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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

DA: No SRP for now on rice, agri products

Sweeping – but most welcome changes at the DA

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

Editorial: Cabinet changes

DA drops plan for rice SRP

THE MANILA TIMES

No SRP on rice, other farm products

BUSINESS WORLD

SRP plan ruled out for rice, other farm products

MANILA BULLETIN

DA rejects price control

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT

DA: No to price control

PILIPINO STAR NGAYON

DA ‘di pabor na magtakda ng SRP sa bigas

ABANTE

DA hindi aawatin presyo ng bigas

PEOPLE’S JOURNAL

DA: No SRP for rice, other agro goods

B. DA FAMILY

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

PH taps IP farms to boost dairy output

THE MANILA TIMES

*Photo:* Import ban

Dairy authority partner’s wit NCIP

BUSINESS MIRROR

Group urges DA to protect local fish producers amid El Niño fears

MANILA TIMES

We need to plant and eat (and get a bigger DA budget for\_ more vegetables

C. AGRI-RELATED STORY

*No stories*

D. FOREIGN STORY

BUSINESS WORLD

Bird flu found in mammals near Antarctica for the first time, scientists say

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT

Soybeans rebound





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## Planned SRP on rice scrapped

There is no need to impose suggested retail prices (SRP) on farm products, particularly rice, despite rising retail prices and ahead of an expected decline in local harvest due to the El Niño weather phenomenon. "We're not doing it," Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said on Thursday, adding that the plan floated last week "was just an idea based on available remedies" under the Price Act. —STORY BY JORDEENE B. LAGARE **A6**

# DA: No SRP for now on rice, agri products

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**  
@jordeenelagare

The Department of Agriculture (DA) rejected on Thursday a proposal to set a suggested retail price (SRP) for rice a few days after an official earlier hinted at the move to tame price surges.

In a statement, the DA said it was not considering the imposition of an SRP on farm products, particularly rice.

"We're not doing it," Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said. "Prices of rice and other agricultural products in international markets like Thailand and other countries are volatile and fluctuating due to El Niño. Hence, we're not suggesting to control prices at the moment," he added.

According to Laurel, international rice prices are fluctuating as countries try to increase their reserves through importation following concerns about a potential drop in harvest due to an expected strong El Niño episode.

The Philippines is one of the world's biggest rice importers, making it vulnerable to fluctuations in the global prices. It has been relying on importation over the past year as local production cannot



**UNNECESSARY MOVE** Calling it counterproductive, the Department of Agriculture has ruled out at the moment imposing suggested retail prices on farm products, including rice which has been hit by price surges. —GRIG C. MONTEGRANDE

meet local demand.

Over the weekend, DA spokesperson Arnel de Mesa said the department was studying setting an SRP for rice, which was selling for around P50 per kilogram (kg) as of this writing.

But Laurel said this "was just an idea based on available remedies" provided to them under Republic Act No. 7581 or the Price Act.

### Voluntary in nature

Under the law, suggested retail prices may be implemented to guide producers, manufacturers, traders, dealers, sellers,

retailers and consumers on the pricing of basic necessities and prime commodities.

Vendors are not required to follow the SRP prescribed by the government since it is voluntary in nature although it can help consumers determine if they are being overcharged.

"I'm well aware that setting retail prices, even if just suggested, for particular goods tend to be counterproductive, especially when there is ample supply," Laurel said.

"In most cases, farmers bear the brunt of a price limit because traders will only lower their purchase prices to keep

their margins. Consumers also don't benefit in such a situation. It could also fuel price speculation and supply hoarding that evolves into another problem altogether," he added.

Upon the recommendation of the implementing agency, the President may impose a price cap in case of a calamity, emergency, prevalence or widespread acts of illegal price manipulation, or artificial and unreasonable price hikes.

As of Thursday, local regular milled rice per kilogram was being sold from P50 to P53, compared to P34 to P40 a year ago, based on the DA's price monitoring of Metro Manila markets.

Local well-milled rice per kg, on the other hand, was priced from P49 to P55, higher than P38 to P44 last year.

Imported regular milled rice was not available but imported well-milled rice ranged from P50 to P58 per kg compared to P40 to P44 previously.

The DA said it was working double time to ensure an ample supply of rice and other agricultural products in the wake of a potential prolonged dry spell caused by El Niño. It was also taking steps to mitigate the weather phenomenon's impact on farm output. **INQ**



Date: JAN. 12, 2004 Page: B1



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## Sweeping—but most welcome—changes at the DA

**W**ill the new Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu-Laurel, Jr. succeed in achieving his goal of a transformed agriculture? To do so, he must address the opportunity—or obstacle, depending on how you see it—that lies between him and his goal: the Department of Agriculture (DA). The DA certainly has many good points, but there is still much to be done.

