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DA pushes for expanded market access for PH agri products in Japan

By GABRIELL CHRISTEL GALANG

The Department of Agriculture (DA) will push for increased market access for Philippine agricultural products to create more export opportunities for Filipino farmers and fisherfolk.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco

Tiu Laurel Jr. said the Philippines-Japan Joint Committee on Agriculture is scheduled to hold its first meeting between April and June.

"This very first meeting of the joint agriculture committee of the two Asian neighbors here in the Philippines will provide an avenue to follow through the agri-fisheries ►7

DA pushes for expanded market access for PH agri products in Japan 1◀

trade and market access discussions started in Japan," Laurel said in a statement.

To recall, Laurel accompanied President Marcos to the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)-Japan Summit last December, during which they convened with Japanese officials and businessmen to explore new avenues for exporting Philippine fish and tropical fruits such as pineapple, bananas, avocado, mangoes, durian, mangosteen, and okra.

Laurel said the upcoming joint agriculture committee meeting in Japan will serve as a follow-up to the discussions during their December meeting.

He added that the meeting will provide an opportunity to address technical and project collaborations outlined in the memorandum of cooperation signed in February last year, as well as the MIDORI Cooperation Plan.

Last October, the Philippines, along with other ASEAN members, endorsed the MIDORI plan, which seeks to foster cooperation projects utilizing Japanese technology and knowledge-sharing to establish robust and sustainable agriculture and food systems, ensuring future food security.

In 2022, Japan imported a total \$87 billion of agricultural products,

the fifth largest in the world that year.

Banana exports

The DA said the review of the free trade agreement between Manila and Tokyo could create opportunities for lowering tariffs on Philippine bananas.

Laurel said the review of the Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA) aligns with the DA's objective of expanding access to Japan's food market.

Specifically, Laurel said the review presents a favorable opening "to discuss the Philippines' appeal for lower tariff on bananas."

The DA is now working with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to get better tariffs for the Philippines in Japan, where bananas from other countries have an advantage due to lower or zero tariffs.

At present, JPEPA imposes seasonal tariffs on exported bananas to Japan, set at eight percent from April 1 to Sept. 30, and subsequently raised to 18 percent for imports between Oct. 1 and March 31.

Earlier, Dita Angara-Mathay, the DTI commercial counselor and special trade representative in Tokyo, said Manila was seeking to eliminate the seasonal tariff on bananas exported under JPEPA.

Angara-Mathay noted that the seasonal tariff on Cavendish bananas has caused the Philippines to lose market share to Ecuador, Peru, and Mexico.

She particularly cited Mexico, the Philippines' main competitor, benefits from a year-round zero tariff in Japan.

Signed in 2006, JPEPA was Manila's first bilateral free trade agreement.

In addition to bananas, Manila is optimistic about the potential re-entry of fresh Davao mangoes into the Japanese market.

Agriculture Attaché Aleli Maghirang, who is assigned to the Philippine post in Tokyo, said the re-entry of fresh Davao mangoes into the Japanese market will inspire "greater confidence to our exporters to continue supplying to Japan."

Laurel has directed the immediate improvement of testing laboratories to align Philippine food code with those of importing countries like Japan, and the enhancement of farming practices and production of good quality planting materials for expansion and replanting.

Japan is the second largest market for Philippine agri-food exports, enjoying a trade surplus of \$824 million in 2022.

At the end of the third quarter last year, Philippine agricultural trade with Japan showed a \$596.4 million surplus in favor of Manila.



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'DA panel should go after real hoarders'

SEN. Francis "Chiz" Escudero is hopeful that the creation of a "blacklisting committee" in the Department of Agriculture (DA) will lead to the identification of real food hoarders and agricultural smugglers.

The senator said the move of Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. goes well with the anti-corruption campaign and other reforms he initiated in the department.

Laurel earlier issued Special Order 11, creating the DA's central blacklisting committee to strengthen the government's drive against unscrupulous manufacturers, suppliers, contractors, consultants, as well as hoarders and smugglers of agricultural products.

In a radio interview Saturday, Escudero expressed confidence in Laurel's ability to implement reforms in the DA for the benefit of the agriculture sector, especially the farmers.

"I've known Secretary Laurel, and he will not steal [from government coffers]. He is not also easily intimidated or fooled," he said in Filipino.

Laurel designated Legal

Service Director Willie Ann Angsiy and Procurement Division Chief Melinda Deyto as chairman and vice chairman, respectively, of the blacklisting committee.

He also appointed Internal Audit Service Director Christopher Bañas to be a member of the committee, which was given 30 days from the receipt of complaints against alleged offenders to issue a resolution containing its findings and recommendations.

Escudero backed Laurel's decision to initiate organizational changes in the DA.

"I trust that under his leadership, Secretary Laurel would be able to maximize the resources given to the agricultural sector to increase our GDP (gross domestic product) in the said sector," the senator said.

He said that during the Senate deliberations on the proposed P167.5 billion budget of the DA and its agencies, he proposed an additional P25 billion budget for the agriculture sector, which was eventually adopted by the chamber.

BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO



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DA eyes bigger share of Japan's food market

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) is eyeing a bigger share of the food market of Japan, one of the top importers of agricultural goods in the world.

In a statement on Sunday, the DA said that Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. met with Japanese officials and businessmen to open more export opportunities for Philippine fish products and tropical fruits such as pineapple, bananas, avocado, mangoes, durian, mangosteen, and okra.

Laurel accompanied President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. during his visit to Japan for the Asean-Japan Summit in December 2023.

He said they have scheduled the first meeting of the Philippines-Japan Joint Committee on Agriculture in the second quarter of this year.

"This very first meeting of the joint agriculture committee of the

two Asian neighbors here in the Philippines will provide an avenue to follow through the agri-fisheries trade and market access discussions started in Japan," he said.

The DA said Japan imported \$87 billion worth of agricultural products in 2022, the fifth largest in the world that year.

Japan is the second largest market for Philippine agri-food exports, posting an estimated value of \$916 million in 2022. And as of the third quarter of 2023, export value was recorded at \$679 million.

A review of the Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA) is also being looked into, Laurel said, adding that this will serve as an oppor-

tunity to discuss the country's appeal for lower tariffs on bananas shipped to Japan.

Under the agreement, the tariff rate on Philippine bananas is 8 percent for imports between April 1 and September 30 and 18 percent for October 1 and March 31.

The DA added that they are coordinating with the Department of Trade and Industry to secure the preferential tariff rate for Philippine bananas shipped to Japan. It noted that other leading exporters of the fruit to Japan, such as Cambodia, Laos, Mexico, and Vietnam, enjoy zero or preferential tariffs.

"Philippine bananas are staples for Japanese consumers, accounting for 22 percent of their food basket. The Philippines' proximity to Japan allows the country to deliver low-cost bananas and other tropical fruits compliant with Japanese food standards," it said.

The resumption of mango shipments to the Japanese market is also being eyed.

The DA said that the export of the fruit has declined sharply since Japan adopted stricter sanitary and phytosanitary standards, especially for the maximum residue limit, in 2011.

Laurel led ceremonies to mark the reentry of Philippine mangoes to Japan, with the presentation of the tropical fruit to his Japanese counterpart.

Agriculture Attache Aleli Maghirang assigned at the Philippine Embassy in Tokyo said she is hopeful that the reentry of Davao mangoes in the Japanese market will spur "greater confidence to our exporters to continue supplying to Japan."

Moreover, Laurel has directed the immediate improvement of testing laboratories to align Philippine food regulations with those of food-importing countries like Japan, and the enhancement of farming practices and production of good quality planting materials for expansion and replanting.



