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DA usec retiring from public service

By **BELLA CARIASO**

Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban has opted to retire from government service, more than a year after he returned to the Department of Agriculture (DA) and more than a month after President Marcos appointed Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. as secretary of agriculture.

Panganiban took his oath on Aug. 12, 2022 and will remain in the DA until the end of this month.



Panganiban

He had served as DA secretary during the presidencies of Joseph Estrada and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

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DA From Page 1

Laurel gave special recognition to Panganiban – who led 18 retirees during the 2023 Pasasalamat Awarding Ceremony at the Bureau of Soils and Water Management Convention Hall – for serving the department for 45 years.

“He has since served our nation with singular distinction, intelligence and honor. He is recognized throughout Southeast Asia for his outstanding professionalism and achievements both in agriculture and in public administration,” Laurel said.

Panganiban chose to retire amid the ongoing reorganiza-

tion at the DA.

Laurel earlier appointed Genevieve Velicaria-Guevarra as head of DA Consumer Affairs, previously occupied by former DA assistant secretary Kristine Evangelista.

He also signed Special Order 1360 designating Alvin John Balagbag as head executive assistant and chief of staff, replacing assistant secretary Rex Estoperez.

Laurel also issued Special Order 1369 appointing Roger Navarro as officer-in-charge of the Office of Undersecretary for Operations.

Navarro previously served as special assistant to National Food Authority Administrator Roderico Bioco.



Enough pork supply through holidays – hog farmers

By **BELLA CARIASO**

There is enough pork supply in the country until the end of the holiday season, the National Federation of Hog Farmers Inc. (NFHFI) assured the public on Thursday.

In a radio interview, NFHFI president Chester Warren Tan said there is no reason for the retail price of pork to increase.

"Our supply is enough this December. As a matter of fact, the demand is still low as the

purchasing power of the consumers is also down. They are trying not to spend. As a result, the supply is high compared to the demand so that supply (of pork) will not be a problem this year," Tan said.

He said that despite the lower farmgate prices – ranging from P180 to P190 per kilo – the retail price of pork remains high at P350 to P380 per kilo.

Tan likewise noted that while there is ample supply of locally

produced pork, the Department of Agriculture (DA) continues to allow the flooding of imported meat products.

He said that local hog raisers are more equipped in addressing the outbreak of African swine fever (ASF).

"Unlike three years ago, our fellow hog raisers were able to manage (the ASF outbreak). They know how to handle unlike before when almost all the pigs were wiped out. The strain is more manageable,"

Tan added.

At the same time, he criticized the decision of the government to extend the lower tariff on pork, rice and corn.

"The morale of the hog raisers is low because of this. What we are saying is for the last two years after the lowering of tariff, we did not see the retail price of (imported pork) to go down to P250 (per kilo). Even at the grocery, you cannot buy P300 (per kilo), they only follow the price of local

(pork)," Tan said.

Tan added that lower tariff on imported agriculture products also resulted in the P4 billion revenue losses to the government.

"It was not beneficial to the government and the consumers," he said.

Based on monitoring of the DA in Metro Manila markets, the retail price of pork ham ranged between P265 and P360 per kilo and pork *liempo*, between P295 and P400 per kilo.

"Honestly, we don't feel that we are being favored compared to the importers. For the past two years, when the live weight reached as high as P240 (per kilo) and the retail price reached P450 (per kilo) during the last administration, we tried to maintain our farmgate price below P200. The problem is the (the government) did not return the tariff. We may be forced to increase as we don't see support from the government," Tan said.



DA maps out irrigation strategies for El Niño

By DANESSA RIVERA

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has issued irrigation directives to finalize strategies for the El Niño phenomenon, which is expected to intensify by February to April next year.

The agency said officials in Regions 1, 2, 3 and the Cordillera Administrative Region met yesterday to finalize strategies to ensure that food production would not greatly suffer with the ongoing El Niño.

During the meeting, DA Undersecretary for rice industry development Leocadio Sebastian asked the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) in these regions to program the release of water, deploy water pumps directly to farmers and propagate to clustered irrigators associations the alternate wet and dry system to ensure that water supply reaches as

many farmers as possible and to prevent palay from being soaked.

Sebastian said water utilization must be done prudently not only to stretch supply but also in keeping with carbon reduction efforts that are being practiced globally.

He also advised regional field office (RFO) heads and NIA officers to request a budget for cloud seeding.