Last Jan. 5, true to his pronouncement that he would significantly involve the private sector in governance, Laurel met with the leaders of the legislated public-private Philippine Council of Agriculture and Fisheries (PCAF). They are the 16 elected private sector chairs of the regional agriculture and fisheries councils and 13 elected chairs of the strategic sectoral committees handling rice, corn, coconut, climate change, mechanization and international trade, among others. Laurel listened intently to their recommendations and acted decisively on each of them.

**CORRUPTION.** The Commission on Audit had earlier reported unliquidated and unexplained expenses in the DA budget amounting to P22 billion to P24 billion each in the last three years. At any given point, it's a scandalous one-third of the total budget of less than P70 billion.

This could easily have been prevented had the DA responded to the Alyansa Agrikultura recommendation, approved unanimously by PCAF, to restore the efficient (and proven successful) private sector monitoring.

The DA regional directors would give the complete list of projects to the private sector-led regional agriculture

### COMMENTARY

ERNESTO M. ORDOÑEZ

and fisheries councils for performance and budget monitoring. This would ensure transparency and accountability.

The good news? Laurel announced that he had ordered this practice restored immediately.

**PARTICIPATION.** In the past, PCAF committees would formulate quarterly recommendations for the Secretary to consider. However, these recommendations were merely forwarded to the Secretary sans any interaction with the committee chairs. The Secretary's response was delivered only in writing. Consequently, the average approval rate was just 30 percent for the past three years.

Laurel is now committing to meeting the chairs personally on a quarterly basis. It is expected that more private sector recommendations will now be implemented.

**INFORMATION SYSTEM.** Establishing a credible market information and intelligence system, as provided under the 27-year-old Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act, was also brought up. It was the most important recommendation agreed upon by the PCAF leaders in their year-end national conference held last Nov. 21 to Nov. 23.

Laurel had earlier identified information as a sorely missing element in decision-making at the DA. He said he was already looking at global best practices and would implement this information system as a top priority.

**MANAGEMENT ACTION.** Laurel has also instituted several significant changes. He has installed CCTVs in different DA offices where there were hardly any before. He changed a large part of the security force. He has supported high-level government presentation at PCAF meetings so that there would be immediate action.

At a recent PCAF international trade committee meeting, there were three undersecretaries and two undersecretaries from the DA and the Department of Trade and Industry. They agreed with the private sector recommendation that agriculture leaders should be funded to officially join government delegations in international negotiations abroad.

Laurel also empowered the PCAF committee chairs, saying that they should have in-depth meetings with their counterpart DA directors on a regular basis. He also replaced nonperforming and questionable DA officials, responding to valid private sector reports that had previously remained unheeded.

After an extensive private sector consultation nationwide, Laurel said he would soon announce the department's 10-point agenda and a significant reorganization. With a transformational Agriculture Secretary and an improved DA, a brighter agriculture lies in front of us. **INQ**



The author is Agriwatch chair, former secretary of presidential flagship programs and projects, and former undersecretary of the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Trade and Industry. Contact is [agriwatch\\_phil@yahoo.com](mailto:agriwatch_phil@yahoo.com)





## **EDITORIAL**

### **Cabinet changes**

Validating rumors that have been circulating since late last year, former Batangas congresswoman Vilma Santos-Recto confirmed yesterday that President Marcos is replacing Benjamin Diokno with her husband, House Deputy Speaker Ralph Recto as secretary of finance.

The appointment of Recto comes on the heels of Marcos' turning over of the agriculture portfolio to shipping tycoon **Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.** Before this, Marcos had named Gilbert Teodoro and Ted Herbosa as secretaries of national defense and health, respectively.

Cabinet members serve at the pleasure of the president. Upon assuming power, the President was expected to pick those who supported his election campaign, or at least did not actively oppose him, to be members of his official family. Into his second year, he has a firmer grasp of the nation's problems and has seen the capabilities of his officials. He can shake up his Cabinet accordingly.

Among the top problems in his first year were inflation, driven mainly by high prices of fuel and agricultural commodities particularly sugar and onions. In surveys by reputable pollsters, taming inflation in general has consistently been cited as the weakest point of the Marcos administration.

Last year, rice prices spiked as global supply tightened amid threats arising from El Niño. Despite importations and an ill-advised price cap, rice prices refused to go down.

Laurel now faces the problem as rice retail prices remain elevated even as farmers complain of rice importations. The unstable supply and prices spring from deep-seated problems bedeviling the agriculture sector in general.

Diokno, who has said the economic team was "shocked" by the rice price cap, is exiting the Department of Finance amid controversy over his push for sweeping reforms in the pension system of military and other uniformed personnel. Diokno had warned of "fiscal collapse" if the MUP pension issue was not decisively addressed. The proposal has been among the issues that triggered speculative stories about brewing destabilization plots against the Marcos administration.