PH anticipates higher agri exports to Japan

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) is optimistic the Philippines will further increase its agriculture exports to Japan with the improved relationship of the two countries.

Japan imported \$87 billion worth of agricultural products in 2022, making Japan the fifth largest market for such products in the world for the period.

The DA said Japan is the second largest market for Philippine agri-food exports. In 2022, agri exports from the Philippines to Japan reached \$916 million, a 2.4 percent growth from 2021's \$894.4 million.

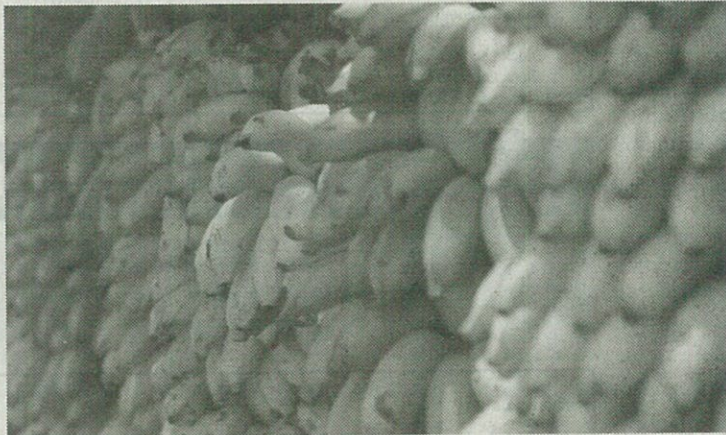
Meanwhile, as of the third quarter of 2023, local shipments of agricultural goods to Japan hit \$679 million.

At the government's participation at the Asean-Japan Summit in Tokyo last month, DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. discussed with Japanese officials and businessmen the possibility of further opening Japan's market for Philippine fish and tropical fruits such as pineapple, bananas, avocado, mangoes, durian, mangosteen and okra.

As a follow-up to the meetings in Japan, Laurel said the DA has scheduled the first meeting of the Philippines-Japan Joint Committee on Agriculture in the second quarter.

"This very first meeting of the joint agriculture committee of the two Asian neighbors here in the Philippines will provide an avenue to follow through the agri-fisheries trade and market access discussions started in Japan," said Laurel in a statement.

Laurel added the joint agriculture meeting in the second quarter will also be an opportunity to discuss technical and project collabora-



Japanese staple. The Philippines hopes to secure preferential tariff on local bananas, whose share in the Japanese market is under threat from those coming from Cambodia, Laos, Mexico and Vietnam. (DOST photo)

tions under the memorandum of cooperation signed in February last year and the MIDORI Cooperation Plan.

Last October, the Philippines alongside other Asian members, signed the MIDORI plan which aims to promote cooperation projects using Japanese technology and sharing experiences to build resilient and sustainable agriculture and food systems for future food security.

The DA said it is also coordinating with the Department of Trade and Industry in securing preferential tariff on Philippine bananas, whose share in the Japanese market is under threat from those coming from Cambodia, Laos, Mexico and Vietnam. Tariff on bananas from these countries is either zero or at preferential rate.

The DA said Philippine bananas are staple in Japanese households, accounting for 22 percent of their food basket.

Proximity of the two countries allows the delivery of low-cost bananas and other tropical fruits compliant with Japanese food standards.

Laurel also said in the statement that the Philippines looks the

review of Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA) as a good initial opportunity "to discuss the Philippines' appeal for lower tariff on bananas."

Under JPEPA, tariff on Philippine banana is pegged at 8 percent from April 1 to September 30, and then increased to 18 percent for imports between October 1 and March 31.

Apart from lowering banana tariff, DA is also seeking to revive the Japanese market for Philippine mangoes as its export had declined since Japan adopted in 2011 stricter sanitary and phytosanitary standards, especially the maximum residue limit.

Aleli Maghirang, agriculture attache of the Philippine Embassy in Tokyo, expressed hope the reentry of fresh Davao mangoes to the Japanese market will spur "greater confidence on our exporters to continue supplying to Japan."

Laurel directed for the immediate improvement of testing laboratories to align Philippine food code with those of importing countries like Japan and the enhancement of farming practices and production of good quality planting materials for expansion and replanting.



El Niño planning must be broadened to cover climate change, analysts say

By **Adrian H. Halili**
Reporter

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) needs to extend its planning for El Niño to address broader climate resiliency issues, analysts said.

"Since the DA is on the planning stage, it may be the proper time to consider seriously not just the El Niño but also the more serious issue of climate change," Ateneo de Manila economics professor Leonardo A. Lanzona said via messenger.

Last week, Agriculture Secretary **Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr.** said that the department is set to introduce its strategy to develop the industry and boost production.

El Niño threatens agriculture because it is projected to bring

drought or dry spells to about 63 provinces in the Philippines.

According to PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration), the government weather service, El Niño is expected to intensify between January and May.

"There's no short-term solution to the food supply problem except to import more. This means lowering tariffs and relaxing quantitative restrictions," Calixto V. Chikiamco, Foundation for Economic Freedom president, said in a Viber message.

On the other hand, Raul Q. Montemayor, national manager of the Federation of Free Farmers, said that the entry of imports must be calibrated to fill in for shortages to avoid oversupply condition.

"Too many (rice) imports depress palay prices and discourage

farmers from planting or expanding their production, making the country more dependent on foreign suppliers for our food staple," he said in a Viber message.

The government has recently extended the low-tariff regime on rice, corn, and pork meat until Dec. 31, 2024.

Executive Order No. 50 kept the rates for rice imports at 35% regardless of their source country, without reference to the minimum access volume (MAV).

The rates on pork meat, whether fresh, chilled, or frozen were kept at 15% for imports within the MAV quota and 25% for those exceeding the quota.

Corn shipments were kept at 5% for shipments within the MAV quota and 15% for those exceeding the quota.



REUTERS

A FARMER cuts rice stalks in a rice paddy on the mountain slopes of Banaue City, Ifugao province.

"We need a comprehensive review of all existing programs, and if necessary, an overhaul of these programs given that the billions being poured into the sector do not seem to have had a significant effect on output, productivity,

profitability of farmers, and competitiveness against imports," Mr. Montemayor added.

Mr. Lanzona said the government should also think of products that it can export competitively.

To boost exports of agricultural and fisheries products, the DA has said that it is drafting a Philippine Agricultural Export Development Plan.

Separately, it said that it will seek to expand shipments of agricultural products to Japan, one of the Philippines' largest export markets.

The DA has recently reassigned key undersecretary positions to streamline operations and "more efficiently carry out President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.'s marching orders to modernize the farm sector and ensure the country's food security."

Mr. Montemayor said that the reorganization would provide an opportunity for the DA to bring in new people and ideas, "instead of just repeating old ineffective programs and pouring more money into them."



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Japan agri export market eyed for expansion

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it is gearing up to expand exports of agricultural goods to Japan.

In a statement on Sunday, the DA said that it is pushing to ship more fish, pineapple, banana, avocado, mango, durian, mangosteen, and okra to the Japanese market.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. said it will put forward proposals for more market opening at a meeting of the Philippines-Japan Joint Committee on Agriculture in the second quarter.

"This very first meeting of the joint agriculture committee of the two Asian neighbors here in the Philippines will provide an avenue to follow through on agri-fisheries trade and market access discussions started in Japan," Mr. Laurel added.

The DA is preparing a Philippine Agricultural Export Development Plan to develop more exportable crops.

Mr. Laurel said that the joint meeting will also discuss possible technical and

project collaboration between the two countries.

The DA said that it is working with the Department of Trade and Industry to obtain a preferential tariff rate for its bananas.

