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## PH bans poultry imports from Belgium, France

By CHINO S. LEYCO

**T**he Department of Agriculture (DA) imposed a ban on the importation of all poultry products from Belgium and France in response to the recent outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in domestic birds in these European nations.

In a statement, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. said the import bans, which also cover wild birds, imposed on the neighboring European countries were necessary to prevent the possible entry of HPAI-H5N1 into the Philippines.

H5N1 is a strain of virus responsible for avian influenza, commonly known as bird flu.

"We're doing this to protect the health of our local poultry population as well as poultry workers and

consumers since H5N1 is a virus that can be transmitted to humans by infected animals," Laurel said.

Belgium and France both reported outbreaks of bird flu in domestic birds to the WOAAH almost simultaneously, with the former submitting its report on Dec. 1, 2023, and the latter on Nov. 30, 2023.

The DA's ban will immediately stop the importation of domestic and wild birds from Belgium and France.

These indefinite import bans also prohibit the entry of Belgian and French poultry products, including poultry meat, day-old chicks, hatching eggs, and poultry semen into the Philippines, effective Jan. 8, 2024.

Meat imports that were already in transit, loaded, or accepted before the ban will still be permitted to enter the country if the poultry were slaughtered or the products were produced on or before Nov. 12,

2023, in the case of France, and Nov. 16, 2023, for Belgium.

However, all imports after the specified dates will not be considered upon arrival in the country, except for heat-treated products.

In 2022, the Philippines saw a 1.57 percent rise in total poultry meat imports compared to 2021, amounting to 411,070 metric tons valued at \$468.4 million. Belgium contributed 2.60 percent of the total imports, while no poultry meat was imported from France.

By 2023, the Philippines' poultry meat imports reached 426,620 metric tons valued at \$418.13, marking a 3.78 percent increase from 2022.

France and Belgium accounted for 0.01 percent and 0.59 percent, respectively, of the total imports.

The DA said that the import bans will remain in effect unless revoked by the agency.





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## Not a single baby step toward agricultural renaissance

If the measurement of a country's gross domestic product (GDP) is based on a certain metric called purchasing power parity (the other PPP acronym in economics, public-private partnership, is the more popular one) and not on nominal GDP, China would be No. 1, not the United States. China may have been overtaken by India as the most populous country on the planet, but it still has 1.4 billion people to feed. China is also the world's top manufacturing power, the "factory to the world." Agriculture may be important to China, but it is in manufacturing prowess where it truly excels.

I am citing this backgrounder for a reason.

The Philippines, with its 115 million people and its sluggish manufacturing sector, is expected to top China's rice imports for 2023 — 3.8 million metric tons (MT) against China's 3.5 million MT. We imported that much rice in 2022, part of a pattern of over-the-top rice imports recorded since 2019, the year the Senate and the House of Representatives mindlessly passed the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) and on the say-so of the executive branch. From 2019 to 2023, we have had only two rankings in global rice importation: the top importer or the second placer. Mindless, reckless importation and greed-driven.

Things will not change in 2024. In the first few weeks of 2024, local seaports will be busy handling an initial 500,000 metric tons of rice imports, an emergency move to plug dwindling supplies. And



### MIDWEEK COMMENTS

**MARLEN V.  
RONQUILLO**

so that the public and the whole world will not see the grim and embarrassing optics of rice queues at the public markets. Rice queues are a particularly embarrassing optic for any administration.

We can provide both a moral and economic justification for this embarrassing place in the global rice market if we excel in other areas. But there is none. We are neither an economic nor intellectual powerhouse. We have no viable manufacturing sector to speak of. We are a century behind in the development of fabs for producing the valued computer chips. We are a global laggard in competitiveness. In fact, we are infamous for notching a record of educational mediocrity, and two PISA rankings have validated that. A wag said, "Why are not Filipinos the top Pornhub visitors?" Of course, that kind of useless exercise does not count, nor is it something we should be proud of.

This is an important aside, so forgive me if I veer off a bit. Our two economic pillars are two acronyms: the OFWs and the BPOs. These are two sectors without government incentives that grow on their own. In fact, the Train law even punished our world-class technology experts who staff the hardcore components of BPO work, such as program-

ming, automation and network engineering. From their ROHQ tax rate of 15 percent before the law, Train imposed a tax increase of 10 percent on these hard-to-find, hard-to-train technology talents. Scores of hardcore tech workers left for overseas jobs after the Train tax increase, opting to become roving "digital nomads" instead of working — and also spending — in a place that does not even recognize their hard-to-find talent.

After rice, the staple food, the second most important agri commodity is yellow corn, on which the animal feeds industry for hog, livestock, egg and fishery production is heavily dependent. For 2023, the projected volume of yellow corn imports is about 1 million MT. A still out-of-control African swine fever (ASF) epidemic, which defenestrated my backyard hog farm in 2022, recently wiped out a dozen starter piglets of my neighbor who hoped against hope that the ASF was gone and he could start anew his backyard raising. That scene of death and defenestration of small hog farms is one playing out in many rural areas of the country, prey to an ASF that is still running amuck long after the 11 original countries with ASF had licked theirs. You know what country developed the first vaccines in Southeast Asia? Vietnam, which only started to rebuild the war-ravaged country in 1975.

Last month, the daughter of another farmer-neighbor posted P10-per-kilogram tomatoes on her social media page. Better than

throwing the tomatoes away. In Benguet, according to news reports, carrots are being given away because prices sank to P1 per kg. Better than seeing them in a state of rot. Not even a state of pricing equilibrium can be enjoyed by the small farmers, which is a simple mandate that the government can easily do.