Sebastian sought closer convergence, coordination and cooperation among the RFOs, NIA, the Philippine Rice Research Institute and other DA agencies and to work closely with private sector suppliers of input and technology to ensure faster modernization of the sector.

He also asked RFOs to prioritize their support to clustered irrigators associations for the dry season crop.

—With Bella Cariasio



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Bataan farmers get free fertilizers

SAMAL, Bataan: The Department of Agriculture (DA) distributed 600 bags of free inorganic fertilizers to rice farmers here on Thursday, December 21.

Agriculture technician Rico Mendoza of the municipal agriculture office said they have also scheduled

distribution of 1,000 bags more on December 27.

Mendoza said the fertilizer distribution is part of the DA's Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Program where farmers also receive free palay (unmilled rice) seeds.

A farmer who is tilling at least one-half hectare of rice land and has registered under the DA program is entitled to a bag of rice seeds and 5 kilos of fertilizers. Mendoza said all farmers in Samal will be included in the program.

ERNIE ESCONDE



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Rice stock estimate questioned

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

THE Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) is questioning the Agriculture department's forecast of substantially higher ending rice stocks for 2023, noting that domestic output growth would be marginal and that imports had dropped.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa last week said that the national rice stock inventory would be enough for 85 to 90 days or about 3.3 million metric tons (MT) by end-December.

"This is 78 percent higher than the ending inventory in 2022," FFF national manager Raul Mon-

temayor said.

"How could we end up with more rice at the end of 2023 when production is estimated to be only slightly higher while imports declined significantly due to high international prices?"

Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) data placed the 2022

ending inventory of rice at 1.85 million MT.

Montemayor said the government had been wrong before with regard to rice stocks, noting that in 2021 the PSA had reported a January 1 inventory of 2.332 million MT.

Output the previous year, however, was 13 million MT and imports totaled some 3 million MT, bringing total supply to about 18.4 million.

As of end-2021, the PSA then reported that the country had 1.86 million MT of rice left, which meant that around 16.5 million MT was consumed.

"After deducting the quantity

utilized for seeds, animal feeds, industrial purposes and allowance for wastage, we can conclude that around 14.9 million tons were consumed as food," Montemayor said.

"This outcome should have immediately raised eyebrows. The derived food usage of 14.9 million tons meant that each Filipino ate an average of 135 kilos of rice in 2021, significantly more than the per capita consumption figure used by the DA (Department of Agriculture) of 119 kilos," he added.

Montemayor said the discrepancy was never explained.

He added that the rice crisis experienced in August and September

this year possibly arose from the "overestimation of local production, which led to a distorted picture of actual rice supply in the market."

"The data discrepancies will continue to haunt us until we firm up our figures and improve our data collection system."

In a related development, the PSA on Tuesday said that palay (unmilled rice) production in the fourth quarter was expected to increase by 1.3 percent year on year.

Based on the standing crop as of November 1, October-December palay output could hit 7.32 million MT, higher than 7.22 million MT actually produced a year earlier.

The updated estimate, however, is 0.5 percent lower than the forecast of 7.35 million MT as of October 1.

The rice harvest area, meanwhile, is likely to fall by 1.5 percent to 1.75 million hectares (ha) from 1.78 million ha, but yields could improve to 4.17 MT per ha from 4.06 MT/ha.

About 1.01 million ha have been harvested as of November 1, equivalent to 57.8 percent of harvest area and output of 4.35 million MT.

Of the remaining 739,620 ha, 60.1 percent of the expected crop is at the maturing stage, 32.1 percent in the reproductive stage and 7.9 percent at the vegetative stage.



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The Manila Times®

Date: DEC 22, 2022 Page: 81

Anatomy of the rice price hike

SOARING rice prices can be attributed to three related events that are products of flawed policy decisions made by politicians and agriculture officials.

First was a series of rice warehouse raids to prove the point of ill-advised politicians that hoarding was the main culprit behind the rice price hike. While it did provide for some high-profile photo opportunities, it never did stabilize rice prices, much more lead to their decline.

Second was the imposition of a rice price cap. Reputable policy analysts have already written how ineffective this was. Regular and well-milled rice that were placed under the price ceiling gradually vanished. Retailers sold special and premium rice that were not covered and were more expensive. Thus, rice inflation continued its upward trend.