Another deep-seated problem that has been highlighted in the past year is the crisis in education. In the next academic year, the Department of Education will be taking over the senior high school program from state universities and colleges under the Commission on Higher Education, after the transition period for the shift to K-12 ended. The administration will have to make sure that this move will not result in a further deterioration in the competencies of Filipino learners.

The honeymoon period for the new administration ended a long time ago. It must be ready to handle heightened public expectations for improvements and a better life.





## DA drops plan for rice SRP

By BELLA CARIASO

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is not considering the imposition of a suggested retail price (SRP) on rice, Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said yesterday.

"We're not doing it. Prices of rice and other agricultural products in international markets

like Thailand and other countries are volatile and fluctuating due to El Niño. Hence, we're not suggesting to control prices at the moment," Laurel said.

Laurel's announcement came a few days after DA spokesperson Arnel de Mesa said the agency may release the SRP next week amid the

Turn to Page 4

unabated spike in retail price of the grains.

At a press conference on Monday, De Mesa said that a technical committee even met to discuss the SRP of rice two days after announcing that the DA was mulling its implementation.

Laurel maintained that earlier proposals for an SRP were just an idea based on available remedies laid out by Republic Act 7581 or the Price Act.

"I'm well aware that setting retail prices, even if just suggested, for particular goods tend to be counter-productive, especially when there is ample supply," Laurel added.

The Price Act Law empowers the DA to stabilize prices of farm products and inputs, including rice, fish, meat, poultry and fertilizers, in times of emergencies, he said.

"In most cases, farmers bear the brunt of a price limit because traders will only lower their purchase prices to keep their margins. Consumers also don't benefit in such a situation. It could also fuel price speculation and supply hoarding that evolves into another problem altogether," he noted.

According to Laurel, the provision of the Price Act requires implementing rules and regulations to be first put in place before the DA could exercise that power.

He said international prices of rice are fluctuating as countries try to increase their rice reserves through importation on concerns of potential drop in harvest due to an expected strong El Niño episode.

Laurel said his agency is working double time to ensure ample supply of agricultural products, particularly rice, in the face of a potential prolonged dry spell due to El Niño, and taking steps to mitigate the weather phenomenon's impact on local production.

Reports from the National Irrigation Administration's Upper Pampanga Integrated Irrigation System, which provides water to farms in major rice-producing provinces of Nueva Ecija, Bulacan and Pampanga, showed sufficient water supply that could sustain strong rice output, he said.

"We're building up a buffer, largely through importation, to ensure we have ample supply of rice as we await the next harvest starting March. This should help keep prices stable without government intervention," he said.

Laurel pointed out that the technical working group crafting of the Price Act IRR is a clear warning to those who may want to exploit the potential shortage of supply, that the DA is empowered by law to go after them.

Meanwhile, various farmers' groups and rice retailers lauded the DA's decision to scrap the proposed SRP on rice.

"We welcome his (Laurel's) decision on SRP. The DA should focus on raising local rice production, El Niño mitigation and a more efficient food logistics/distribution system," former agriculture secretary Leonardo Montemayor said in a separate message to The STAR.

Rice retailers' group Grains Retailers Confederation of the Philippines president James Magbanua said that the DA should ensure that proper consultations are conducted before the department decides on an issue like the imposition of SRP.

On the other hand, Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura executive director Jayson Cainglet said there was a disconnect between the farmgate price of other farm commodities and the retail prices amid the slump in the wholesale cost of highland vegetables.

"The SRP under the Price Act penalizes retailers without addressing the undue high prices. The supply is never an issue at this period," Cainglet told The STAR.

At the same time, Montemayor and Cainglet said that the arrival of 18,463 metric tons of imported rice from Vietnam, Thailand and Pakistan as of Jan. 4 will not bring down retail prices.

"The 18,000 (MT of imported rice) is a small quantity, just one-half of our national daily rice requirement of 36,000," Montemayor said.

- With Catherine Talavera





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## No SRP on rice, other farm products

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) rejected imposing a suggested retail price (SRP) on rice and other agricultural products to stabilize local prices of commodities.

In a statement on Thursday, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said setting retail prices will only affect farmers since traders will only lower their purchase prices to gain profit.

"We're not doing it. ... I'm well aware that setting retail prices, even if just suggested, for particular goods tend to be counterproductive, especially when there is ample supply," he said.

"Consumers also don't benefit in such a situation. It could also fuel price speculation and supply hoarding that evolve into another problem altogether," he added.

Laurel noted that earlier proposals for an SRP were based on available remedies under Republic Act 7581, or the "Price Act."

The DA said on Saturday it is studying the imposition of SRP on rice amid rising prices. The reimposition of the price cap, however, was completely ruled out.

The department said the Price Act gives it authority to stabilize the prices of farm products such as rice, fish, meat, poultry and even fertilizers, in times of emergencies.

"But that provision of the Price Act requires implementing rules and regu-

lations to be first put in place before the DA could exercise that power," DA said.