You see all these depressing developments in the agriculture sector and then your mind goes back to the middle of 2022 and the promise by the political leadership of an agricultural springtime. At this point in 2024, you expected that promise to translate into a few baby steps taken to fulfill that grand vow for the sector's renaissance. Then you realize that not a single baby step has been taken to that promised land. Nada. Zero. Zilch.

Excuse the "po" and "opo," but these were the exact answers I got when I asked about the current state of affairs at the [Department of Agriculture](#). I asked precisely what the new [secretary](#), the billionaire [Francis Tiu Laurel](#), has been doing. These were the exact quotes. First, humihingi po ng data. Second, nag-rereorgazine daw po. Goodness gracious man, leave your safe perch, hit the ground running and go to the areas of deep depression. When the recently retired Agriculture undersecretary Ding Panganiban was in his 30s, he received a TOYM award when the TOYM was the most coveted prize for overachieving young people, for solving the rat infestation in the rice fields of the Central Plains — boots on the ground, solving crises in real-time.





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## DA again bans poultry from Belgium, France

THE Department Agriculture (DA) has reimposed a temporary ban on the importation of poultry products from Belgium and France following outbreaks of avian influenza or bird flu in both countries.

In a statement on Tuesday, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said the import ban was necessary to prevent the spread of the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), particularly the H5N1 subtype

"We're doing this to protect the health of our local poultry population as well as poultry workers and consumers since H5N1 is a virus that can be transmitted to humans by infected animals," Laurel said.

The DA imposed an import ban of poultry products from Belgium in February that was later lifted in June 2023.

Poultry imports from France, meanwhile, were initially banned in 2021. Importation from the said country was again allowed in September 2023.

A report submitted by both countries to the World Organization for Animal Health said there were several outbreaks of H5N1-HPAI affecting domestic birds. Belgium submitted its report on Dec. 1, 2023, while France did so

on Nov. 30, 2023.

"The DA's imposition of the ban will immediately stop the acquisition of both domesticated and wild birds from Belgium and France," the Agriculture department said.

"The indefinite import bans also prevent traders from bringing in Belgian and French poultry products including poultry meat, day-old chicks, hatching eggs, and poultry semen into the Philippines starting Jan. 8, 2024," it added

Shipments from France that were already in transit and were slaughtered or produced before Nov. 12, 2023 will be allowed to enter the country. In the case of Belgium, these will be for goods produced before Nov. 16, 2023.

The Philippines' total importation of poultry meat was 411,070 metric tons in 2022 and valued at \$468,455,990. This was higher by 1.57 percent compared to 2021.

Of the total, 2.60 percent originated from Belgium, while no imports were recorded from France.

Last year, 426,620 metric tons of poultry meat worth \$418,130,353 were imported. France and Belgium accounted for 0.01 percent and 0.59 percent, respectively.

**JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL**



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## DA bans entry of poultry products from Belgium, France

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has banned the importation of poultry and other poultry products, including wild birds from Belgium and France.

DA said the move was made after the two European countries reported to the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) their respective outbreaks of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in domestic birds.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said the bans were necessary to prevent the possible entry of HPAI-H5N1

in the Philippines.

"We're doing this to protect the health of our local poultry population as well as poultry workers and consumers since H5N1 is a virus that can be transmitted to humans by infected animals," Laurel said.

DA added that Belgium and France that shares a border, almost simultaneously reported the bird flu outbreak in domestic birds to the WOAH.

Belgium submitted its report on December 1, 2023 while France on November 30, 2023.

DA's imposition of the ban will immediately stop the acquisition

of both domesticated and wild birds from Belgium and France while also preventing traders from bringing in Belgian and French poultry products including poultry meat, day-old chicks, hatching eggs and poultry semen into the Philippines starting last Monday.

However, meat imports already in transit, loaded or accepted before the ban will still be allowed to enter the country if the poultry were slaughtered or the products were produced on or before November 12, 2023 in the case of France and November 16, 2023 for Belgium.

All imports after the said dates will not be considered upon arrival in the country, except for heat-treated products.

DA said the import bans will continue unless revoked.

Based on data from the Bureau of Animal Industry, from January to November 2023, the Philippines imported a total of 1,870,203 kg of chicken from Belgium equivalent to 0.48 percent of the 393,288,739 kg total chicken imports of the Philippines for the period.

The Philippines did not purchase any chicken meat from France for the period.





## DA bans importation of poultry products from Belgium, France amid bird flu fears

By JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ

[@joveemarie](#)

**T**HE Department of Agriculture (DA) banned the importation of live poultry and poultry products, including wild birds, from Belgium and France following reports of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) outbreaks in domestic birds in the two European nations.

The bans are in response to notifications made to the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) by Belgium on December 1, 2023, and France on November

30, 2023.

In a statement on Tuesday, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. emphasized the necessity of the import bans to prevent the potential introduction of HPAI-H5N1 into the Philippines.

"We're doing this to protect the health of our local poultry population as well as poultry workers and consumers since H5N1 is a virus that can be transmitted to humans by infected animals," he said.

Belgium and France, which share a border, almost simultaneously reported the bird flu outbreak in domestic birds to the WOAH. Belgium submitted its report on December 1, 2023 while

France on November 30, 2023.

The DA's imposition of the ban will immediately stop the acquisition of both domesticated and wild birds from Belgium and France. The indefinite import bans also prevent traders from bringing in Belgian and French poultry products, including poultry meat, day-old chicks, hatching eggs, and poultry semen into the Philippines starting January 8, 2024.

