (\$2.6 billion) financing facility to build up the critical minerals capacity has already been spent, and there may be a need for further state funding, King said.

The department was looking into strategic critical minerals hubs across Australia to concentrate mining and refining in specific areas, where they could share infrastructure assets, she said.

The minister said the expense of individual companies constructing roads and rail infrastructure to service their operations could dramatically push up the cost of projects. *Bloomberg News*