On Tuesday, the department announced it will create a technical working group that will come up with the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) for Section 9 of the Price Act relating to agricultural products.

Laurel said the move will serve as a warning to price manipulators.

"We will not hesitate to use the powers and remedies at our disposal to ensure that our farmers and consumers are amply protected against those who may want to exploit any supply shortage," he said.

He said that prices of agricultural products in the international market are volatile and fluctuating because of El Niño.

The weather phenomenon also affected the global rice market as countries fill import rice in anticipation of a drop in harvest due to a strong El Niño episode.

"Hence, we're not suggesting to control prices at the moment," Laurel said.

He gave assurances that the department is working double time to ensure an ample supply of rice and other farm products during the El Niño.

Reports from the National Irrigation Administration's Upper Pampanga Integrated Irrigation System indicate that there is an ample water supply to provide a strong rice output.

Irrigation provides water to farms in major rice-producing provinces like Nueva Ecija, Bulacan and Pampanga.

"We're building up a buffer, largely through importation, to ensure we have ample supply of rice as we await the next harvest starting in March. This should help keep prices stable without government intervention," he said.

**JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL**





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## SRP plan ruled out for rice, other farm products

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said on Thursday that it is no longer considering a suggested retail price (SRP) scheme for rice and other agricultural products.

"We're not doing it. Prices of rice and other agricultural products in international markets like Thailand are volatile and fluctuating due to El Niño. Hence, we're not proposing to control prices at the moment," Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. said in a statement.

Last week, the DA said that it was considering a rice SRP to contain rising prices.

Mr. Laurel added that the SRP plan "was just an idea based on available remedies according to Republic Act 7581, or the Price Act."

"I'm well aware that setting retail prices, even if just suggested, for particular goods tend to be counterproductive, especially when there is ample supply," he said.

Under the Price Act, the DA has the authority to stabilize the prices of crops, fish and other marine products, fresh meat, fresh poultry, dairy products, fertilizer and other farm inputs during emergencies.

According to the DA, it needs to come up with implementing rules and regulations (IRR) to enforce the parts of the law that concern farm goods.

Mr. Laurel has ordered the creation of a technical working group to draft the IRR.

"We will not hesitate to use the powers and remedies at our disposal to ensure that our farmers and consumers are amply protected against those who may want to exploit any supply shortage," he added.

The DA said other countries are seeking to increase their grain reserves in anticipation of lower production due to dry spells brought on by El Niño.

The government weather service, known as PAGASA (Philippine 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.

"We're building up a buffer, largely through imports, to ensure we have ample supply of rice as we await the next harvest starting March. This should help keep prices stable without government intervention," Mr. Laurel added.

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

Last year, a surge in the price of rice prompted the government to briefly implement price controls.

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

Mr. Laurel said that another set of price controls on rice would affect producers, who bear the brunt of lowered prices.

"In most cases, farmers bear the brunt of a price limit because traders will only lower their purchase prices to keep their margins. Consumers also don't benefit in such a situation. It could also fuel price speculation and hoarding that will evolve into another problem altogether," he added.

Adrian H. Halili





# DA rejects price control

Cost of rice in Metro Manila ranges from ₱43 to ₱68 per kilo

By GABRIELL CHRISTEL GALANG and JEL SANTOS

**T**he Department of Agriculture (DA) has turned down proposals to introduce suggested retail prices (SRPs) for agricultural products, specifically rice.

Based on the DA's Bantay Presyo (Price Watch), the retail prices of rice as of Jan. 10 range from ₱43 to ₱68 in the metropolis.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said on Thursday, Jan. 11, that the agency is not considering the proposed imposition of SRP owing to the volatility of global commodity prices caused by El Niño.

"We're not doing it," Laurel said in a statement. "Prices of rice and other agricultural products in international markets like Thailand and other countries are volatile and fluctuating due to El Niño."

The proposal to introduce an SRP followed the 19.6 percent surge in rice inflation in December, the highest surge in 14 years.

But Laurel's statement is an indication that the government prefers a market-driven pricing system for agricultural products.

We're not suggesting controlling prices at the moment, the DA chief said. ▶3

## DA rejects price control 1◀

As of Jan. 10, local regular milled rice is the least expensive; it costs between ₱43 and ₱53 per kilo.

Local special, on the other hand, is the most expensive rice in Metro Manila. It retails for ₱54 to ₱68 per kilo.

Imported regular milled rice remains unavailable in markets, according to DA monitoring.

The DA said its market price monitoring in Metro Manila covered Commonwealth, Guadalupe, Las Piñas, Malabon, Marikina, Mega Q-Mart, Muntinlupa, Muñoz, Pasay, Pasig, Pritil, Quinta, and San Andres.

In September last year, President Marcos implemented a price ceiling for rice, which resulted in issues such as shortages and the emergence of underground markets due to imbalances in supply and demand.