Exceptions will be made for meat imports already in transit, loaded, or accepted before the ban, provided that the poultry was slaughtered or the products were produced on or before November 12, 2023 (for France) and November 16, 2023 (for Belgium). All imports beyond these dates, excluding heat-treated

products, will not be considered upon arrival in the country.

According to data, the Philippines' total importation of poultry meat in 2022 witnessed a 1.57 percent increase compared to 2021, reaching 411,070 metric tons valued at \$468,455,990. Belgium constituted 2.60 percent of the overall imports, with no recorded imports from France.

In 2023, Philippine importation of poultry meat reached 426,620 metric tons valued at \$418,130,353 which is a 3.78 percent increase compared to 2022. France and Belgium account for 0.01 percent and 0.59 percent respectively of total imports.

The DA said the import bans would continue unless revoked by the agency.



## Mga manok mula Belgium, France binawal sa 'Pinas

Ipinagbawal ng Department of Agriculture (DA) ang pag-aangkat ng mga manok, kabilang ang mga wild bird mula sa Belgium at France matapos mapaulat na laganap ang Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) doon.

Sinabi ni Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. na ang importan na ipinataw sa mga kalapit na bansa sa Europa ay kinakailangan upang maiwasan ang

posibleng pagpasok ng HPAI-H5N1 sa Pilipinas.

"We're doing this to protect the health of our local poultry population as well as poultry workers and consumers since H5N1 is a virus that can be transmitted to humans by infected animals," pahayag ni Laurel.

Ang Belgium at France, ay sabay na nagulat ng paglaganap ng bird flu sa mga domestic bird sa World Organization for Animal Health

(WOAH).

Pinagbabawalan din sa 'indefinite import bans' ang mga mangangalakal na magdala ng Belgian at French poultry products kabilang ang poultry meat, day-old chicks, hatching egg, at poultry semen sa Pilipinas simula noong Lunes, Enero 8.

Batay sa datos noong 2022, tumaas ng 1.57 porsiyento ang kabuuang importasyon ng Pilipinas ng poultry meat kumpara noong 2021, na

may 411,070 metric tons na nagkakahalaga ng 468,455,990 US dollars.

Noong 2023, ang importasyon ng Pilipinas ng poultry meat ay umabot sa 426,620 metric tons na nagkakahalaga ng 418,130,353 US dollars na tumaas ng 3.78 percent kumpara noong 2022.

Sinabi ng DA na magpapatuloy ang importan maliban na lang kung bawiin. **(Dolly Cabreza/Eileen Mencias)**





**Poultry products mula Belgium at France, bawal - DA**

Ban na sa Pilipinas ang importasyon ng poultry at iba pang poultry products kasama na ang wild birds mula sa bansang Belgium at France makaraang maiulat ng World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) na ang mga ito ay may outbreaks ng Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) sa domestic birds.

Ayon kay Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. ang pagbawal sa naturang mga kalakal ay kailangan upang maiwasan ang posibleng pagpasok ng HPAI-H5N1 sa Pilipinas.

"We're doing this to protect the health of our local poultry population as well as poultry workers and consumers since H5N1 is a virus that can be transmitted to humans by infected animals," sabi ni Laurel.

Ang indefinite import ban ay makakaiwas din na maipasok ng mga

negosyante ang Belgian at French poultry products kabilang na ang poultry meat, day-old chicks, hatching eggs, at poultry semen sa Pilipinas.

Noong 2023, ang Philippine importation ng poultry meat ay umaabot ng 426,620 metric tons na may halagang

US\$418,130,353 o 3.78 percent na taas kumpara noong 2022.

Umaabot sa 0.01 percent poultry products ang imports ng Pilipinas sa France at sa Belgium ay may 0.59 percent total imports. Ang ban ay patuloy na ipatutupad hangga't hindi ito inaalis ng DA. (Angie dela Cruz)





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## DA chief opens office for dialogue with regional councils

**AGRICULTURE Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.** opened his office for a dialogue with regional councils, which gave him a clearer perspective on pursuing agricultural modernization.

Laurel on Monday, met a group from the agricultural and fisheries sector who offered recommendations and inputs about the real situation of the land.

Following the meeting, the DA chief announced that a 10-point agenda is now being finalized to address issues holding back the progress of the country's farm sector and its stakeholders, particularly farmers and fisherfolk.

He said more infrastructures, including warehouses, seaports, food terminals, and roads, will be built to help bring down the cost of food when they reach consumers.

"The DA is also working towards digitalization and a thorough review of the minimum access volume to

rationalize food importation," he added.

Laurel also welcomed the private sector's push for greater spending on agricultural infrastructure and mechanization to hasten the farm sector's modernization, increase productivity, and ensure the country is food secure.

The recommendations presented by the councils were varied and included issues affecting the production of rice, fish, and other aquatic resources, poultry and livestock, corn and feed crops, high value crops including rubber and fiber crops, coconut, as well as domestic trade and mechanization.

Among the recommendations of the regional councils are the establishment of cold storage facilities for vegetables, including onions, as well as laboratories for biosecurity concerns and the construction of farm-to-market roads or other modes for faster movement of agricultural products. **Joel dela Torre**

# REMATE

## ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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### Importasyon ng manok, poultry products mula Belgium at France bawal muna

**IPINAGBAWAL** ng gobyerno ng Pilipinas sa pamamagitan ng Department of Agriculture (DA) ang importasyon ng manok at iba pang poultry products mula Belgium at France sa gitna ng outbreak ng bird flu sa mga nasabing bansa.