"(The Philippines') leading share of the Japanese market is under threat from Cambodia, Laos, Mexico, and Vietnam, whose banana exports to Japan enjoy zero or preferential tariffs," it added.

Under the Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement, bananas

from the Philippines are charged a seasonal tariff of 18% between Oct. 1 and March 31 and 8% between April 1 and Sept. 30.

The DA said the Philippines' proximity to Japan allows the shipment of lower-priced bananas and tropical food compliant with Japanese food standards.

Additionally, the DA said that it is looking to revive the export of mangoes to Japan.

"Exports have declined sharply since Japan adopted in 2011 stricter sanitary and phytosanitary standards, especially the maximum residue limit," it added.

Mr. Laurel said that he has ordered the immediate improvement of testing laboratories to align food codes with those of Japan's.

Agricultural exports to Japan amounted to \$679 million in the third quarter of 2023, according to Aleli Maghirang, the DA agriculture attaché in Tokyo. —

Adrian H. Halili



Lower tariffs, revival of PHL mango exports eyed by DA

By CAI U. ORDINARIO [@caiordinario](#)

MANILA is keen on negotiating for lower tariffs for bananas and the revival of its mango exports to Tokyo, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. recently met with Japanese officials and businessmen at the Asean-Japan Summit.

Tiu Laurel said the DA has already scheduled a meeting between Filipino and Japanese officials at the Philippines-Japan Joint Committee on Agriculture slated for the second quarter of this year.

"This very first meeting of the joint agriculture committee of the two Asian neighbors here in the Philippines will provide an avenue

to follow through the agri-fisheries trade and market access discussions started in Japan," Tiu Laurel was quoted in a statement as saying.

According to the DA, Philippine bananas are staples for Japanese consumers, accounting for 22 percent of their food basket.

The Philippines's proximity to Japan allows the country to deliver low-cost bananas and other tropical fruits compliant with Japanese food standards.

Given this, Tiu Laurel said Ma-

nila looks at the review of Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement as a good initial opportunity "to discuss the Philippines' appeal for lower tariff on bananas."

Under Jpepa, an economic partnership agreement between the two countries, tariff on Philippine banana is pegged at 8 percent from April 1 to September 30, and then increased to 18 percent for imports between October 1 and March 31.

The DA is also seeking to revive the Japanese market for Philippine mangoes, whose export had declined sharply since Japan adopted in 2011 stricter sanitary and phytosanitary standards, especially the maximum residue limit.

During the Asean-Japan Summit in December, Tiu Laurel led ceremonies to mark the re-entry of Philippine mangoes to Japan, with the presentation of the tropical fruit to his Japanese counterpart.

Agriculture Attache Aleli Maghirang, who is assigned at the Philippine Embassy in Tokyo, said she is hopeful that fresh Davao mangoes' re-entry in the Japanese market will spur "greater confidence to our exporters to continue supplying to Japan."

Maghirang said the country's agriculture exports to Japan amounted to \$679 million in the third quarter of 2023.

In the past three years, Manila's exports to Tokyo amounted to \$2.89 billion. The country's highest export earnings from shipments to Japan was \$1.08 billion in 2020 followed by \$894.4 million in 2021 and \$916 million in 2022.

DA said Japan is the second largest market for Philippine agri-food exports, enjoying a trade surplus of \$824 million in 2022. At the end of the third quarter last year, Philippine agricultural trade with Japan showed a \$596.4 million surplus in favor of the Philippines.

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Group to DA: End fish importation, food insecurity

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

[@jonlmayuga](#)

THE Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakayang Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) has called on Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. to renounce food importation policies and instead support the local food producers.

According to Pamalakaya's Fernando Hicap, from 2018 to 2023, the country imported more than 250,000 metric tons of various pelagic fishes including round scad (*galunggong*), mackerel, big-

eye scad (*matang baka*), bonito, and moon fish for the wet market.

Most of the fish were imported from China and Taiwan, the "countries known to be conducting fishing expeditions in the Philippine waters."

"[Laurel] must abandon the import-liberalization policies that have been a scourge to our local farmers and fishers. Since the country has increased the volume of its imports from 2018, farmgate prices of our local fishery produce have fallen dramatically," he said.

"In some provinces, the farmgate price of galunggong went down to

P60-P70 per kilo from P100-P110 per kilo due to the entry of the much cheaper fish in local wet markets."

He said the DA must instead strengthen the local agri-fisheries production through sufficient subsidies and ensuring the exclusive rights of fishers and farmers to fishing grounds and agricultural lands.

Pamalakaya has listed down other demands to address the plight of the rural sectors in the country, and consequently ensure local food security:

- Stop all destructive projects in fishing grounds and coastal communities like reclamation; these

projects cause environmental degradation and drastically affect the fish stocks in the seas;

- Carry out genuine rehabilitation of major fishing waters in the context of fishery and marine resources development; and

- Uphold the exclusive rights of Filipinos in our territorial waters, especially in the resource and mineral-rich West Philippine Sea.

Citing a report published by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, the group said the Philippines is one the most food-insecure countries in Southeast Asia.

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'Blacklisting panel at DA should ferret out real hoarders'

By BUTCH FERNANDEZ

[@butchfBM](#)

THE creation of a blacklisting committee in the Department of Agriculture (DA) is a step in the right direction, as it aligns with the anti-corruption campaign and other reforms that Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. is initiating in the agency, according to Sen. Chiz Escudero.

In a media interview over the weekend, he expressed confidence that Laurel can finally clean up the controversial department and implement much-awaited reforms for the benefit of the agriculture sector, especially the farmers.

"Matagal ko nang kilala si Secretary Laurel, at hindi magnanakaw 'yan. Hindi rin 'yan madaling madala

ika nga sa pananakot o anumang uri ng panloloko [I have known Secretary Lauyrel a long time. He is not easily swayed by those trying to scare or scam him]," said.

"Umaasa ako na sa binuo niyang committee na ito ay tunay ngang ma-identify 'yong mga totoong hoarders at mga smugglers [I have trust that the committee he created will ferret out the real hoarders and smugglers]."

Laurel's Special Order 11 creates the DA's central blacklisting committee to strengthen the government's drive against unscrupulous manufacturers, suppliers, contractors, consultants as well as hoarders and smugglers of agricultural products.

He has designated DA Legal Service Director Willie Ann Angsiy

and Procurement Division Chief Melinda Deyto as chair and vice chair, respectively, of the blacklisting committee.

Laurel also appointed DA Internal Audit Service Director Christopher Bañas to be a member of the committee, which was given 30 days from the receipt of complaints against alleged offenders to issue a resolution containing its findings and recommendations.

In the same interview, Escudero expressed his full support for Laurel's decision to initiate organizational changes in DA just two months after President Marcos appointed him.

Laurel announced last Thursday major changes in the department's leadership, saying the reorganization is intended to align the DA

more closely with the President's directives to enhance operations.

"The revamp he is undertaking in the Department of Agriculture has my support because like any newly installed agency head, we should give him the freedom to pick those he can trust to do the work he envisions for his department," said Escudero, partly in Filipino.

He stressed that his trust in Laurel's leadership is "absolute" and he thinks the Secretary can "maximize the resources given to the agriculture sector."

At the Senate deliberation on the proposed P167.5-billion budget of the DA and its agencies, Escudero proposed an additional P25-billion budget for the agriculture sector, which was eventually adopted by the chamber.

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GO NEGOSYO PILIPINAS

ANGAT LAHAT!
JOEY CONCEPCION

A fulfilling 2023, a promising 2024

By most projections, the future of the Philippines looks promising. If you set aside the pessimism and short-lived issues, we can look forward to steady progress ahead. As outlined in the Philippine Development Plan, our country's economic roadmap, we have set our sights on becoming an upper-middle income nation by 2025. With a predominantly young and digital-savvy population, I tend to agree that we are indeed well-positioned to become one of the fastest-growing economies in the region.