The price ceiling also proved to be an expensive policy instrument as the government had to extend subsidies to rice retailers to the tune of P2 billion. This was meant to soften retailer losses from selling the grain at par with procurement plus logistics costs.

Third was the rejection of a proposal to temporarily reduce the rice tariff to 10 percent from 35 percent by groups who barely understood their economics. The main reason for the proposal was that interna-



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tional rice prices had become exorbitant — adding logistics costs and the tariff would make rice imports even more expensive.

Local rice production is not enough to meet local demand. The country imports an average of 7 to 17 percent of our total rice requirement depending on whether or not nature (e.g., typhoons, drought, pests, etc.) has adversely affected our rice-producing areas. Thus, rice importation is an indispensable tool in meeting the increasing rice requirements of our growing population.

In the past, imports stabilized and even depressed prices because these were cheaper than locally produced rice. But when India decided to ban exports of non-basmati rice, global prices of the grain soared. India accounts for around 40 percent of total world rice exports.

It is in this context of rising global rice prices that the temporary rice tariff reduction was proposed. Unfortunately, lobby groups like the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) and the Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag) supported by a

plethora of leftist organizations, took to the streets to noisily protest the measure, even vilifying the personalities behind it including this author.

In the meantime, so-called policy analysts at the Department of Agriculture supported the populist stance.

During a meeting with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., they noted that there was no need for the tariff cut because it would lessen revenues that could be used as additional “ayuda” (financial aid) for farmers. They also predicted that global rice prices would soon decline.

The latter prediction is tantamount to a “shooting from the hip” argument as it did not take into consideration that Asia’s rice-producing countries would experience a serious El Niño problem and that the Indian election would not take place till May 2024. Harvard professor Peter Timmer noted in an essay that the Indian government would opt to maintain stability of local rice prices, which its rice export ban aimed to achieve, and hence, most likely continue the policy even after the May election.

The raids on selected rice warehouses had the effect of sowing fear among prospective rice importers as arrivals of sizable volumes might be construed as an act of hoarding and hence, subject the imports to

confiscation. The definition of what constitutes “hoarding” and “healthy inventory” is unclear.

For instance, I was informed by a top executive of an agribusiness firm engaged in fruit production and processing that they normally maintain a sugar inventory of about two months. This is to ensure continued operations and deliveries to buyers and customers.

Does holding two months’ supply of sugar constitute hoarding? Obviously, it does not in the case cited. But what about rice? Will a two-month inventory be considered hoarding given that it takes around 60 days to order, ship, inspect and deliver stocks to the warehouse?

Besides the fear of being accused as hoarders, traders also face rising global rice prices. The Philippines imports almost 90 percent of its rice from Vietnam, whose prices have breached \$600 per metric ton. Thai prices, meanwhile, are traditionally higher than Vietnam’s.

Adding logistics costs and a tariff of 35 percent, rice imports have become more expensive than locally produced rice. Traders will certainly lose money if they import more. Unfortunately, we need the imports because, as noted earlier, we are not rice self-sufficient.

The effect of the more expensive

rice imports is to pull up the price of local rice. Traders scramble for cheaper local rice, in the process pushing up prices. This is the main reason why palay (unmilled rice) farmgate prices have reached as high as P30 per kilo in some areas of the country.

It is indeed a supreme irony that organizations like the FFF and Sinag are the ones warning the public to brace for higher rice prices. They are mainly to be blamed for the skyrocketing prices because they successfully blocked the proposal to temporarily reduce the rice tariff. They do not believe in the logic of economics, only populist ideas that benefit their parochial sectoral interests. They should be honest enough to admit that they imposed unnecessary suffering on millions of Filipino consumers, particularly the poor.

By the way, I am glad to note that the government, through the National Economic and Development Authority, has moved to extend Executive Order 10, which lowered tariffs on corn, rice, pork and chicken, to ease the suffering of Filipino consumers from rising prices of basic food commodities.

A Happy Christmas and a blessed New Year to all!

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PHL's rice imports as of mid-Dec hits 3.2 MMT

THE country's rice imports as of mid-December have breached 3.2 million metric tons (MMT) level with over 130,000 MT arriv-

ing in the first 14 days of this month, according to the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI).

SEE "PHL," A2

PHL...