Laurel clarified that the SRP proposals and stakeholder consultations were based on potential solutions outlined in the Price Act, or Republic Act No. 7581.

The Price Act grants the DA the authority to maintain stable prices for key agricultural products such as rice, fish, meat, poultry, and fertilizers during times of emergency.

"I'm well aware that setting retail prices, even if just suggested, for particular goods tend to be counterproductive, especially when there is ample supply," Laurel said.

Earlier, DA spokesperson and Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said the agency was already working on SRPs for rice products by consulting with industry players and stakeholders.

Laurel emphasized that the price ceiling primarily affects the farmers, as traders may only lower their purchase prices.

"Consumers also don't benefit in such a situation [because] it could also fuel price speculation and supply hoarding that evolves into another problem altogether," he added.

Meanwhile, Laurel said the DA should establish first the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) before delving into the Price Act.

He added that the formation of the technical working group (TWG) for the Price Act IRR should serve as a deterrent to those considering exploiting the current supply situation.

"We will not hesitate to use the powers and remedies at our disposal to ensure that our farmers and consumers are amply protected against those who may want to exploit any supply shortage," he warned.

With the strong El Niño expected in the coming months, the DA chief said that international rice prices are changing as countries aim to boost their rice reserves through imports, which the Philippines is also doing.

"We're building up a buffer, largely

through importation, to ensure we have ample rice supply as we await the next harvest starting March," Laurel said. "This should help keep prices stable without government intervention."

He further said that the DA is making efforts to ensure an adequate supply of agricultural products to prepare for the extended dry spell, as well as developing strategies to alleviate its

impact on local production.

Meanwhile, the National Irrigation Administration's Upper Pampanga Integrated Irrigation System reported sufficient water supply, which could guarantee a strong rice output.

This irrigation system assists in providing water to farms in major rice-producing provinces such as Nueva Ecija, Bulacan, and Pampanga.





## DA: No to price control

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) is not considering imposing suggested retail price (SRP) on farm products, particularly rice, saying it could be counterproductive.

"We're not doing it. Prices of rice and other agricultural products in international markets like Thailand and other countries are volatile and fluctuating due to El Niño. Hence, we're not suggesting to control prices at the moment," said DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. in a statement yesterday.

Laurel said the SRP is a remedy available under the

Price Act to stabilize prices of farm products and inputs including rice, fish, meat, poultry even fertilizers, in times of emergencies.

However, implementing rules and regulations (IRR) have to be in place before SRP can be imposed.

"I'm well aware that setting retail prices, even if just suggested, for particular goods tend to be counterproductive, especially

See DA > Page A2



A vendor tends to his stall in a public market in Quezon City on Oct. 19, 2023 when the government pegged per kilogram prices on well-milled and regular milled rice at P45 and P41, respectively. (File Photo)



# Malaya Business Insight

Date: 12 JAN 2024 Page: A1 & A2



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## DA

when there is ample supply," Laurel said.

He said in most cases, farmers bear the brunt of a price limit because traders will only lower their purchase prices to keep their margins.

Laurel cautioned SRPs do not benefit consumers as they could fuel price speculation and supply hoarding.

"That evolves into another problem altogether," Laurel added.

Yet, a technical working group is readying the IRR on SRP which the DA can impose against those who may want to exploit the current pricing situation of agri-

goods.

"We will not hesitate to use the powers and remedies at our disposal to ensure our farmers and consumers are amply protected against those who may want to exploit any supply shortage," Laurel said.

DA said international prices of rice are fluctuating as countries try to increase their rice reserves through importation on concerns of potential drop in harvest due to an expected strong El Niño episode.

Laurel said the DA is also working double time to ensure ample supply of agricultural products,

particularly rice, in the face of a potential prolonged dry spell due to El Niño as well as to mitigate the weather phenomenon's impact on local production.

DA said that so far, the National Irrigation Administration's Upper Pampanga Integrated Irrigation System, which provides water to farms in major rice producing provinces of Nueva Ecija, Bulacan and Pampanga, showed sufficient water supply that could sustain strong rice output.

"We're building up a buffer, largely through importation, to ensure we have ample supply of rice as we await the next harvest

starting March. This should help keep prices stable without government intervention," Laurel said.

Meanwhile, Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) urged the DA to adopt measures where local producers can directly sell their goods to the government to ensure reasonable farm-gate and retail prices.

Pamalakaya said the DA can intervene in the marketing system by reducing the layers of middlemen and private traders.

Pamalakaya is also pushing for the passage of the Rice Industry Development Act which aims

to attain national food security based on self-sufficiency and self-reliance.

Pamalakaya said the proposed law allocates P185 billion for three-year core programs such as production support via socialized credit, farm inputs and machineries, accelerated infrastructure development programs, post-harvest facilities and research and development.

The group is also pushing for the passage of the Production Subsidy Bill which seeks to provide P15,000 production subsidy to over two million registered fisherfolk nationwide as well as the

Genuine Agrarian Reform Bill which seeks a free land distribution to Filipino farmers.