In my role outside of RFM, I have the privilege of working at the intersection of two growth drivers that will help us achieve this goal: the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in my job at Go Negosyo and job creation as the lead for Jobs cluster of the Private Sector Advisory Council. Both these sectors will have a significant role as we move forward, with MSMEs thriving on growing consumer demand, and our workforce remaining a key advantage of the Philippine economy.

Over the past year, Go Negosyo has mentored thousands of active and aspiring entrepreneurs, and put MSMEs in the spotlight on both the national and regional stage. We have worked tirelessly to provide them with enhanced access to capital, markets and mentoring. Our efforts have also focused on encouraging the adoption of digital technology and reaching out to a broader audience to foster an entrepreneurial mindset.

As Go Negosyo enters its second decade, I must admit that I never anticipated it would play such a substantial role in my life for such an extended period. Indeed, I am incredibly satisfied with the impact it has made. I was inspired by my father, JoeCon, and my uncle Raul, who also dedicated themselves to causes beyond their corporate work. I now understand the rewarding nature of such endeavors.

But, being a businessman, I still find it useful to quantify our accomplishments to appreciate the progress we have achieved. In 2023 alone, Go Negosyo was able to mentor over 20,000 active and aspiring entrepreneurs across the Philippines, thanks to the support of more than a thousand Go Negosyo mentors and our partners in MSME development. These mentorships are conducted regularly and span various programs.

One of the most visible is the mall-based public mentoring program called 3M on Wheels. In collaboration with local government units and industry groups, we have reached out to active and aspiring entrepreneurs in local communities. This year alone, we have mentored over 6,000 individuals through this initiative and plan to expand its frequency nationwide.

3M on Wheels serves as the entry point for MSME training. For established businesses, we have developed an "MBA for MSMEs," the Kapatid Mentor MicroEntrepreneurs (ME) program and its agri-focused version, the Kapatid Agri Mentor ME Program. These programs are implemented in partnership with the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Agriculture and the Agricultural Training Institute. Since the inception of these programs, over 15,000 participants have completed the program; this year, we added over 2,000 more from across the country.

We wanted to share the success of our KMME and KAMMP programs with our neighboring ASEAN member-states, particularly in light of the ASEAN economic integration. Thus, we extended our efforts by creating the ASEAN Mentorship for Entrepreneurs Network (AMEN) as our legacy program from the Philippines' chairmanship of ASEAN in 2017. So far, we have produced 196 graduates from the ten ASEAN member-states.

Similarly, we are currently laying the groundwork to share the principles of the Kapatid Angat Lahat sa Agri Program (KALAP) with other countries in the region. Our aim is to realize the benefits of public-private partnerships in agriculture and exchange lessons in agripreneurship among our ASEAN neighbors. In our own country, we have already gathered 50 big-brother agriculture companies who have committed to sharing their inclusive business models with small farmers and integrating them into their value chains. Additionally, our recent partnership with the Cooperative Development Authority will undoubtedly help us identify more small farmers for KALAP.

Recognizing that our young population is a significant advantage in the near term, we have also launched the Youthpreneur program in 2023. This program is specifically designed to provide the youth with a practical understanding of business and cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset. Both our mall-based and school-based Youthpreneur events have been tremendously successful, largely due to the support of the Department of Education.

And because the entrepreneur thrives in a dynamic environment, we've continued to organize national summits to focus on areas of growth and challenges for MSMEs. These include the Women Summit for women entrepreneurs, the Balik-Bayan Summit to assist OFWs and their families in reintegrating as entrepreneurs, the Tourism Summit to explore opportunities for MSMEs in the local tourism industry and Digital SignUp Now, which focuses on one of the most exciting areas for entrepreneurs: digital technology. Through these specialized events, we have provided focused mentoring to more than 6,000 active and aspiring entrepreneurs. Moreover, our annual MSME Summit serves as a platform for dialogue between the government and the private sector, offering valuable insights into MSME development and related issues.

Overall, we promoted private sector participation in key economic development issues and worked closely with government agencies and various local government units across the country.

And now, as Go Negosyo approaches its second decade of serving the MSME sector, we will continue to advocate for entrepreneurship as a pathway to sustainable and inclusive growth. This will be achieved through these focused and sustained programs that



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ESPECIALLY MANGOES AND BANANAS

PH PUSHES FOR BIGGER BITE OF JAPAN'S FRUIT MARKET

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**
@jordeenelagare

The Philippines is seeking a larger piece of the pie in the Japanese food market as it explores additional avenues to export more locally produced agricultural products, especially mangoes and bananas, to the archipelago up north.

In a statement over the weekend, Agriculture Attaché Maria Alilia Maghirang of the Philippine Agriculture Office in Tokyo said the reentry of fresh Davao mangoes in Japan will spur "greater confidence to our exporters to continue supplying to" that country.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said the export of mangoes to Japan has declined sharply since 2011 when Tokyo imposed stricter sanitary and phytosanitary standards.

Also, the DA is coordinating with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) about lowering Japan's tariff rate on Philippine bananas, a staple among Japanese consumers.

For this reason, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said, the government is considering the review of the Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement.

In particular, Manila is considering to lodge an appeal

for a preferential tariff rate on Philippine bananas bound for Japan.

The DA noted the country holds the largest share in terms of banana exports to Japan, but is under threat from Cambodia, Laos, Mexico and Vietnam which enjoy a zero tariff rate or preferential tariff.

Bananas from the Philippines account for 22 percent of Japan's imports of the tropical fruit.

At present, the Philippine banana is levied a tariff rate of 8 percent from April 1 to Sept. 30 and then slapped with a higher tariff of 18 percent between Oct. 1 and March 31. INQ

Date: JAN. 08, 2024 Page: B1



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HIGH PRICES

PH MEAT IMPORTS DOWN IN 2023

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**
[@jordeenelagare](#)

The Philippines sourced less meat from abroad in the first 11 months of 2023 as demand was dampened by high prices.

Data from the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) showed that the country brought in 1.1 billion kilograms of meat as of November last year, down 10.9 percent from 1.3 billion kg in 2022.

Nearly half or 49.4 percent of the imported meat were pork, with the volume decreasing by 17.1 percent to 550.5 million kg during the comparative period.

On the other hand, the volume of imported chicken went up year-on-year by 5.7 percent to 393.3 million kg as of end-November.

A more hefty decline in imports was seen in beef with the volume declining by 21.7 percent to 134.4 million kg.

Meat Importers and Traders Association president emeritus Jesus Cham expects the imported volume this year to stay at the same level as in 2023 as consumers are still "under pressure" from high prices, thus prompting importers to hold back on more purchases. INQ



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63 items on SRP list to hike prices – DTI

Manufacturers cite raw materials and transport costs, logistics issues as reasons

By KHRISCIELLE VALAO and JEL SANTOS

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) announced that 29 percent of the items included in the Suggested Retail Price (SRP) bulletin may increase prices this year.

DTI Assistant Secretary Amanda Nograles of the Consumer Protection Group said that 63 items out of 270 in the SRP have pending price adjustments.

For food products included in the 63 items, the prices will adjust to around ₱0.25 to ₱7.25.

"If we will compare the price adjustment in 2023 versus 2024, the average is around six percent compared to the over 10 percent change recorded in 2022 versus 2023," said Nograles. ►6



63 items on SRP list to hike prices – DTI 1◀

The affected food items include canned sardines, processed milk, coffee, bread, instant noodles, bottled water, processed canned meat and canned beef, and condiments.