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Latest BPI data showed that total rice imports as of December 14 reached 3.223 MMT, some 603,000 MT lower than the 3.826 MMT recorded full-year import volume last year.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) earlier projected that the country's total rice imports this year could settle at around 3.65 MMT, if the remaining valid import volume arrives in the country. *(Related story: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/12/14/rice-imports-to-fall-by-5-due-to-high-prices/>)*

BPI data also showed that Viet-

nam remained the country's top source of imported rice, accounting for 87 percent of the total import volume as of December 14.

The country's total rice imports from Vietnam have so far reached 2.813 MMT. It was followed by Thailand at 207,648 MT and Myanmar at 131,718 MT, based on BPI data.

Citing historical data, the DA expects about 620,000 MT of rice to enter the country this December. Latest BPI data showed that about 137,501 MT of rice has already arrived in the country from December 1 to December 14.

BPI data showed Bly Agri Venture Trading remained the top rice importer in the country with a total volume of 233,438 MT. It was followed by Davao Solar Best Corp. with a total volume of 221,598 MT and Orison Free Enterprise Inc. with a total import volume of 203,389 MT.

The data also showed that BPI approved and issued 557 sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances (SPSICs) in December for the importation of 444,270.4

MT of rice.

Under the updated rules and regulations of the Department of Agriculture, the approved rice import volume must enter the country within 30 days after the corresponding SPSICs were issued.

Agriculture officials earlier cautioned that without rice imports coming in the next few months, particularly in January and February, the country would have thin grain stocks, especially amid the anticipated impact of El Niño on domestic rice production.

"Without [rice] imports, we will have less than 39 days at the end of the first semester and 61 days at the end of March, which is very thin supply considering our archipelagic condition. We cannot spread the 61 days [stock level] evenly, so we need to import," Agriculture Undersecretary for Rice Industry Development Leocadio S. Sebastian said earlier. *(Related story: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/12/15/da-sees-domestic-milled-rice-output-decline-in-h1-2024-amid-el-nino-threat>)* Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas



Shortages in data, and not only food, plague Philippine agriculture

By RAUL MONTEMAYOR

RECENT years have seen wild swings in the supply and prices of food. For a while, onion prices jumped seven-fold. At another time, farmers were forced to dump their tomato harvests due to the lack of buyers.

Food prices have been blamed for the spike in inflation rates, with the government often caught flat-footed and left to react to crises instead of anticipating and preventing them. In many instances, this can be traced to the lack of accurate and timely data, which has led to poor program design, faulty planning, and delayed decision-making.

Our recurrent problems with rice supply and prices are a case in point.

In 2021, PSA placed the beginning (January 1) rice inventory at 2.332 million tons. If we add the domestic output of a little over 13 million tons in rice equivalent and imports of almost 3 million tons, total available supply during the year reached some 18.4 million tons.

PSA then reported that, by December 31, the country had only 1.86 million tons of rice left, which means we had used up around 16.5 million tons. After deducting the quantity utilized for seeds, animal feeds, industrial purposes, and allowance for wastage, we can conclude that around 14.9 million tons were consumed as food.

This outcome should have immediately raised eyebrows. The derived food usage of 14.9 million tons meant that each Filipino ate an average of 135 kilos of rice in 2021, significantly more than the per capita consump-

tion figure used by the Department of Agriculture (DA) of 119 kilos.

This apparent discrepancy was never explained; nor was the PSA's ending inventory figure for 2021 adjusted. It thus became the official beginning inventory for 2022, which resulted in an even more perplexing statistical anomaly during the year.

Compared to 2021, total available supply was higher in 2022 despite a slight dip in production, mainly because imports ballooned to 3.8 million tons. Yet, PSA placed the 2022 ending inventory at only 1.85 million tons, or practically the same as at the end of 2021. Where did all the excess supply go?

When asked to clarify its figures, PSA insisted that its inventory estimate was correct, give or take a small margin for errors. It added that its figures assumed that each Filipino consumed about 110 kilos of rice during the year.

If we take this as a given, then either consumption increased or production went down.

It is highly unlikely that per capita consumption increased in 2022, given the relatively high rice prices during the year. At most, total consumption would have grown by only about 1.5 percent, equal to the population growth rate, or by around

200,000 tons.

The only possible explanation therefore lies in the production estimates. Our computations show that the only way we could have ended 2022 with 1.85 million tons is if production in rice equivalent was only 9.7 million tons, and not 12.9 million tons as reported by PSA. This implies that *palay* production actually dropped by a whopping 5 million tons, or by 25 percent, in 2022. Even if we use the DA's higher per capita consumption figure of 119 kilos, *palay* production would still end up lower than the PSA estimate by 3.2 million tons.