Sinabi ng DA na ang poultry ban ay ipinalabas kasunod ng pag-uulat ng Belgium at France ng kani-kanilang outbreaks sa Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza sa domestic birds sa World Organization for Animal Health.

Tinuran pa ng departamento na ang Belgium at France, nagsi-share ng border, halos magkasabay na nag-ulat ng bird flu outbreak sa domestic birds sa WOA.

Sa katunayan, isinumite ng Belgium ang report nito noong Disyembre 1, 2023, habang ang France naman ay nagsumite noong Nobyembre 30, 2023.

Winika ng Agriculture Department na ang pagbabawal sa poultry at poultry products mula sa dalawang nabanggit na bansa ay kailangan para mapigilan ang posibleng pagpasok ng HPAI-H5N1 sa Pilipinas.

"We're doing this to protect the health of our local poultry population as well as poultry workers and consumers since H5N1 is a virus that can be transmitted to humans by infected animals," ayon kay Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel.

Sakop ng 'ban' ang pagkuha kapuwa ng domesticated at wild birds at maging ng poultry products kabilang na ang "poultry meat, day-old chicks, hatching eggs, at poultry semen" mula sa Belgium at France simula pa nito lamang Enero 8, 2024.

Ang paglilinaw naman ng DA "meat imports already in transit, loaded or accepted before the ban will still be allowed to enter the country if the poultry were slaughtered or the products were produced on or before November 12, 2023 in the case of France, and November 16, 2023 for Belgium."

"All imports after the above-mentioned dates will not be considered upon arrival in the country, except for heat-treated products," ayon pa rin sa DA.

Makikita naman sa data ng DA na noong 2022, ang kabuuang importasyon ng Pilipinas sa poultry meat ay tumaas ng 1.57%

kumpara noong 2021, na may 411,070 metric tons na nagkakahalaga ng \$468,455,990.

Ang Belgium naman ay mayroong 2.60% ng overall arrivals, habang wala namang importasyon na naitala mula sa France.

Noong 2023, umabot sa 426,620 metric tons na nagkakahalaga ng \$418,130,353 ang poultry meat ang inangkat ng Pilipinas, tumaas ito ng 3.78% mula 2023.

Ang France ay mayroong 0.01% habang ang Belgium naman ay mayroong 0.59% para sa kanilang kabuuang pag-angkat.

Sinabi ng DA na magpapatuloy ang 'import bans' maliban na lamang kung babawiin ng departamento.

**KRIS JOSE**



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## Farmers want tariffication review, cool to rice SRP

By RAMON EFREN LAZARO

SAN MIGUEL, Bulacan – Farmers in Central Luzon, considered as the rice granary of the Philippines, are calling for the abolition or review of the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).

Simeon Sioson, chairman of 4SM Multipurpose Farmers Cooperative, noted that rice prices have surged since the implementation of the law.

Another farmers' group supported the call while expressing doubts about providing suggest-

ed retail prices (SRP) for rice.

Sioson noted that prior to the implementation of the RTL, regular milled rice was sold at P27 per kilo and well milled rice at P32 per kilo in retail stores accredited by the National Food Authority (NFA).

Proponents of the RTL said rice prices in the local market could still go down compared to the NFA rice's selling price at the time, according to Sioson.

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## Farmers

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Sioson lamented that rice prices have almost doubled, to the advantage of rice smugglers and hoarders.

"It is about time that lawmakers review or repeal the law, which burdens consumers who have to deal with the rising cost of rice," he said.

Raul Montemayor, national chairman of the Federation of Free Farmers, supported the call to review the provisions of the law.

He said lawmakers should implement measures for the government to "engage in direct importation and sale of subsidized rice through dedicated outlets."

Earlier, the Department of Agriculture (DA) announced that the government could release the suggested retail price (SRP) of rice next week amid the spike in the prices of the staple.

Montemayor said an SRP could eventually lead to a price cap if price increases cannot be controlled.

"It's hard to enforce. The imposition of the SRP is a sign that the government cannot do anything to decrease rice prices."

Montemayor said a price cap on rice should be realistic and based on the prices of palay and milling costs.

He said if rice retailers suffer losses, it might lead to a shortage of rice in the markets or mislabeling to go around the price cap and government might be forced to again give *ayuda* or cash aid.

### IRR for buffer fund

Meanwhile, the DA has created a technical working group (TWG) to prepare the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) on the provision of the Price Act which allocates a buffer fund.

In a special order, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. tasked the TWG to draft the IRR to implement Section 9 of the Price Act relating to agricultural products.

Republic Act 7581 or the Price Act was enacted to stabilize the supply and prices of basic necessities and prime commodities, to safeguard consumers against unreasonable price hikes and ensure fair practices within the market. — With Catherine Talavera



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## ₱20 per kilo of rice still possible this year

AGRI Party-list Rep. Wilbert T. Lee on Tuesday, January 9, expressed confidence that President Marcos' promise of attaining ₱20 per kilo of rice was possible, especially this year.

In renewing his push for the passage of House Bill No. 9020 or the "Cheaper Rice Act," Lee said he was confident that Marcos' promise could still materialize.

Lee renewed his push for the passage of the bill which primarily seeks to establish a "price subsidy program" that would help local farmers ensure their profit and entice them to boost their production.

Under the bill, the Department of Agriculture (DA), in coordination with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and other relevant agencies, will buy palay from farmers at higher prices, and sell the rice to consumers at cheaper rates.

"We see this Cheaper Rice Act as a solution to our aspiration to achieve a ₱20/kilo rice, so this should be turned into a priority measure so it can be enacted into law as soon as possible," Lee said.

