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Isabela, Maguindanao del Sur free of bird flu

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has cleared the province of Isabela and Maguindanao del Sur of avian influenza (AI) or bird flu.

In a memorandum circular issued on December 20, DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said that 90 days have passed since the end of disinfection operations and surveillance which yielded negative bird flu results.

"Continued disease monitoring and surveillance in the 1-km (kilometer) and 7-km surveillance zones surrounding the affected farms yielded negative test results for influenza type A virus," Laurel said through the memo.

According to the DA, Isabela recorded three confirmed cases of

highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), which was confirmed through laboratory testing. The cases were detected in chicken layer, duck, gamefowl, pigeon and native chicken from the city of Cauayan and municipalities of Alicia and Gamu.

The province of Maguindanao del Sur, meanwhile, detected three bird flu cases in ducks, which was recorded from the municipality of Ampatuan.

Upon detection of the disease, the provincial government of both provinces conducted disease investigation, immediate depopulation and other measures as stated on the Avian Influenza Protection Program guidelines.

The protective measure was done in coordination with the

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Agrarian Reform and the Bureau of Animal Industry.

Last month, the Agriculture department allowed the commercial use of AI vaccines following the release of guidelines for vaccination.

The department set the guidelines for vaccine procurement and has identified priority areas through Memorandum Circular 49 in order to control the further spread of the animal disease.

DA's Senior Undersecretary Domingo Panganiban said that the outbreak of HPAI in the country has been causing significant economic impact on the poultry industry due to high mortality.

Avian types, which are eligible

and ineligible for vaccines, were also identified.

Eligible types are commercial layer chicken, commercial layer breeder, commercial broiler breeder, commercial colored/free-range breeder, commercial grandparent broiler breeder, small hold layer/native chicken, duck, gamefowl, turkey and goose.

The types ineligible for vaccination are commercial broiler chicken, small hold broiler, quail, pigeon and exotic birds.

"Vaccination does not guarantee absolute protection, thus all facilities are strongly encouraged to practice biosecurity measures to the highest level possible," the memorandum stated.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



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Red tide alert up on Biliran Island

THE Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) Eastern Visayas (Region 8) confirmed on Friday that the red tide phenomenon emerged in the coastal waters of Biliran Island after more than a year.

BFAR issued a local red tide warning after seawater samples taken in Biliran tested positive for the deadly microorganism that causes paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP).

The BFAR stated that, in addition to tidal changes, numerous factors contributed to an increase in the number of places in the region under local red tide advisories.

Currents, wind directions and the availability of nutrients and sunlight, for example, are all potential factors in this issue, according to the bureau.

The samples were transferred to the BFAR head office for extra laboratory test.

Biliran's coastal waters are the fifth in the region to be included in the local red tide alert.

BFAR earlier identified the harmful red tide in San Pedro Bay in Basey, Samar; Cancabato Bay in Tacloban City; the coastal waters of Guiuan, Eastern Sa-

mar; Irong-Irong Bay in Catbalogan City, Samar; and Matarinao Bay in General MacArthur, Quinapondan, Hernani and Salcedo in Eastern Samar.

"There is no shellfish ban in the region, per the latest shellfish bulletin. However, these areas are under local red-tide advisories. Samples collected from these bays and coastal waters are positive for pyrodinium bahamense, a toxic microorganism that causes PSP," the BFAR Region 8 said.

BFAR continued to reiterate its

message for the public to avoid catching, selling or consuming any sort of shellfish or shrimp despite not being covered by the existing shellfish bulletin.

Fish, squids, shrimp and crabs are safe to eat if they are fresh and well cleaned, and internal organs such as gills and intestines are removed before cooking.

BFAR looks into water samples on a regular basis using its regional laboratory to guarantee that shellfish collected from various bays are safe for human consumption. **MOISES CRUZ**



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DA Central Luzon plans for 2023-24 dry season

'Said planning included preparing for *El Niño*. The aim of the meeting was to discuss planting during the dry season and vulnerable areas that need protection when *El Niño* sets in.'