Among the non-food items in the list are toilet soap, candles, and batteries.

Nograles noted that 59 of the items were approved for a general price increase, while two items have filed for a weight reduction and corresponding price increase. The last two items applied for weight and price reduction.

Meanwhile, the prices for 71 percent or 154 items have not moved.

Nograles emphasized that not all brands and variants in each category filed for a notice of price adjustments. This means consumers can still have options among sellers and substitutes that offer lower or sustained prices.

She said that the agency is planning to start releasing the Letters of Concurrence this month, prioritizing the notices of the manufacturers which have applied since 2022 but have not yet been approved.

The updated SRP bulletin may be released sometime in the first quarter of 2024 with the adjustments, as soon as all notices have been approved, she added.

Nograles said that the DTI duly asks the manufacturers to substantiate their notice of price adjustments, emphasizing the basis for components such as proof of increased production costs.

She highlighted the passage of Executive Order (EO) No. 41, which suspends the local government's ability to collect toll fees, as having helped manufacturers reduce production costs.

Based on the letters they have received, manufacturers have cited the costs of raw materials, transport, and other logistical issues as reasons for filing price considerations.

The implementation of the adjusted prices may take effect within a month, considering the alignment of the DTI and the manufacturers' computation for the movement of prices.

"Even if the DTI releases the Letter of Concurrence or Letter of Approval, of course the manufacturer will need some time to implement the price adjustments, especially those with computerized systems who simply need to update the price lists. So, there will be some lag by the time the DTI releases the notice of approval to the time the actual prices in the market are effective," said Nograles.

"Going forward, we're optimistic that we will mitigate the requests for price adjustments since our inflation rate has gone down," said DTI Secretary Alfredo Pascual.

SRP on rice

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is looking into the possibility of putting a suggested retail price (SRP) on rice.

Recently, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported that the price of rice increased by 19.6 percent in December of last year, which was the largest increase in over 14 years.

The statistics agency stated that this value was also the highest for 2023 since rice inflation peaked in September as a result of the imposition of a price ceiling.

"Isang pwede pa nating gawin talaga na pinag-aaralan na ngayon ay ang pagtatakda ng suggested retail price na aayon sa price act kung talagang tataas pa rin lalo ang presyo ng bigas (One thing we can do that is currently being studied is the setting of a suggested retail price that will be in accordance with the price act if the price of rice continues to go up)," DA spokesperson Arnel De Mesa said during a radio interview on Saturday, Jan. 6.

DA's Agribusiness and Marketing Service (AMAS) will be conducting consultations with all stakeholders, he said.

De Mesa explained that it is required for AMAS to conduct consultations with all stakeholders before placing an SRP on rice.

He clarified that the agency will not implement a price ceiling or cap on rice.

Based on the price monitoring of the DA in Metro Manila markets last Friday, Jan. 5, the cheapest rice retail price is ₱40 a kilo (Local Well-Milled). The most expensive rice sold in the metropolis costs ₱68 per kilo (Local Special).

Shrinkflation

Nograles also said that the DTI is keeping tabs on shrinkflation.

Shrinkflation occurs when the price of the goods is the same but there is a change in the grammage or weight of the product. Effectively, that is a price increase because for the same amount you get less of the product.

"For basic necessities and prime commodities where the grammage was reduced but prices are retained, that should be evaluated by the DTI, especially those in the SRP bulletin. But as we've said, it's the manufacturers' business decision whether they want to change their product or reduce or keep the price," she said.

Nograles said that the role of the DTI is to inform consumers of the changes in products or price with no misrepresentation of grammage, and flagging manufacturers selling goods in the SRP list which have not filed with the agency.



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Meat imports down 10.94% as of Nov

THE country's meat imports from January to November last year went down due to lower shipments of pork and beef, the Department of Agriculture (DA) reported.

Latest data from DA-Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) showed that meat imports during the first 11 months of 2023 reached 1.15 billion kilograms (kg), down 10.94 percent from 1.25 billion kg posted in the period of 2022.

For November alone, shipments of meat were recorded at 96.3 million kg, lower by 22.29 percent in comparison to 123.95 million kg logged in the same month of 2022.

Data from the department showed that the lower level of imports was caused by the decline in pork shipments, accounting for 49.35 percent of total imports during the period.

It fell 17.10 percent to 550.53 million kg from 664.15 million kg a year earlier.

Beef imports, meanwhile, reached 134.39 million kg during the said months. This was lower by 21.67 percent from 171.6 million kg a year earlier.

Importation of buffalo meat also decreased by 17.77 percent during the period, hitting 35.66 million kg, lower than the previous year's 43.37 million kg.

The Philippines also imported about 393.28 million kg of chicken in the same period, 5.71-percent

higher than the 372.04 million kg posted in 2022. In terms of volume, chicken is the second-highest imported meat product, next to pork, accounting 35.25 percent of the country's total meat imports.

Turkey shipments, meanwhile, were higher by 19.02 percent during the period, and was registered at 574,470 kg in comparison to 2022's import level of 482,632 kg.

Figures from the BAI also showed that imports of lamb meat went up marginally by 1.25 percent to 708,297 kg from 699,523 kg posted the previous year.

The largest increase in the volume of imported meat was seen in duck meat. It went up by 110.26 percent to 281,333 kg from 133,801 kg logged in 2022.

According to BAI, Brazil remained as the biggest supplier of meat imports from January to November 2023, having shipped 369.38 million kg of the commodity. This accounted for 33.11 percent of the country's total imported meat during the first 11 months of last year.

The United States and Spain followed, supplying the country with about 203.48 million kg and 135.7 million kg of meat imports, respectively.

Canada also shipped a total of 115.25 million kg of meat; Australia with 53.97 million kg; and the Netherlands with 52.24 million kg during the period.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



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Taiwan's 2,000MT rice donation to benefit PH poor



■ Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in the Philippines Representative Wallace Chow (standing center, left) and Chairman and Resident Representative of Manila Economic and Cultural Office Silvestre Bello 3rd (standing center, right) lead the ceremonial turnover of the 1,000 metric tons of milled rice.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

TAIPEI Economic and Cultural Office in the Philippines Representative Wallace Chow, on behalf of the government of the Republic of China (Taiwan), handed over the first batch of 1,000 metric tons of milled rice to the Philippines on January 4. The donation was received by Chairman and Resident Representative of Manila Economic and Cultural Office (Meco) Silvestre Bello 3rd. Joining him in the ceremonial turnover were officials from the **Department of Agriculture (DA).**

In his remarks, Representative Chow said Taiwan has prioritized agriculture development and food security cooperation with the

government of the Philippines as climate change has affected greatly the farming industry in the country.

He pointed out that rice donation is yet another testament of the solid collaboration among other ongoing projects between the Philippines and Taiwan, such as the Taiwan Technical Mission on Agriculture in Tarlac, the Mushroom Demonstration Farm in Baguio and the Filipino Young Farmers Internship Program in Taiwan.

Chow also emphasized that Taiwan is a reliable partner to the Philippines, and this valued partnership will continue when we

help and respect each other.

In response to the insufficient food supply caused by climate change, Taiwan government committed to donate 2,000 metric tons of milled rice to the Philippine government.

The donated rice will serve as additional food security stocks to be distributed by Department of Social Welfare Development in collaboration with DA to the pro-poor and relief operation programs following the occurrence of calamity or emergency situation.

Meco was assigned to receive these donated rice on behalf of the Philippine government.



Meat imports drop 11% in Jan-Nov 2023 to 1.12B kg

THE country imported 1.12 billion kg of imported meat in the first 11 months of the year, 10.9 percent lower from the 1.25 billion kg of meat imported from January to November 2022, according to data from the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI).