Under the proposal, the government will increase the price of rice by ₱5 to ₱10 per kilo, and the government will buy from local farmers so that they will be sure to make money.

"When there is income, they will continue to increase their production," explained Lee.

He also said the measure will address concerns that farmers are forced to sell their land because they are not earning.

"If there is a profit per kilo, no one will think of selling their land. Even their children and youths will be enticed to enter farming," he pointed out. (Hannah Torregoza)





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## IRR draft points to government plan to stockpile food ahead of shortages

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said that it is drafting implementing rules and regulations (IRR) governing the procurement of agricultural goods ahead of a possible tightening of the food supply.

DA Special Order No. 18 creates a technical working group (TWG) to prepare the IRR for Section 9 of Republic Act 7581, or the Price Act, as they apply to food procurement.

Section 9 of the Price Act gives the DA the power to procure, purchase, import, or stockpile basic or prime agricultural commodities.

The IRR will also set the rules for distributing the commodities during shortages or when there is a need to influence market prices.

In a statement on Tuesday, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. said that he

ordered the working group to "develop a clear and concise set of rules to implement Section 9 of the Price Act."

The TWG will also work with the Department of Trade and Industry and other government agencies to develop the IRR.

Consultations will be set with consumer groups and market experts to address their concerns.

"The Price Act was enacted to stabilize the supply and prices

of basic necessities and prime commodities, to safeguard consumers against unreasonable price hikes, and ensure fair practices within the market," the DA said.

The DA has been tasked with monitoring the prices of crops, fish and other marine products, fresh meat, fresh poultry, dairy products, fertilizer and other farm inputs during emergencies. — **Adrian H. Halili**



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## Palay output goal of 20M MT deemed insufficient to satisfy growing demand

FARMERS said that the current target for palay or unmilled rice production is not ambitious enough to meet growing demand for rice, signaling that the government is planning to address shortages with more imports.

"A 20-million-ton output will not even be enough to satisfy the increase in demand, and our deficit and reliance on imports will actually increase," Federation of Free Farmers National Manager Raul Q. Montemayor said in a Viber message.

The national daily consumption rate for rice is equivalent to 679,670 bags or 33,983.5 metric

tons (MT), according to the National Food Authority.

On Monday, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said it wants production to be no less than 20 million MT, equivalent to the previous year's target.

The DA has said that it is expecting 500,000 MT of imported rice to arrive as the government builds up reserves in preparation for the worst of El Niño.

To bring down the prices of imports, the government also extended the lowered tariffs on rice via Executive Order No. 50. Rates for rice imports were kept at 35%, regardless of the mini-

mum access volume and country of origin.

"We are about the same or higher than last year. So, 20 million MT is not impossible but (will depend on) timing of irrigation and early planting," former Agriculture Undersecretary Fermín D. Adriano said in a Viber message.

Last year, the DA similarly projected that palay production would hit 20 million MT due to the increase in land area planted to rice.

"If the El Niño results is delayed or we receive reduced rainfall in the second quarter, it will

reduce available water in dams for irrigation and prevent or delay planting in rainfed areas," Mr. Montemayor said.

Separately, Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura Executive Director Jayson H. Cainglet said that dry spells occurring in Nueva Ecija would pose a risk to production as the province accounts for 3-5% of national output.

"If Nueva Ecija experiences dry spells, this would have a big impact on production, because (the province) is a major rice producing area," he said in a Viber message.

The government weather service, known as PAGASA (Philip-

pine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration), has said that El Niño's intense phase could run until the second quarter and bring droughts or dry spells to 63 provinces.

Meanwhile, Mr. Montemayor said that wet season harvest starts in May, running until late September or November, and may be vulnerable to El Niño as well.

"This wet season crop will be the most vulnerable to El Niño and we could again experience tight supply and price spikes in August and September like last

year if supplemental imports do not come in," he added.

A surge in the price of rice in Philippine markets prompted the government to implement price controls last year.

Executive Order No. 39, capped rice prices at P41 per kilogram (kg) for regular-milled rice and P45 per kg for well-milled rice. Price controls ran from Sept. 5 to Oct. 4, 2023.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., who was the agriculture secretary at the time, cited hoarding and price manipulation as behind the higher prices. — **Adrian H. Halili**



## editorial

# Volatile environment for global rice prices

**A**LMOST a year into the conflict in Eastern Europe, which started when Russia attacked Ukraine, rice prices in the Philippines were relatively stable, based on figures released by the Department of Agriculture on January 5, 2023. In its regular price monitoring, figures from the agency showed that regular milled rice ranged from P34 per kilo to P40 per kilo in markets in the National Capital Region. More importantly, the cheapest rice variety was available in all NCR markets monitored by the DA.

Based on the same data set from the agency, the price of imported regular milled rice was slightly higher and averaged at P37.50 per kilo. Aside from being slightly expensive, the imported variant was available only in Malabon Central Market. The costlier imports—well milled and premium rice—were sold in all markets visited by the agency.

The average cost of local regular milled rice on January 5, 2023 did not breach the P40-per-kilo mark despite the spike in the price of inputs, particularly fertilizer, and fuel prices due to the war in Eastern Europe. This happened despite the slight decline in domestic unmilled rice production and restrictions put in place by exporters, such as India, in 2022. According to data from the Philippine Rice Research Institute, Philippine palay output in 2022 reached 19.76 million metric tons, lower than the 19.96 MMT in 2021.