Some industry players are not discounting this possibility. They note that imports of major fertilizer grades declined by around 30% during the year, as prices more than doubled. Farmers would presumably have drastically reduced fertilizer usage. But PSA reported a mere 1 percent drop in production and yield during the year.

If production actually fell in 2022, then we—and the government—have been working with the wrong figures all along. And it is possible that the rice crisis we experienced in August and September this year arose from this overestimation of local production—which led to a distorted picture of actual rice supply in the market.

More disturbingly, it implies that the billions we have poured into the rice industry these past few years have not significantly increased farmers' productivity and competitiveness. As a result, we have become more dependent on imports for our

basic staple, and more vulnerable to disturbances in international markets over which we have little control.

The data discrepancies will continue to haunt us until we firm up our figures and improve our data collection system. Only recently, the DA claimed that we will end 2023 with a stock level good for 90 days, or about 3.3 million tons. This is 78 percent higher than the ending inventory in 2022. How could we end up with more rice at the end of 2023 when production is estimated to be only slightly higher while imports declined significantly due to high international prices?

Information is indispensable for proper analysis, planning and decision-making. We cannot properly address our recurrent food shortages and problems if we continue to have a shortage in timely, correct and meaningful data.

Given its wide mandate, the PSA probably needs additional manpower and technical expertise to implement a dedicated agricultural data collection system. Within the DA, a system must be set up to gather and link data from different agencies and programs and to process these into meaningful and timely information for program implementors and policy makers. The private sector can contribute to this effort by providing regular feedback to check the accuracy of the data generated by the system.

Raul Montemayor is the National Manager of the Federation of Free Farmers Cooperatives, Inc. (FFFCI), a nationwide federation of agricultural cooperatives.

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DSWD, FAO join hands in fight vs hunger

IN line with the anti-hunger initiatives of the government, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the United Nations - Food and Agriculture Organization (UN-FAO) has launched the Digital Mapping System (DMS).

This innovation is designed to strengthen food security systems in the country, the DSWD said in its statement.

The DMS is an initiative

under the DSWD Enhanced Partnership Against Hunger and Poverty (EPAHP) Convergence Program that aims to strengthen the capacities of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and small-holder farmers by linking them to prospective markets such as the DSWD's Supplementary Feeding Program (SFP), and other institutional feeding programs of various agencies.

It is funded by the FAO under a Technical Cooperation Programme with the DSWD EPAHP.

Among those who signified their support to the DMS were Department of Agriculture (DA) Undersecretary for Special Concerns and for BARMM Engr. Zamzamin Ampatuan, and World Food Programme (WFP) Country Capacity Strengthening Coordinator Mr. Peter Loach.

Jester Manalastas

Avoid feeding pigs with food wastes – DA

BAGUIO CITY – The Department of Agriculture in the Cordillera Administrative Region (DA-CAR) is reminding swine raisers anew not to feed pigs with swill or food wastes from establishments, which had been observed as among the causes of African swine fever (ASF).

"Swill feeding was identified as among the sources of ASF that affected several regions in the country, not sparing the Cordillera. We appeal to the hog raisers – don't give scrap food because instead of earning from raising livestock, they might lose even their capital," said Director Jennilyn Dawayan, DA-CAR officer-in-charge, in a phone interview on Wednesday.

ASF, which affected the biggest number of swine heads in a commercial livestock farm in a town in Benguet in 2021 and 2022, was found to have emanated from swill feeding sourced from a restaurant in this city, which is also the source of scrap food fed to small backyard raisers.

"We should learn from our experience that it is better to feed the animals with standard feeds where they are assured of quality, than incur more expenses and even lose the capital in case one of their animals is found to be infected. Once one is infected, there is no choice but to cull all those located within a certain distance," Dawayan said.

Aside from swill feeding, she said buying of cheap piglets online is another factor to the spread of ASF, with buyers learning later on that the animals they



NO SWILL FEEDING. Backyard and commercial swine raisers in the Cordillera Administrative Region are asked to adopt the no swill or scrap food feeding to avoid a possible reinfection of African swine fever. Dr. Leisley Deligen, chief of the regional Department of Agriculture (DA) livestock division, reiterated anew their call to provide quality feeds to animals, do not buy cheap piglets online, and avoid bringing home meat from events to prevent ASF infestation. (Photo by Liza T. Agoot)

purchased are infected.