Pork comprised bulk of the meat imported by the Philippines from January to November 2023 at 550.5 million kg or 49.4 percent of the total. Pork imports was 17.1 percent lower than the 664.15 million kg. in 2022.

Chicken followed with

393.29 million kg or 35.3 percent of all imported meat from January to November 2023. The figure is 5.7 percent higher than 2022's 372.04 million kg.

Beef imports were at 134.4 million kg or 12.05 percent of all meat imports in the period. The volume is 21.7 percent lower than last year's 171.6 million kg.

BAI said the Philippines imported 35.66 million kg of buffalo, lower by 17.8 percent than 2022's 43.37 million kg as turkey imports increased by 19.1 percent to 574,930 kg from 2022's 482,632 kg. - *Jed Macapagal*

Meat imports			
Nov 2023 vs Nov 2022			
MEAT TYPE	2023 (KG)	2022 (KG)	% CHANGE
BEEF	134,398,284	171,600,268	-21.7
BUFFALO	35,663,847	43,371,414	-17.8
CHICKEN	393,288,739	372,040,393	5.7
DUCK	281,333	133,801	110.3
LAMB	708,296	699,521	1.3
PORK	550,539,824	664,154,535	-17.1
TURKEY	574,930	482,632	19.1
TOTAL	1,115,455,253	1,252,482,564	-10.9

SOURCE: BAI



PHL MEAT IMPORTS DIP DOUBLE DIGITS TO 111 MMT IN 11 MOS

By CAI U. ORDINARIO

Twitter: @caiordinario

THE country's meat imports posted a double-digit decline in the January to November 2023 period, according to data released by the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI).

Based on the data, meat imports reached 1.115 billion kilograms or 111.55 million metric tons (MMT) before the Holiday season started in 2023. This was lower than the 1.252 billion kilos or 1.25 MMT shipments that arrived in the same period of 2022.

Imports in November 2023 stood at 96.315 million kilos, a 22.3-percent decline from the 123.95 million kilos shipped to Manila in November 2022.

In November 2023, BAI data showed beef, chicken, and pork imports, recorded double-digit declines in shipments.

Data showed beef imports reached 13.758 million kilos in November 2023, a 27.53-percent decline from the 18.98 million kilos shipped in the same month in 2022.

Shipments of chicken declined 23.22 percent to 34.058 million kilos in November 2023 from 44.36 million kilos in November 2022.

The BAI data also showed pork shipments reached 46.232 mil-

lion kilos in November 2023, an 18.91-percent decline from the 57.013 million kilos the country imported in November 2022.

Meanwhile, in terms of origin, majority or 81 percent of the country's meat imports in the January to November 2023 period came from five countries, namely, Brazil, the United States, Spain, Canada and Australia.

Data showed shipments from the five countries reached a total of 904.808 million kilos; Brazil led the pack with shipments reaching 396.382 million kilos.

This was followed by the United States with 203.489 million kilos; Spain, 135.703 million kilos; Canada, 115.255 million kilos; and Australia, 53.979 million kilos.

Shipments from Brazil and the US were mostly chicken and pork. For Brazil, the bulk was composed of mechanically deboned meat (MDM) for chicken and pork cuts; while for the US, the bulk comprised Chicken Leg Quarters and pork offals. The latter is used for famous Filipino dishes like sisig.

Imports from Spain and Canada were composed of pork, specifically pork offals for Spain and pork cuts for Canada. The bulk of the meat imports from Australia were beef shipments, specifically beef cuts.



Commercial planting of 2 GM crops gets nod

By MANUEL T. CAYON

[@awimailbox](#)

THE Philippines approved the commercial cultivation of 2 genetically modified (GM) crops last year, according to the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA).

In the December 14 edition of the newsletter of ISAAA, the Philippines and Brazil are two of the countries that approved GM crops for commercial planting in 2023.

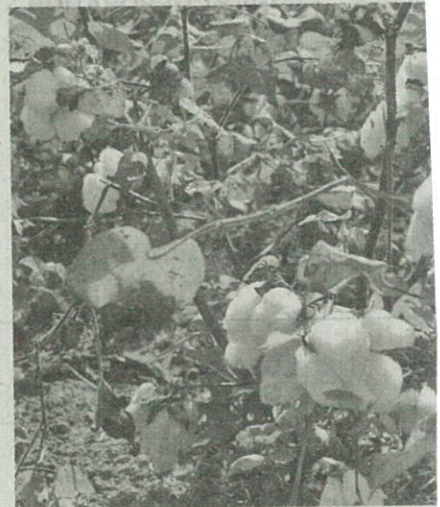
The Philippines approved for food, feed and processing on September 14 of the modified canola with the "event," or modification, dubbed LBFLPK.

This was the second canola GM

version to be approved for food, feed and processing. Manila earlier approved one GM canola crop in March 2022.

The two modified canola crops were enhanced to tolerate the application of herbicides.

The Philippines also approved on August 24 last year for commercial cultivation a GM cotton version with the tag GFM Cry1A with



BT cotton planted by the Philippine Fiber Industry Development Authority. WWW.PHILFIDA.DA.GOV.PH

lepidopteran insect resistance and antibiotic resistance.

Lepidarian insects, or caterpillars, are known pests in forests, food crops, fibers and stored grains.

Brazil approved last March 2023 one modification of wheat tagged



Australia, New Zealand, Columbia, Turkey and Ghana had also greenlit GM crops.

The Philippines is the first country in Asia to commercialize Bt corn, a variety that is resistant to a grain pest called the corn borer.

Since 2002, when it first approved Bt corn for commercial planting, the Philippines has given its go signal to other GM crops, such as Bt eggplant.

The government approved the commercial cultivation of the borer-resistant Bt eggplant last October 2022, almost two decades since the start of its development in the Philippines.

The Bureau of Plant Industry of the Department of Agriculture (DA-BPI) granted the "Biosafety Permit for Commercial Propagation (No. 22-001 Propa)" of Bt eggplant (Event EE-1) to the University of the Philippines Los Baños.

The approval was pursuant to the decision made by the Departments of Agriculture, Science and Technology, Environment and Natural Resources, Health and Interior and Local Government Joint Department Circular 1, Series of 2021.

The regulatory approval came after strict and comprehensive biosafety evaluations conducted by the Joint Assessment Group composed of representatives from Competent National Authorities-Biosafety Committees, Caraan said.

It was also based on the certification of the Event EE-1 as a Plant Incorporated Protectant (Group 11A Insecticide) by the Fertilizer and Pesticide Authority.

Dr. Cesar Quicoy, an economist from the University of the Philippines Los Baños, had said that the Philippines lost as much as P33.85 billion (\$634 million) due to the delay in commercializing the insect resistant Bt eggplant.

HB4 for commercial cultivation.

Since 2022 nine countries have approved various genetic modifications of eight crops for commercial cultivation and production and processing for food or feeds.

Aside from the Philippines and Brazil, the United States, Nigeria,



Go Negosyo, CDA sign deal to scale up small farmers

Entrepreneurship advocacy group Go Negosyo and the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) signed an agreement that will soon give small farmers a better chance at scaling up.

The memorandum of understanding signed on Jan. 4 would link agriculture cooperatives with leading agriculture companies in the Philippines.

The identified and organized cooperatives would then be assisted by big brother companies in consolidating produce, meeting market requirements as well as accessing credit, inputs and training.

The deal also aims to improve collaboration between cooperatives and the private sector and promotes a value-chain approach through public-private partner-

ships.

Go Negosyo and CDA's strategic partnership would support and implement the objectives of the Kapatid Angat Lahat Agri Program (KALAP) for the benefit of the cooperatives sector in the Philippines.