In a separate statement, the National Federation of Sugarcane Planters (NFSP) said that in a meeting with Laurel this week, it renewed its call to government to address the decline in mill gate prices of sugar which has not reflected in retail prices.

Enrique Rojas, NFSP president, said current sugar prices are a far cry from the level of sugar prices last crop year. Prices now hover at around P2,400 to P2,500 per bag, which is much lower than the more than P3,000 per bag last crop year.





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### **DA 'di pabor na magtakda ng SRP sa bigas**

Hindi pabor ang Department of Agriculture na magpatupad ng suggested retail price (SRP) sa bigas.

"We're not doing it. Prices of rice and other agricultural products in international markets like Thailand and other countries are volatile and fluctuating due to El Niño. Hence, we're not suggesting to control prices

at the moment," sabi ni Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel.

Ang panukalang lagyan ng SRP ang farm products ay base lamang anysa sa available remedies alinsunod sa Price Act na nagbibigay kapangyarihan sa DA na ma-stabilize ang presyo ng farm products at inputs kasama na ang

presyo ng bigas, isda, karne, abono sa panahon ng emergency.

Sinabi ni Laurel na double time ang pagtatrabaho ngayon ng ahensiya upang matiyak na ang suplay ng agricultural products laluna ng bigas ay sapat kahit na may banta ng epekto ng El Niño sa agrikultura. (Angie dela Cruz)





## DA HINDI AAWATIN PRESYO NG BIGAS

WALANG planong magpataw ng suggested retail price (SRP) sa bigas at iba pang mga produktong agrikultura ang Department of Agriculture (DA) ngunit mag-aangkat na ito ng bigas para maseguro ang suplay nito na magiging panangga sa mga mananamantala.

"We're building up a buffer, largely through importation, to ensure we have ample supply of rice as we await the next harvest starting March," sabi ni Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. kahapon.

Aniya, ang aangkating bigas ang magsisilbing buffer para hindi sumirit ang presyo ng bigas at hindi na kailanganing kontrolin pa ang presyo sa pamamagitan ng pagpapatupad ng SRP.

"We're not doing it," sabi ni Laurel tungkol sa SRP. Umaasa ang DA na magiging stable ang presyo ng bigas nang hindi nito panghihimasukan ang presyo. Gayun pa man, nagbabala si Laurel na handa ang DA na gagamitin nito ang kapangyarihan nito sa sinumang mananamantala sa sitwasyon sa ilalim ng Price Act. Aniya, babala na sa mga magsasamantala ang pagtatag ng technical working group dahil may kapangyarihan ang DA na habulin sila.

"We will not hesitate to use the powers and remedies at our disposal to ensure that our farmers and consumers are amply protected against those who may want to exploit any supply shortage," dagdag ni Laurel.

Sa ngayon, magalaw ang presyo ng bigas at iba pang mga produktong agrikultura sa iba't ibang mga bansa tulad ng Thailand dahil sa El Nino phenomenon kaya hindi magpapatupad ng SRP ang DA.

Ang mga pag-aaral sa SRP ay nagbunsod sa mga mungkahi dahil isa ito sa mga maaaring maging tugon sa sumisirit na mga presyo sa ilalim ng Price Act o Republic Act No. 7581.

Dagdag ni Laurel, maaaring hindi makatulong ang pagtatala ng SRP kahit pa mungkahi lamang ito lalo na't kung may sapat na suplay.

Kadalasan, mga magsasaka pa ang nadedehado ka-pag naglagay ng price limit dahil babaratin lamang sila ng mga traders at hindi naman bababa pa ang presyo para sa mga consumers.

Dagdag pa niya, ito pa ang nakapaghihiikayat sa hoarding at espekulasyon na dumadagdag sa problema.

Nagmamahal ang presyo ng bigas sa world market ngayon dahil maraming mga bansa ang namimili para masiguro ang kanilang suplay bilang paghahanda sa El Niño. (Eileen Mencias/Natalia Antonio)





## DA: NO SRP FOR RICE, OTHER AGRI GOODS

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) is not considering the proposed imposition of suggested retail price (SRP) on farm products, particularly rice.

"We're not doing it. Prices of rice and other agricultural products in international markets like Thailand and other countries are volatile and fluctuating due to El Niño. Hence, we're not suggesting to control prices at the moment," Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu-Laurel Jr. said in a news release Thursday.

Earlier proposals for an SRP "was just an idea based on available remedies" according to the Republic Act 7581 or the Price Act, he said.

The Price Act Law empowers the DA to stabilize prices of farm products and inputs, including rice, fish, meat, poultry even fertilizers, in times of emergencies.

The provision of the Price Act

requires the creation of implementing rules and regulations (IRR) before the DA could exercise the power.