BY JONAS REYES

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO, PAMPANGA — A meeting was recently held by the Department of Agriculture Central Luzon for the 2023-2024 Dry Season Planting at the DA Conference Room, DMGC, Maimpis.

Said planning included preparing for *El Niño*. The aim of the meeting was to discuss planting during the dry season and vulnerable areas that need protection when *El Niño* sets in.

Participants identified vulnerable areas that will most likely be adversely

affected during the dry spell and discussed how these areas may be supported with water by the National Irrigation Administration.

Interventions implementation

Also discussed during the planning session was the implementation of interventions helping farmers such as soil ameliorants and bio-control agents, seedlings and fertilizer discount voucher.

Present during the planning session were various representatives from the agency, Philippine Rice Research Institute, Philippine

Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization, Agricultural Training Institute, Bureau of Plant Industry, Bureau of Agricultural Research, Bureau of Soils and Water Management, National Irrigation Administration, and officials from Ilocos Region, Cagayan Valley and Cordillera Administrative Region.

Also present were Undersecretary for Rice Industry Development Dr. Leocadio S. Sebastian, Regional Executive Director for Central Luzon Crispulo G. Bautista Jr., and Rice Banner Program Focal Person Dr. Lowell Rebillaco.



EDITORIAL

Still bitter over sugar

Last year the holiday cheer was dampened by the eye-watering prices of red onions, with no white onions to be had at any price. Onion memes provided comic relief from the pain of onions priced at up to P720 a kilo, due to a domestic supply crunch arising from the lack of foresight in making timely importations.

Having learned its lesson, the government has moved to prevent a repeat of the holiday onion crisis this year. What remains elevated is the retail price of sugar, despite multiple importations that have pulled down mill gate prices. Retail prices of refined white sugar have doubled from two years ago, and have resisted going down significantly despite the entry of tons of imports since the start of this year along with regular sugarcane harvests.

Good governance watchdogs have yet to address questions about the anomalous importation of 440,000 metric tons of white sugar by three lucky entities handpicked by the **Department of Agriculture**: All Asian Countertrade Inc., Edison Lee Marketing Corp. and S&D Sucden Philippines Inc. This importation was suspected to be linked to the resignation in March of David John Thaddeus Alba as head of the Sugar

Regulatory Administration, although he cited health reasons.

The imported sugar began arriving on Feb. 9, even before a sugar order was issued by the SRA. The DA had attributed the rushed arrival of the imports to the need to bring down retail prices to P80 to P84 a kilo from a high of P110 as of March. This price range was still higher than the prevailing retail price of P55 a kilo in January 2022.

High sugar prices fueled food inflation, which in turn accounted for much of the hefty uptick in the inflation rate starting late last year. Today, despite numerous importations, a retail price of P80 a kilo for white sugar remains an aspiration. Meanwhile, local sugarcane farmers and millers are complaining about falling mill gate prices amid the continuing importations, which have failed to pull down retail prices from their onerous levels.

The government has promised to look into the lament of domestic producers, and to find out why sugar retail prices refuse to go down. Such promises have been made before. Consumers can only hope that this promise will not go the way of many New Year's resolutions, which are soon broken and forgotten.



Gov't developing national standard for coconet coir fiber

By **DANESSA RIVERA**

The **Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA)** is developing the national standard for coconet coir fiber to boost local and international trade of the product.

The agency is seeking comments from stakeholders on the draft Philippine National Standard (PNS) for coconet from Dec. 4 this year to Feb. 2, 2024.

It has also tentatively scheduled a public consultation on Jan. 16, 2024 to gather more comments.

The PCA said the standards would lay down specifications on the minimum requirements and grading quality of coconet for local consumption and international trade.

"This standard specifies the mini-

mum requirements and establishes a system for good quality coconet intended for coconet bio-engineering solutions for soil erosion, irrigation, flood control, landfill, rehabilitation of mined areas, slope protection, riverbank and mangrove stabilization," the agency said.

The PCA said the woven netting shall be made from 100 percent high strength coir twine.

In the draft, it has classified three types of coconet, based on mass per unit area at moisture content between 18 to 24 percent wet basis and on applicability.