In 12 months, the price of the same rice variety that is widely consumed by Filipinos will jump to an average of P51.50 per kilo, based on data from the DA. The average price of regular milled rice as of January 5 was more expensive by P14.50 compared with the 2023 level. What's worrisome, based on data released by the agency, is that the cheapest variety was available only in four markets out of the 29 markets it monitored last week.

The cheapest imported variant—regular milled rice—was not available. The well milled and premium rice sourced from abroad were more expensive than those produced locally, based on figures from the DA. Prices averaged P54.50 per kilo and P58 per kilo for well milled and premium rice, respectively.

Poor weather, concerns over the impact of El Niño on output and trade restrictions have combined to put pressure on international rice prices. In a report last December, Bloomberg reported that 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. **(See "Rice prices scale fresh 15-year high as supply risks linger," in the BUSINESSMIRROR, December 25, 2023).** The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations also reported that international rice prices jumped by more than a fifth in 2023.

These factors plus the continued increase in the price of inputs due to the conflict in Eastern Europe are now punishing Filipino consumers in the form of high prices. It would do well for the DA to see to it that mechanisms are in place to prevent unscrupulous traders from unduly taking advantage of consumers. These mechanisms should include measures that would stop them from hoarding rice supply in their bid to increase their profits.





## Wholesale presyo ng bigas sumipa noong Disyembre

**Abante**  
**NEGOSYO**

PUMAPALO na sa P45.83 per kilo ang wholesale price ng regular milled rice noong Disyembre mula sa P43.88 per kilo noong Nobyembre habang uma-bot na sa P49.11 per kilo ang whole-sale price naman ng well milled rice mula P47.31, ayon sa datos ng Philip-pine Statistics Authority.

Samantala, tinala naman ng **Department of Agriculture** ang presyo ng local well milled rice sa P40-P55 per kilo sa mga palengkeng iniikutan nito sa Metro Manila at P50-P58 per kilo naman para sa well milled na im-ported rice.

Kumpara sa nakaraang taon, 30.8% na ang inakyat ng wholesale price ng regular milled rice at 28.6% naman sa well milled rice.

Mas mahal ang retail price ng bigas dahil pinapatungan pa ito ng mga re-tailer na binibili ang bigas sa whole-salers.

Walang nakitang regular milled rice ang DA sa mga palengke ng Metro Ma-nila noong January 8 samantalang P43-P55 per kilo naman ang presyo ng lo-cal na well milled rice na nakita nito.

Walang nakikitang epekto ang pinaplanong pagpataw ng suggested retail price sa bigas ang Samahang In-dustriya ng Agrikultura.

Ayon kay SINAG Executive Direc-tor Jayson Cainglet, nasa mga traders na ang mga palay at mahal na rin ang imported rice. Sa pananaw ni Cainglet, P46-P54 per kilo lamang ang dapat na presyo ng bigas. **(Eileen Mencias)**



# REMATE

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### IMPORTED AGRI-PRODUCTS VS. LOCAL FARMERS

**MISTULANG** parang kendi na ipinamumudmod sa mga bata ang ginawa ng mga magsasaka sa Benguet noong Disyembre makaraang ipamigay nito ang ilang gulay tulad ng carrots sa taumbayan bunsod sa walang mamimili dulot nang bumaha na imported na gulay sa mga merkadong saksakan ng mura.



Marami pa rin ang nabulok sa kabila nang pamamahagi nito sa mga dumarayo sa Baguio City dahil na rin sa napakaraming ani ng mga tagaroon kaya naman malaki ang nawalang puhunan at kita ng mga magsasaka.

Ilan pa kayang magsasaka sa bansa ang nakararanas din ng ganitong kalagayan na kung hindi binabarat ng middlemen ang ani nila ay wala nang mapagbentahan ng mga gulay dahil sa napakababang presyo ng mga umaangkat?

Ipalagay pa na nating kailangan ding

mag-import ng agricultural products na 'yan tulad ng bigas, karne at iba pa subalit hangga't hindi natutuldukan ang pagpupuslit sa bansa ng pangunahing pagkain, hindi rin maibebenta ang mga lokal na produkto sa makatwirang presyo bunsod sa napakamura ng mga ilegal na bilihin na 'yan na tinatangkilik naman ng taumbayan.

Batid ng bawat isa na malinis ang hangarin ni Pangulong Bongbong Marcos na umangkat ng mga produkto upang may pagkaing sapat ang mamamayan ngunit

habang hindi natitigil ang sindikato sa loob ng **Department of Agriculture** na matagal nang pinasisilip ng Pangulo, hindi rin maiaangat ang sektor ng agrikultura sa bansa.

Ibig sabihin, kailangang putulin muna ang ugat ng kutsabahan sa DA at Bureau of Customs upang tuluyan nang maging makatotohanan ang nais mangyari ni PBBM na pagpapalakas ng magsasaka't mangingisda sa bansang sagot naman ng self-sufficiency sa usapin ng pagkain.



## IRONY: RICE PRICIER IN AREAS WITH HIGHER POVERTY RATES

**W**HOLESALE rice prices were high in regions that recorded poverty rates above the national average, according to the latest data released by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

The PSA said wholesale regular milled rice prices nationwide averaged P45.83 per kilo. This was a 30.8-percent year-on-year growth rate.

The highest was in Central Visayas at P54.21 per kilo. The poverty rate in the region was at 31 percent in the first semester of 2023, higher than the 22.4 percent national average.

Other regions that recorded high regular milled rice prices were the Davao region and Bicol region that saw wholesale prices average P49.06 per kilo and P48.43 per kilo.