"I'm well aware that setting retail prices, even if just suggested, for particular goods tend to be counterproductive, especially when there is ample supply," Tiu-Laurel said. "In most cases, farmers bear the brunt of a price limit because traders will only lower their purchase prices to keep their margins. Consumers also don't benefit in such a situation. It could also fuel price speculation and supply hoarding that evolves into another problem altogether."

"We will not hesitate to use the powers and remedies at our disposal to ensure that our farmers and consumers are amply protected against those who may want to exploit any supply shortage," he added.

PNA



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**MILK SUFFICIENCY**

## PH TAPS IP FARMS TO BOOST DAIRY OUTPUT

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**  
@jordeenelagare

The **National Dairy Authority (NDA)** has partnered with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) to build stock farms as it aims to increase domestic milk sufficiency by 5 percent in four years.

The NCIP approved the signing of a memorandum of agreement with the NDA, a corporation under the Department of Agriculture, for the development of stock farms within the ancestral domains, the NDA said in a statement on Thursday.

The stock farms, designed for producing and breeding dairy cattle, will feature a processing facility.

For this project, the NDA assured that the facilities would adhere to NCIP standards and respect sacred ancestral land, environmental

norms and traditional protocols as well as align with the Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan of indigenous cultural communities.

The NDA estimated that each stock farm with 50 heads of dairy cattle would occupy 10 hectares (ha) of land, including land for pasture development, while those cultivating 100 heads would need 20 to 30 ha assuming that 80 percent of the area is utilized.

Rigorous validation processes will be put in place to uphold the best interest of the indigenous cultural communities/indigenous peoples, who will be hired as part of the workforce. They will be organized into cooperatives to qualify as recipients of dairy animals.

Beneficiaries will undergo training on various techniques such as dairy production, animal health and management, artificial insemination, milk processing, financial literacy, business development and food safety.

"NDA will train them in dairy farm management. They will supply animal feeds like corn silage and forage," NDA administrator Gabriel Lagamayo said. **INQ**



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## Dairy authority partners with NCIP

THE National Dairy Authority (NDA) partnered with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) to establish stock farms for production and breeding of dairy cattle in ancestral lands.

NDA Administrator Dr. Gabriel Lagamayo and NCIP Chairman Bo-i Jennifer Pia Sibug-Las led the signing of the memorandum of agreement on Jan. 9, 2024.

Lagamayo said that the program will benefit the Indigenous Cultural Communities or Indigenous Peoples (ICCs/IPs) as they will be employed as part of the workforce in the farm operations.

"Our goal of 5 percent milk sufficiency by the year 2028 requires a large volume of milk production. This program allows and welcomes participation. There is room for everyone, including our ICCs/IPs," said Lagamayo.

The agreement states that stock farms will be established on ancestral domains, which will be used for breeding of dairy cattle. The ICCs/IPs, meanwhile,

Nomura still expects the 2024 average to fall within target. Last month, it lowered the inflation forecasts for the Philippines to 6.0 percent from 6.2 percent for 2023 and that for 2024 to 3.5 percent from 3.8 percent.

The Monetary Board's baseline inflation forecast for 2024 is a within-target 3.7 percent. Its risk-adjusted projection, however, is an above-target 4.2 percent.

Surging inflation in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine prompted monetary authorities to embark on a tightening spree beginning in May 2022.

The BSP's policy rate currently stands at a 16-year high of 6.50 percent following rate hikes totaling 450 basis points (bps), the last an off-cycle 25-bps increase late October last year as consumer price growth accelerated anew.

The BSP, Nomura said, will "exercise patience in its pivot."

"We therefore reiterate our forecast for BSP to start cutting only in August, and deliver a total of 150bp in rate cuts to 5.00 percent through Q1 2025," it added.

Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno has said that key interest rates could be lowered by as much as 100 basis points (bps) this year, with monetary authorities matching or even exceeding expected US Federal Reserve rate cuts.

Analysts, meanwhile, said the BSP was likely to begin cutting interest rates only in the second half and only after the US central

►Pivot B2





## Group urges DA to protect local fish producers amid El Niño fears

**A** N alliance of small fishermen and fisherfolk on Thursday urged the Department of Agriculture (DA) to put in place measures that will protect domestic capture fisheries production amid the El Niño threat.

In a statement, Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) suggested direct procurement of agri-fishery products from small producers at reasonable farm-gate prices and delivery of the produce to consumers at affordable prices.

Pamalakaya made the recommendation amid reports DA is seeking to revise a law clause to stabilize commodities in preparation for the food shortage linked to the looming El Niño.

"The government's continuous neglect to intervene in the marketing system allows many layers of middlemen and private traders to manipulate the

farm gate and retail prices to unreasonable rates. This system in the agricultural trade has put both the local food producers and consumers at a disadvantage," Pamalakaya national chairman Fernando Hicap said.

Hicap asserted the role of the DA to ensure that agricultural commodities are directly procured from farmers and fishers, and ultimately retail them at affordable prices for the interest of ordinary consumers.