Dr. Leisley Deligen, chief of the DA-CAR livestock division, told the Philippine News Agency that cooperation among all hog raisers is needed to sustain the

drop in ASF cases in the region.

"We are asking for cooperation. We were able to decrease the cases in 2022 but our 2023 record shows we have an increase. Although slight, we cannot relax our rules or else, we will go back to the same situation in the past," she said.

Deligen said five ASF cases were recorded in 2019 when the region started to log incidence. The number increased to 65 in 2020, and further to 191 in 2021, that affected 88 villages in 41 municipalities and cities.

The numbers, however, dropped to 42 cases in 2022, covering 26 villages and 16 municipalities and cities.

As of December 1 this year, the DA-CAR had already monitored 49 ASF cases, this time due to online buying of pigs and the "cañao", a socio-religious ritual where chicken, pigs, or carabaos are butchered to be feasted on.

The veterinarian urged the public to be cautious, and avoid reinfection in areas already cleared or is no longer under the red category.

Record from the regional Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) shows that as of December 1, there are 29 municipalities in the region that have been downgraded from red to pink category, while 12 have been further downgraded to light green.

However, 34 municipalities remain under the red category and are continuously being monitored.

(PNA)



Bean to bar chocolate brand included in exhibit on Philippine design

The Design Center of the Philippines is hosting an exhibit called "50 Years of Philippine Design and Beyond" in the National Museum of Fine Arts. As its name says, it presents some of the country's top designs from different fields. One of them is Theo+Philo Artisan chocolates, the first bean to bar chocolate in the country.

Not only did the brand pave the way for the luxury and sustainable chocolate market, it's also known for its unique flavors that marry Davao cacao with iconic Philippine flavors such as calamansi, siling labuyo, and adobo. It's easily distinguishable because of the lush, maximalist design on its packages that reflect the richness of the chocolate inside.

I reached out to founder Philo Chua to congratulate him on the brand's inclusion in the exhibit and to pick his brain on design and how it can be used to highlight Filipino products.

How does it feel to be part of this prestigious exhibit?

"I feel honored and ecstatic for having reached another milestone for our company. While we had set out to cre-

ate great looking products, never would I have imagined that we would be included in an exhibit for 50 years of Philippine Design, which features so many great and renowned designers and artists."

What is Theo+Philo's design philosophy?

"Our design philosophy is Global Modern Filipino. While we put in touches of Pinoy influences in our designs, we want to stay away from looking like the traditional native Filipino designs that we are familiar with. We want to look forward to what Filipino designs can be instead."

Theo+Philo has always placed importance on packaging and design. Why is this so?

"I have always loved great design and packaging, which is why it was important to me that we create something that is aesthetically pleasing. We also wanted to



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create a truly Filipino product that we can take pride in globally. I think we have so many great products, but because so many people don't do the extra step to present it properly via good packaging or design, it doesn't get the proper recognition it deserves."

Why is package design important?

"The first thing we notice about any product is how it looks. A well designed package attracts attention, and helps a product stand out and sell. [It] attracts the right kind of customers because the way a product is packaged sends out a lot of signals/information about what the underlying product is.

"[It] also provides utility. The way a product is packaged also informs the customer how the product is to be used and in what context. Hence, packaging can affect consumer behavior, too."

What are some steps one can take to widen one's knowledge of aesthetics and the design process?

"I think in today's interconnected world, it is easier than ever to look at what appeals to today's consumers. Beyond looking at designs online, it's also good to look at social media and see what gets a lot of engagements.

"In addition, I would encourage people to look at designs that may not exactly be in the same industry as one's own industry. We can take inspiration from other industries. For example, I may be in the food industry, but I like to look at the packaging of beauty products.

"It's also really helpful to learn about the print process and what are the available materi-

als that one can use for packaging. Through this manner, one creates their own specifications for their packaging, even sometimes innovating with using new materials that may not have been used for packaging before."

How can one incorporate Filipino elements in their product design without looking stereotypical?

"I think it's important to have an inner look first and understand one's own identity before venturing into the design process. Most of what we see are people copying other designs because they are too lazy to think about what their brand identity stands for and how it is different from another. I think having a clear identity of who and what you are is the first step.