Poverty incidence in the Davao region was at 27.2 percent and in Bicol region at 32.9 percent in the first six months of 2023.

Wholesale regular milled rice prices in Central Visayas posted a 40.9-percent increase in December 2023; Davao region, 44.7 percent; and Bicol region, 33.9 percent.

Meanwhile, wholesale well-milled rice prices averaged P49.11 per kilo nationwide. The region that recorded the highest cost was also Central Visayas at P57.15 per kilo, which marked a 39.6-percent year-on-year growth.

This was followed by four regions with an average of above P51 per kilo. These regions were Davao, Eastern Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, and Bicol region where the price aver-

aged P51.59 per kilo; P51.39 per kilo; P51.26 per kilo; and P51.08 per kilo, respectively.

In terms of poverty incidence, Eastern Visayas had a poverty rate of 33.7 percent while Zamboanga Peninsula had a poverty incidence of 38.2 percent in the first semester of 2023.

Meanwhile, wholesale rice premium prices averaged P53.23 per kilo. This marked a 27.2-percent year-on-year growth in 2023.

The data showed premium rice prices were highest in Central Visayas and averaged P59.72 per kilo; followed by Bicol region at P56.96 per kilo; Zamboanga Peninsula, P53.96 per kilo; and Cagayan Valley, P53.10 per kilo.

The PSA data also showed that wholesale special rice prices averaged P54.14 per kilo. This marked a 17.4-percent year-on-year growth.

Eastern Visayas recorded the highest average wholesale premium rice prices at P58 per kilo, followed by Cagayan Valley at P57.85 per kilo; and National Capital Region at P56.04 per kilo.

PSA said the monthly data on the wholesale selling prices for agricultural commodities are obtained from the results of the Wholesale Selling Price Survey conducted every week of the reference month.

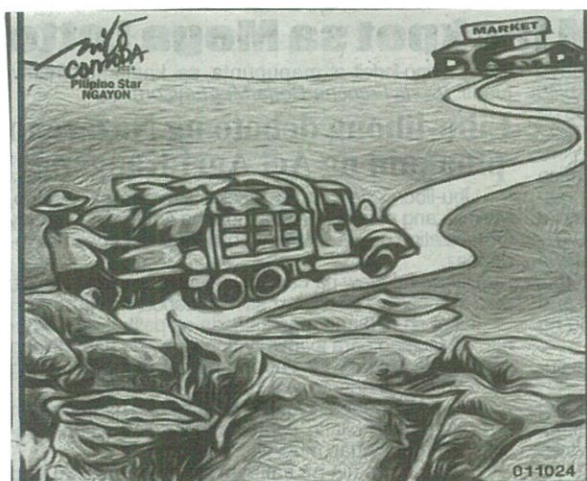
Wholesale price refers to the price of commodity transacted in bulk for further resale or processing. It is the actual "spot" transaction price received usually by the wholesalers, distributors or marketing agents for large lots but net of discounts, allowances, and rebates. *Cai U. Ordinario*



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### **Editorial**

## **Farm-to-market road madadaanan na?**

**I**PINAGMALAKI ni President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. na 51 percent na ng farm-to-market road ang natapos. Sabi ng Presidente, ang dapat daw na maging target ay 131,410.66 kilometers sa anim na taon niyang termino pero sa kasalukuyan, 67,328.92 kilometers na ang naga-gawa. Kaya maaari na raw niyang maireport sa sambayan na 51 percent na ang natatapos sa farm-to-market road mula Aparri hanggang Jolo. Ipinangako ng Presidente na bago matapos ang kanyang termino ay tapos na ang 131,410.66 kilometrong target.

Magandang balita ang sinabi ng Presidente na halos kalahati ng farm-to-market road mula Aparri hanggang Jolo ay tapos na. Ito ang matagal nang hinahangad ng mga magsasaka—ang magkaroon ng kalsada sa mga kanayunan para madaling mailuwas sa kabayanan ang kanilang mga ani. Dahil sa kawalan ng kalsada, matagal bago mailuwas sa kabayanan ang mga aning palay, gulay, prutas at iba pang agri products. Kadalasang nabubulok at nahihinog ang kanilang mga ani at natalo sila sa ginastos sa mga ito. Ang pagkakaroon ng kalsada mula kanayunan patungong palengke sa bayan ay malaking tulong sa mga magsasaka.

Marami nang naging Presidente ng bansa ang nangako ng farm-to-market road pero hindi ito nagkaroon ng katuparan. May mga nagtangkang simulan ang farm-to-market road pero hanggang simula lang. Hindi tinapos at nagsilbing daan ng mga hayop at hindi tao. Dahil hindi sementado kaya lubak-lubak at maputik. Halatang kinurakot ang pondo sa pagpapagawa ng mga kalsada. Ang naging kawawa ay mga magsasaka.

Ang ideya sa pagkakaroon ng farm-to-market road ay inilunsad ni Marcos Jr. isang buwan makaraang makapanumpa sa puwesto noong Hunyo 2022. Sinabi ng Presidente noon na pinag-aaralan na ng kanyang administrasyon ang Farm-to-Market Road Network Program. Ilang araw ang nakalipas, ipinag-utos niya sa mga opisyal ng Department of Agriculture na maglatag ng plano para sa pagpapagawa ng farm-to-market road. Ito aniya ang makatutulong nang malaki sa pagpaparami ng pagkain at para mapalakas ang rural communities. Ito raw ang unang hakbang para malutas ang problema sa pagkain na sa kasalukuyan ay namamayani sa bansa. Kapag naisagawa ang mga kalsada sa kanayunan, magtutuluy-tuloy aniya ang daloy ng pagkain at hindi na kakapusin.