The agency has also specified the packaging and labeling of the coconet for warehousing, storage, retail and export.

The PCA said major contents of this PNS are based on the Depart-

ment Order 142, Series of 2016: Amendment to Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) Standard Specification for Coconet Bio-Engineering Solutions and Administrative Order 01 Series of 2016: PCA-National Irrigation Administration (NIA) Coconet Standard Generic Specification for Irrigation.

The development of a coconet PNS was first conceptualized in 2017 led by the Bureau of Agriculture and Fisheries Standards (BAFS) the PCA.

In 2019, the BAFS turned over the standard development to the Bureau of Philippine Standards of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI-BPS).

However, with the recognition of PCA as a Standard Development Organization the activity was again transferred to PCA in 2021.



Agusan Sur IP group gets P8.6-M project from DA

BUTUAN CITY—The Department of Agriculture in the Caraga Region (DA-13) handed over on Thursday the P8.6 million Dairy Cattle and Milk Production Project to an indigenous people (IP) organization in the town of Sibagat, Agusan del Sur.

In a statement Friday, DA-13 identified the recipient as the Sibagat Manobo Dairy Producers Development Association in Barangay Padiay.

"The project is part of the commitment of the agency to help develop the tribal communities in the region through the

Kabuhayanat Kaunlaranng Kababayang Katutubo (4K) Program," DA-13 Regional Executive Director Ricardo Oñate Jr. said.

The group's president, Jimson Sumanda, thanked the government for the support they received through the DA's 4K program.

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Uptrend in prices of agricultural commodities slows down in Q3

By XANDER DAVE CEBALLOS

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported that the upward trend in agricultural commodity prices, including crops and fish, continued to lose momentum in the third quarter of 2023.

The PSA said in a report that the annual producer price index (PPI) for agriculture dropped to 7.9 percent from 12 percent in the second quarter this year. In the same quarter of last year, the annual growth rate was recorded at 18.8 percent.

This was the lowest price ► **9**

Uptrend in prices of agricultural commodities slows down in Q3 1◀

growth rate for agricultural products since the fourth quarter a year ago, which was at 29.7 percent.

From January to September, the growth rate of PPI for agriculture was registered at 14.5 percent.

However, its quarter-on-quarter growth moved at a slower pace during the period with a 0.1 percent decline compared to 0.9 percent in the second quarter.

The PPI for crops showed a deceleration to 12.3 percent from 18.8 percent in the previous quarter and 20.2 percent in the third quarter a year ago.

Growth rates declined in fruits (3.4 percent from 4.2 percent), crops (15.3 percent from 20.8 percent), and commercial crops (11 percent from 29.8 percent).

On the other hand, year-on-year

price increases were recorded in cereals (12.5 percent from 8.1 percent), beans and legumes (29.2 percent from 6.5 percent), condiments (142.7 percent from 91.8 percent), and leafy vegetables (101.4 percent from 11.1 percent).

Quarter-on-quarter, the growth of prices for crops increased 0.7 percent during the third quarter from 0.4 percent.

Likewise, the PPI for fisheries also slowed down to 2.1 percent in the third quarter from a two-percent annual drop.

Among the fisheries subsectors, inland municipal fisheries saw the highest annual drop in price growth at 20.7 percent while marine municipal fisheries declined further to 3.1 percent from an annual drop of 1.1 percent.

Commercial fisheries grew at a slower pace at 0.9 percent from 1.6 percent while the aquaculture subsector registered an annual increase of 1.4 percent from 1.9 percent.

On a quarter basis, the PPI for fisheries had a slower decline of 2.1 percent from nine-percent decrement.

This was due to the annual increases noted in the price growth of poultry at 1.1 percent from 1.3 percent and livestock at 3.9 percent from 7.2 percent annual decrease.

Compared to the second quarter, the PPI for livestock and poultry declined to 2.1 percent from 0.8 percent.

The PPI for both livestock and poultry, however, recorded an uptrend of 2.2 percent in the third quarter from an annual decline of 5.1 percent in the previous quarter.