"As for trying to incorporate Philippine elements, I think it would come out naturally if one has a strong identity. I think those Philippine elements that come out being stereotypical and generic comes when one is trying too hard and is not natural to the brand."

What's next for Theo+Philo?

"We're always looking into what the future is, and we like to experiment. We've been very fortunate to have had some brand collaborations to extend and push us in ways that we didn't imagine before, and it's something that we'd like to do more of.

"Furthermore, we're constantly thinking about the utility of our products and how we can improve it. As mentioned, packaging can affect how a product is utilized."

The exhibit runs until March 3, 2024.



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'6 regions in PH suffer from food insecurity'

AT least six regions in the Philippines have a high prevalence of food insecurity "due to the unavailability of food and/or lack of resources to obtain food," the Department of Science and Technology (DoST) said on Thursday.

Director Imelda Agdeppa of the DoST-Food and Nutrition Research Institute (FNRI) told the Bagong Pilipinas Ngayon public forum on PTV-4 that the government has been implementing programs to at least minimize the problems in the countryside.

Agdeppa said the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) has recorded the highest food insecurity prevalence at 84 percent, followed by Caraga or Region 13 at 70 percent.

Northern Mindanao (Region 10), Zamboanga Peninsula (Region 9) and Eastern Visayas (Region 8) each have a food insecurity prevalence of 69 percent.

Bicol or Region 5 is at 68 percent, according to the DoST official.

Citing the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Agdeppa said that food insecurity happens when there is limited access to safe and healthy food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life.

"The other dimension of food insecurity is when a person, for the lack of food on the table in a day, would only resort to sleeping as his way of resolving his hunger," she said.

She recalled that the agency, specifically the FNRI, conducted rolling surveys that were started in 2018 but were suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic and they pushed through again in 2021.

"From these surveys, we have found out that those mentioned regions have been suffering with high prevalence of food insecurity that ranges from moderate to severe conditions," Agdeppa said.

She said the DoST-FNRI has been creating ways to make nutritious products like squash, carrots and potatoes accessible to many Filipinos, especially in the remote regions.

Agdeppa cited the Department of Education (DepEd) and Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) under

Vice President Sara Duterte and Secretary Rexlon "Rex" Gatchalian, respectively, who have partnered in making nutritious food accessible, especially to the poorest of the poor through supplementary feeding programs.

"We also have this iron-fortified rice that comes from what we call broken rice, which is being used as animal feed. We now have a technology that converts the broken rice into iron-fortified flour that we mix with the regular rice to make it iron-fortified rice," she said.

The DoST official cited Gatchalian, in particular, for consulting with them about the kind of food that his agency is supposed to give to the people under DSWD's programs, especially in relief operations.

ARLIE O. CALALO



PHL expected to import more rice due to El Niño

By Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocsen Reporter

THE EL NIÑO weather event's impact on agriculture production in the Philippines could lead to a surge in rice imports to account for the supply shortfall, the World Bank said.

"El Niño is expected to dampen farm production and increase the need for rice imports," the multilateral lender said in its latest Food Security Update.

A strong El Niño is expected to continue until January next year and is seen to persist until May 2014, according to the latest advisory by the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA).

The weather event increases the likelihood of below-normal rainfall conditions, which could

bring dry spells and droughts in some areas of the country.

By the end of May 2014, 65 provinces are projected to experience a drought while six will face a dry spell.

The Philippines, one of the world's biggest rice importers, will likely grapple with soaring prices of the staple.

The World Bank said global sugar and rice prices have increased by double-digits due to the El Niño and its impact on production and trade.

"El Niño has led to dry conditions in South and Southeast Asia, affecting sugar production in India and Thailand, the two largest exporters after Brazil," it added.

Federation of Free Farmers Chairman Raul Q. Montemayor said that the El Niño will more likely affect the wet season harvest in the Philippines, which normally begins in the middle of the year.

El Niño, S1/3

*El Niño,
from S1/1*

"It could affect plantings for the next (wet season) crop which usually starts in May or June. There will be less rainfall in rain-fed areas while irrigation dams may not be fully replenished and filled to capacity," he said in a Viber message.

"This will result in delayed planting and/or reduced planted area. Crops may not survive if the drought lingers during the July-September lean months. The impact in terms of production will be felt when farmers harvest again in September-November," he added.

The latest crop condition assessment by PAGASA showed that most of the provinces in Luzon received "inadequate amounts of water required to support both the rice and corn crops."