The principles of KALAP, formalized in 2023 through agreements with government agencies, became the basis for several agreements with the Business Advisory Council of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

The agreement was signed by Go Negosyo founder Joey Concepcion and CDA chair Undersecretary Joseph Encabo.

"There are several different inclusive business models that our big brothers in KALAP have

already implemented; the cooperatives can adapt the models suited to their crop and forge a relationship with the big-brother corporations, such as helping them get access to technologies and markets," Concepcion said.

"The partnership with the CDA will help us identify the cooperatives who are willing to be part of KALAP," he added.

Encabo said the agreement was timely as President Marcos has been spearheading efforts to strengthen cooperatives, calling on the cooperative movement to start the consolidation process for local farmers' cooperatives associations.

"As we implement the merger consolidation focusing on agriculture cooperatives, the program



BOOSTING AGRIPRENEURSHIP: Go Negosyo founder Joey Concepcion and senior adviser William Dar join Cooperative Development Authority administrator Myrla Paradillo and CDA chairman Joseph Encabo during the signing of a memorandum of understanding on Jan. 4.

can directly infuse to them and roll out as they make cooperatives' resources bigger, expand their membership and add to their assets," he added.



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BOOSTING AGRIPRENEURSHIP Go Negosyo founder Joey Concepcion (3rd from left) and Senior Adviser William Dar (right) join Cooperative Development Authority Administrator Myrla Paradillo (left) and CDA Chairman Joseph Encabo at the signing of a memorandum of understanding that aims to support and implement the objectives of the Kapatid Angat Lahat Agri Program for cooperatives.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

GO NEGOSYO, CDA DEAL GIVES AGRI COOPERATIVES A BOOST

GO Negosyo has entered into a partnership with the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) to link agriculture cooperatives with the country's leading agri companies and give small farmers a better chance at scaling up.

In a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed on January 4, the nonprofit organization that advocates for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and the CDA, the lead government agency for cooperatives, agreed to identify and organize coops which will be assisted by private

business organizations in consolidating their produce, meeting market requirements, as well as accessing credit, inputs and training.

The partnership was created to support and implement the objectives of the Kapatid Angat Lahat Agri Program (Kalap), said Go Negosyo founder Jose Ma. "Joey" Concepcion 3rd.

Concepcion said Go Negosyo organized Kalap to establish partnerships between the government and the private sector.

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■ AGRI FROM A1

GO NEGOSYO

Under the program, small farmers are integrated into the value chain of "big-brother" companies, giving them access to mentoring, markets and capital.

He said that after being formalized in 2023 through several MoUs with government agencies, the program has now grown to include 50 big-brother companies.

Concepcion said the principles espoused by Kalap have also become the basis for several MoUs with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) Business Advisory Council.

He noted that there are several inclusive business models that partners Kalap have implemented, which the cooperatives can adapt.

The partnership with the CDA will help Go Negosyo identify the cooperatives willing to be part of Kalap, said Concepcion.

"The bottom line is poverty alleviation, and many of the poor are in the agriculture sector," he said following the signing of the MoU. "Unless we fix that, we will never solve the problem of poverty."

CDA chairman Undersecretary Joseph Encabo called the signing of the MoU with Go Negosyo "timely" since President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has called on the country's cooperative movement to start the consolidation process for local farmers' cooperatives associations.

"As we implement the merger consolidation focusing on agriculture cooperatives, the program can directly infuse to them and roll out as they make [cooperatives] resources bigger, expand their membership, and add to their assets," said Encabo.

The government has been trying to revitalize the agriculture sector by helping raise productivity to generate more jobs and stimulate economic activity, especially in the provinces.

Based on World Bank estimates, around 43 percent of the country's land area is agricultural, a sector that accounts for around 24 percent of local employment.

The Marcos administration considers boosting the productivity of agriculture, along with the manufacturing sector, as key to raising the country from a lower-middle-income economy to middle-income status.

This goal is outlined in the 2023-2028 Philippine Development Plan, the country's road map for socioeconomic progress in the medium term.

FRANCO JOSE C. BAROÑA



Soy sags; corn down

CHICAGO- Chicago Board of Trade soybean futures crumbled to their lowest prices since June on Friday and declined for a third consecutive week as much-needed rains hit dry growing areas in Brazil.

Corn futures set a contract low. Wheat prices advanced but still finished the first week of 2024 in negative territory.

The setback in soybean futures came as rains have reduced concerns about crop losses in the world's biggest exporter of the oilseed. Stabilizing yields could prevent soy buyers from shifting export business to the US from Brazil, as the nations compete for sales on the world market.

For the week, soybean futures

lost about 3.2 percent, while corn fell 2.2 percent and wheat slid 1.9 percent at the CBOT.

"It's been lower this week as we came back from the holiday," said Sherman Newlin, an Illinois farmer and analyst with Risk Management Commodities. "It's been based off of all the rain that's been going on in South America."

Most-active CBOT March soybeans ended down 11-1/4 cents at \$12.56-1/4 a bushel after reaching the lowest price since June 15.

March corn futures finished 5-3/4 cents lower at \$4.60-3/4 per bushel and reached a contract low at \$4.60. March wheat settled up 2-1/2 cents at \$6.16 per bushel as the market bounced from a one-month low on Thursday. -Reuters



Arabica coffee futures hit one-month low amid forecast for rains in Brazil

LONDON — Arabica coffee futures on ICE hit a one-month low on Friday and ended the week with a net loss of 3%, amid commodities indexes rebalancing and forecast for rains in top-grower Brazil.

COFFEE: March arabica coffee settled down 2.75 cents or 1.5% at \$1.828 per pound (lb), having hit a one-month low earlier at \$1.820.

Dealers said the rebalancing of commodity indexes in January is likely leading to selling of arabica coffee futures by funds.

Weather remains mostly positive for crop development in top-grower Brazil, which continues to show good export flow.

Brazil exported 4.06 million bags of green coffee in December, 33% more than a year ago.

March robusta coffee rose 0.3%, at \$2,795 a metric ton, extending the prior session's gains. The contract, however, fell 2% in the week.

Dealers said prices will have to rise further to tempt farmers in top producer Vietnam to sell at regular volumes. Exporters are meanwhile struggling to deal with delivery delays from farmers, they said.

SUGAR: March raw sugar was little changed at 21.11 cents per lb. It gained 2.5% this week.

Dealers said market attention had shifted back to better-than-expected production in major exporters Brazil and Thailand,

although dry conditions in Brazil could weigh going forward.

Brazil exported 75% more sugar in December from a year ago, the government said.

Thailand is expected to produce 8-8.5 million tons of sugar in the 2023/2024 production year.

China's sugar output in the 2023/2024 season is seen at 3.2 million metric tons, down 60,000 metric tons from a year earlier.

March white sugar was little changed, at \$607.10 a ton.

COCOA: March London cocoa settled down £60 or 1.7% to £3,494 a ton, having hit a one-month low earlier at 3,484 pounds/ton. March New York cocoa fell \$56 or 1.3% to \$4,204 a ton. — **Reuters**



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German agriculture minister vows no more concessions to farmers' demands

BERLIN — Germany's agriculture minister criticized a mob that tried to intimidate the economy minister over subsidy cuts for farmers and vowed that the government would make no more concessions on the issue despite plans for nationwide rallies next week.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition watered down plans to cut agriculture subsidies as part of its 2024 budget on Thursday after hundreds of farmers protested in central Berlin last month against the prospect of losing the tax break entirely.

But the diluted plans, which the president of the German Farm-

ers' Association said did not go far enough, prompted demonstrators to block Economy Minister Robert Habeck from disembarking from a ferry in northern Germany on Thursday night.