Isa naman sa dapat supilin ng pamahalaan ay ang walang tigil na smuggling ng agri products na lumulumpo sa mga lokal na magsasaka. Sa kasalukuyan, patuloy ang pagdagsa ng mga gulay na imported at ang appektado ay mga magsasaka. Marami sa mga aning gulay ng magsasaka ay hindi nabebenta sapagkat ang mga imported ang nasa mercado. Karamihan sa lokal na ani ay nabubulok lang. Mawawalan ng silbi ang farm-to-market road kung talamak ang agri smuggling.



## FARMERS SUPPORT PEOPLE'S INITIATIVE

A FORMER representative of the agriculture sector in Congress today disclosed that farmers' groups all over the Philippines are among the prime movers of the signature-gathering campaign being conducted nationwide as part of the People's Initiative for constitutional reform.

"We, in the farming sector, are honored to announce our active role in spearheading the People's Initiative. This is a movement deeply rooted in empowering the Filipino people and is supported by the unwavering commitment of our farmers' groups, civic organi-

zations, and local government leaders," said former Rep. Argel Cabatbat of Magsasaka Partylist, who is one of the petitioners for the People's Initiative.

"We have mobilized our leaders and farmers' groups not only in Albay, but in the entire country to get the number of signatures needed for the People's Initiative. We are in close coordination with other people's organizations and local government leaders who are with us in this campaign," Cabatbat pointed out.

Cabatbat made the announcement in response to allegations made by Albay Rep. Edcel Lagman

that mobilization funds had been distributed to mayors of Albay to jumpstart the People's Initiative campaign in the province.

"Much as I respect my former colleague, Manong Edcel, I wish to disabuse his mind that public funds are spent for this purpose. This is an insult to the prime movers of the People's Initiative who spent their own money as well as to private donors who donated the printed forms needed for the signature campaign," Cabatbat said.

"Nag-report sa akin mga lider ng farmers' groups sa Albay at nagulat sila sa akusasyon ni Cong. Edcel. Nakaka-insulto raw

ang paratang na ito dahil sariling sikap ang ginawang mga magsasaka na kumikilos para sa People's Initiative. Hindi raw sila mukhang pera," he added.

Cabatbat explained that farmers' groups are amenable to amending certain provisions of the 1987 in order to help realize an honest-to-goodness modernization program for the agriculture sector.

"More than 36 years have passed, yet the Senate insists on its obstructionist stance to constitutional reforms. It is now time for our people to take direct action and exercise their sovereign will," Cabatbat said.





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# Wheat, maize imports seen rising this year

THE country's wheat and maize or corn imports are expected to increase in 2024 due to growing food consumption in Asia, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said.

In its latest report, the FAO forecast that the Philippines will import about 6.1 million metric tons (MT) of wheat this year or 8.9 percent higher from 2023's estimated volume of 5.6 million MT.

The total global wheat utilization is forecast to rise in 2024 due to an expected growth in the food consumption led by Asia, including the Philippines, the UN agency said.

Wheat intended for feed use is also seen to increase, "while the other uses are anticipated to remain on par with last season's levels," the FAO said.

"Global wheat inventories are forecast to remain near their record-high opening levels by the close of the seasons in 2024," said FAO, projecting the global stock level to hit 315.1 million MT.

"The aggregate stock level of the major exporters is expected to rise, mainly reflecting an increase in stocks in Ukraine and the United States of America," it added.

Ample supplies and strong com-

petition among exporters have contributed to a general downward trend in international wheat prices, which stood at 27 percent below their year-earlier value as of October.

World wheat trade in the marketing year 2023-2024 is predicted at 194.4 million MT, lower from the 200 million MT recorded level in 2022-2023.

Maize imports, meanwhile, is forecast to reach 1.0 million MT, a slight increase from the previous year's 900,000 MT.

FAO said that local corn production may marginally dip to 8.2 million MT in comparison to 8.3 million MT logged last year.

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority showed that local production of corn was recorded at 2.46 million MT from July to September this year, up by 67.42 percent from the previous quarter's 1.47 million MT.

Year on year, corn output in the third quarter was also higher by 4.99 percent than the 2.34 million MT recorded in the same period last year.

Majority of the harvest was yellow corn with an output of 1.72 million MT, or 70.09 percent of total production.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



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## Soybeans, corn steady

CANBERRA - Chicago soybean and corn futures steadied on Tuesday after falling oil prices and improved crop conditions in major producer Brazil dragged them to multi-year lows in the previous trading session.

Wheat futures also rose slightly after a sharp drop on Monday.

The most-active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) was up 0.3 percent at \$12.49-3/4 a bushel after slumping to \$12.36 on Monday, its lowest since December 2021.

CBOT corn dipped 0.1 percent to \$4.54-3/4 a bushel after reaching \$4.52 on Monday, the lowest since December 2020.

Wheat was up 0.4 percent at

\$5.98-3/4 a bushel. It fell 3.2 percent on Monday but remains above September's three-year low of \$5.40.

Oil prices fell 3.4 percent on Monday, dragging down corn and soybeans that are used to make ethanol and biofuels and weighing on wider grain markets. Crude rose by around 0.5 percent on Tuesday.

In Brazil, a key soybean and corn grower, recent and forecast rains have reduced concerns about yield losses as farmers begin to reap 2023/24 crops.

"Brazil's likely weather this week will give the market more comfort with lower corn and soybean prices," said independent analyst Tobin Gorey. - *Reuters*