Mr. Montemayor warned that securing imports may be difficult or expensive if other Southeast Asian countries like Thailand or Vietnam are also hit by the El Niño.

"Additionally, other countries that normally do not import but also want to ensure their food security through imports, such as Indonesia, will start competing with us for the available supply and this could drive up prices," he said.

Rice imports have reached 3.22 million metric tons (MT) as of Dec. 7, according to the Bureau of Plant Industry.

The US Department of Agriculture is projecting rice imports to hit 3.8 million MT this year.

To address spiraling rice prices, the government earlier placed a temporary price cap on regular and well-milled rice from September to October this year.

The government should not just rely on imports as a stopgap measure and instead must provide further support to farmers and the agriculture sector, Mr. Montemayor said.

"Helping our farmers produce as much as possible despite less rainfall is the most important step. This would involve the rehabilitation of irrigation systems, water harvesting and impounding, and installation of irrigation pumps. This could be complemented by a public campaign to save water, reduce rice wastage, and promote rice substitutes," he added.

The World Bank also noted other steps being taken by the Philippine government to ensure adequate rice supply, such as expediting rice importers' clearances.

"In addition, a law has been proposed designed to minimize food waste and promote balanced eating habits by mandating that restaurants serve smaller-portioned, half-cup rice orders," it added.



Global rice prices hit highest level in 15 years

RICE PRICES reached a fresh 15-year high on mounting concerns that increased demand and the impact of El Niño will further tighten supplies of the grain that is a staple for billions across Asia and Africa.

Thai white rice 5% broken, an Asian benchmark, climbed by 2.5% from the prior week to \$650 a ton on Wednesday, according to the Thai Rice Exporters Association. That's the highest level since October 2008.

Prices most recently rallied to that milestone in early August in the wake of sweeping export curbs from top shipper India and as dry weather threatened the Thai crop. After retreating for most of September and October, price gains quickened in November. This could keep food inflation elevated in the coming months, especially in rice-reliant countries like the Philippines.

Rice, SI/3

Rice,
from SI/1

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also concerned about accelerating food inflation before general elections next year. The cost of rice is increasing despite export restrictions, a good harvest and ample state stockpiles, according to the food ministry. The staple has risen about 12% annually in the past two years, and officials have asked millers to cut retail prices.

Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin said this week Indonesia plans to buy 2 million tons from the country by the end of next year. Local millers delayed sales after the news on hopes of higher prices, said Chookiat Ophaswongse, an honorary president of the Thai Rice Exporters Association, adding that the strong Thai currency also contributed to rising prices.

Looming supplies from Vietnam and Thailand may limit the potential for any sharp upside in the market, Mr. Chookiat said, noting Thailand has sufficient water reserves to guarantee a good second crop. High prices will also encourage farmers to expand planting, he said by phone on Thursday.

"Still, we expect the price to remain at pretty high levels early next year on lingering food security concerns and India's ban," Mr. Chookiat said.

The increase in the cost of the grain is in stark contrast to other staples — wheat and corn. The Thai white rice price is up by 36% in the past year, while wheat futures in Chicago are down 20% and heading for the first decline in seven years. Corn futures have lost about 30% this year. — **Bloomberg**



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Soybeans fall; corn up

SINGAPORE- Chicago soybean futures slid for a third consecutive session on Thursday, as rains in parts of Brazil's oilseed belt eased concerns over yield losses.

Corn ticked up, after falling in the previous session on pressure from the US government's move to close two key rail crossings into top importer Mexico, while wheat recouped some of Wednesday's deep losses.

The most-active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) fell 0.3 percent to \$13.11-1/2 a bushel, corn added 0.1 percent to \$4.70 a bushel and wheat rose 0.6 percent to \$6.13-1/2 a bushel.

Dry weather in Brazil, the world's No. 1 soybean exporter, raised

worries about output earlier this month, but rains have improved crop conditions in some regions.

Still, Brazilian farmers will reap 156.5 million metric tons of soybeans in the 2023/24 season, below an estimated 158.9 million tons recorded in the previous cycle, according to a revised crop forecast from agribusiness consultancy Celeres.

For corn, the closure of US Mexico rail crossings weighed in the market.

Dozens of major US agricultural groups on Wednesday urged the US to reopen two rail crossings on the Texas-Mexico border in an effort to restore the trade routes shuttered due to increased migrant crossings, saying they are causing steep export losses. - *Reuters*