Videos of the blockade show dozens of people in reflective vests gathered on the pier in Schluettziel, prompting the ferry carrying Mr. Habeck back from an island holiday to turn back.

"We have corrected our position" on the subsidies, Agriculture Minister Cem Ozdemir told broadcaster ARD, who added that the government had not given in

to the farmers' demands. "I didn't buckle and I'm not buckling. We have found a good solution. We now all stand by it together," Mr. Ozdemir said.

"But what happened (to Habeck) is people who don't care about German agriculture. They have wet dreams of upheaval."

Mr. Scholz also criticized the blockade, calling it shameful on social media platform X. "With all due respect for a lively culture of protest, no one should be indifferent to such a brutalization of political morals," he wrote early Friday.

— Reuters



World food price index ends 2023 some 10% below 2022 levels

LONDON — The United Nations (UN) food agency's world price index ended last year about 10% below its 2022 level, with values in December also down from the previous month, helping further ease concerns over global food price inflation.

The Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) price index, which tracks the most globally traded food commodities, averaged 118.5 points in December, down 1.5% from November and 10.1% below December 2022 levels.

For 2023, the index averaged 13.7% below year earlier levels, with only sugar prices higher over the period. The FAO's sugar price index did, however, decline 16.6% in December from November.

This was "mainly driven by the strong pace of production in Brazil, along with reduced use

of sugarcane for ethanol production in India," the UN agency said in a statement.

The FAO's cereal price index rose 1.5% in December from November, as wheat, maize, rice and barley prices all rose amid hindered shipments from major exporting countries.

For the year, however, cereal prices were 15.4% below their 2022 average as markets are well supplied with the exception of rice. The largest price falls were in vegetable oils, with the price index slumping 1.4% in December, from November, and a substantial 32.7% drop for the year.

The FAO's meat price index dipped 1.0% in December from November and was down 1.8% year on year, while the December dairy price index rose 1.6% month on month, but was down 16.1% from a year earlier.

— Reuters



Global rice prices surged in 2023—FAO report

INTERNATIONAL rice prices jumped by more than a fifth last year due to host of factors, including export restrictions and poor weather, according to a report published by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) last Friday.

Based on the FAO All Rice Price Index (Farpi), international rice prices in 2023 were on average 21.1 percent above their 2022 level and at their highest, in nominal terms, since 2008.

"Indica prices drove this gain, with a 25-percent annual leap. Nonetheless, Japonica, Aromatic, and Glutinous quotations were also up by 6, 11, and 17 percent, respectively," FAO said.

"A host of factors contributed to these gains, including production disruptions registered in some major exporters in 2022/2023 due to poor weather and/or surges in input costs, heightened inflationary pressure, as was the case of Pakistan, and concerns over the impacts of El Niño on 2023/2024 crops."

FAO said the export restrictions imposed by India starting July 2023 had also affected prices, most notably its imposition of a ban on Indica white rice exports and a 20-percent tax on Indica parboiled exports.

"This was even if the Indian government approved exceptions to its export restrictions totaling at least 3.5 million tons since late October 2022 for a host of countries on food security grounds."

On the demand side, the United Nations agency said efforts to keep domestic prices in check and beef up reserves also led to strong purchases by some Asian and African buyers, which also buoyed prices.

In December alone, Farpi averaged 141.1 points, up 1.6 percent month-on-month and 18.6 percent above its December 2022 level.

"Indica prices underpinned December's Farpi increase, rising by 2.6 percent month-on-month in response to purchases by Asian buyers, particularly Indonesia, tight availabilities in Vietnam and a further appreciation of the baht against the US dollar, in the case of Thailand."

FAO said glutinous quotations remained close to their November levels, while aromatic and japonica prices eased by a further 2.6 and 0.6 percent, respectively.

The latest results of the Farpi were released together with FAO's report on world commodity prices in December 2023.

The FAO Food Price Index, which tracks monthly changes in the international prices of a set of globally-traded food commodities, averaged 118.5 points in December, down 1.5 percent from November and down 10.1 percent from December 2022.

For 2023 as a whole, the index was 13.7 percent lower than the average value over the preceding year, with only the international sugar price index higher over the period.

The FAO Cereal Price Index went up by 1.5 percent from November, as wheat, maize, rice, and barley prices all rose, partly reflecting logistical disruptions that hindered shipments from major exporting countries.

"For the year as a whole, the index was 15.4 percent below the 2022 average, reflecting well supplied global markets, although FAO's All Rice Price Index (part of the FAO Cereal Price Index) registered a 21 percent increase, largely owing to concerns about the impact of El Niño on rice production and in the aftermath of export restrictions imposed by India."

The FAO Sugar Price Index declined 16.6 percent from November, hitting a nine-month low although still up 14.9 percent from December 2022.

"The plunge in sugar quotations was mainly driven by the strong pace of production in Brazil, along with reduced use of sugarcane for ethanol production in India."

The FAO Meat Price Index dipped 1.0 percent from November, reaching a level 1.8 percent below that of December 2022, due to "persistent weak import demand" from Asia for pig meat. Regional buying interest also slowed for bovine and poultry meat despite ample exportable supplies in large producing regions.

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Argentina pushes to get out of farming time warp with better GMO seeds

ARGENTINA is seeking to make its decades-old rules governing patented seed technology fit for the modern era, a move that would allow it to compete with agriculture powerhouse rivals Brazil and the United States.

As part of new President Javier Milei's sweeping reforms to liberalize the economy, seed companies including Syngenta Group Co. Ltd., Corteva Inc. and Bayer AG would be able to charge farmers royalties. That would bring investments to Argentina and give the nation access to the latest genetically modified seeds.

An arcane law dating to the 1970s protects farmers from having to pay annual fees to seed companies. As a result, they have been left behind while neighboring Brazil has produced record crops year after year. Without the newest strains,

Argentine soybean yields are about 17 percent lower than in Brazil and the US, according to analysts at the Rosario Board of Trade.

Changing the rules would be "a huge step," said Pablo Vaquero, a distributor of cotton seeds. "We've been falling behind Brazil and the US for years and now they wipe the floor with us."

Argentina usually is the largest exporter of soy meal and soy oil, the third-biggest exporter of corn and a top global wheat supplier. But its agriculture industry has been in steady decline as governments heavily taxed farmers and meddled with exports. Most farmers voted for libertarian Milei in a bid to reverse the predicament.

The president's package includes signing Argentina on to the latest global convention—from 1991—protecting more compre-

hensively the intellectual property rights of seed breeders. It is set to face resistance in congress, where Milei's party is a minority.

While the current state of affairs would seem to save farmers money, it's effectively placed the Pampas crop belt in a time warp where they plant outdated strains that yield less than their rivals abroad.

At a soy conference in September, Juan Jose Blanchard, head of Latin America at Louis Dreyfus Co., underscored how the seed technology problem has contributed to the crop industry's decline.

"Do you know how many serious programs there are today in Argentina for improving soy genetics?" said Blanchard, an Argentine. "One, two, three maximum. In Brazil there's a minimum of 30. So if we stay where we are, the gap between Argentina and Brazil in

farm productivity is going to get wider and wider."

If the package goes through, implementation of the seed rules would be at the discretion of local lawmakers and policymakers, said Rodolfo Rossi, a former seed scientist who heads soy association Acsoja.

Previous governments tried and failed to charge farmers for seeds reaped from one harvest and used to plant the next.

For a few years from 2016, Argentina even allowed Monsanto Co.—later acquired by Bayer—to test soy cargoes for its Intacta technology and try to collect royalties. In 2021, Bayer exited the Argentine soy seed business, citing global strategy changes and a redirecting of investments in the country to "profitable" projects.

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