The group vowed to continue its campaign for the enactment of alternative measures that would strengthen agriculture and fisheries production through government subsidy or support.

These include House Bill 405 or the Rice Industry Development Act, which aims to attain national food security based on self-sufficiency and self-reliance.

According to Pamalakaya, the pending law

specifically pushes to allocate a P185-billion budget for three-year core programs, such as production support via socialized credit, farm inputs and machinery, accelerated infrastructure development programs, post-harvest facilities, and research and development.

Meanwhile, House Bill 2024, or the Production Subsidy Bill, seeks to provide P15,000 production subsidy to over two million registered fisherfolk nationwide.

Lastly, the group said it is supporting House Bill 1161, or the Genuine Agrarian Reform Bill, which seeks a free land distribution to Filipino farmers.

"These are among the effective measures to brace our food production amid the looming threat of El Niño and other natural calamities," Hicap said.

*Jonathan L. Mayuga*





## We need to plant and eat (and get a bigger DA budget for) more vegetables

**T**he sad thing about our agriculture industry is that it moves so slowly that discussions about old problems and concerns are still relevant months later.

For example, I attended a Pandesal Forum titled "Agrikultura sa Kalunsuran para sa Masaganang Kinabukasan!" (Urban Farming for a Better Future) hosted by columnist and businessperson Wilson Lee Flores at his 84 year-old Kamuning Bakery Cafe late last year. On the panel were, in the order written on the invitation, Dr. Gerald Glenn Panganiban, director of the **Dept. of Agriculture (DA) Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI)**; Dr. Joel Cuello, professor of Biosystems Engineering at University of Arizona; Dr. Cecilio K. Pedro, president of the Federation Of Filipino Chinese Chambers Of Commerce & Industry, Inc. (FFCCII) and founder of the Lamoian Corporation (which produces Hapee Toothpaste, among other products); and former Department of Agriculture Secretary Dr. William D. Dar, now of GoNegosyo.

It was a pretty long discussion, which I shall be taking several columns to cover

and use as jump-off points for my own thoughts, as the items brought up, while not new, are important because it means that we already know the answers, we just somehow refuse to implement them. Like I mentioned in the beginning of this column, sadly, our agriculture industry moves so slowly (if at all) that what's "old news" remains current.

Dar, who was DA secretary during former President Duterte's term, including during the pandemic, drew from his experience then as a testament to the efficacy and importance of urban and peri-urban (outside urban but not quite in rural areas) gardening, citing the logistics needed to transport goods from fields to cities. "So it would be the best of arrangements if we develop vegetable and fruit growing areas around," he said.



**AVANT GARDENER**  
YVETTE TAN

He added that what's lacking is a DA budget, particularly for other crops, as "about 60-65 percent of the budget in agriculture is devoted to rice," adding that "when there are opportunities for significantly increasing the budget of agriculture, you have to really invest largely and significantly... [in] high-value agriculture. And that should be a big direction the government must undertake."

That said, he later noted that Filipinos eat an average of "60 or so kilos" of vegetables a year, half the average of more vegetable-forward countries. This points to not just a need to increase production, but to combine it with several campaigns geared toward encouraging Filipinos to eat more vegetables. Ironically, even though vegetables can be expensive, they are still associated with being poor, and meat, particularly pork and beef, with being rich.

Dar cites the westernization of the Filipino diet as the culprit behind this cultural shift. "Only a few young people like vegetables," he said in Taglish. "...we should do more, especially in our curriculum.... The culture, the attitude has to change [to] that it is much healthier to eat vegetables and fruits rather than Western foods."

But to do something like this requires money. Money for increased DA support for high value crops and other crops that aren't rice. Money for farm-to-market roads, for post harvest and cold storage facilities, for a comprehensive national planting calendar, even just for proper irrigation systems. Money to mount a nationwide vegetable eating campaign that (and this is very important) isn't cringe.

While this administration's agriculture budget has increased from the last one, it still is nowhere near enough to properly support it. Dar estimated that the DA budget went from 1.5 percent to 1.75 percent of the total national budget, but this pales in comparison to the amounts our ASEAN neighbors dedicate to their thriving agriculture industries, which he estimates set aside six percent of their national budget for agriculture.

This all points to a disconnect in the Filipino psyche when it comes to agriculture. From my observations and (unfortunately) all too real-life encounters, many Pinoys think that the Philippines is an agricultural country but bristle at the thought of farmers getting paid a fair wage. They equate farming with poverty and love to post about their outrage at vegetables dumped on roadsides without digging deeper into what societal factors lead to such waste. They also love posting about "helping the farmer" (a phrase I deeply disagree with, right up there with "make farming sexy") as if the agriculture industry was a charity case and not an industry that needs reform and support. And while yes, we look to government officials like the current DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. and other government agency leaders and employees to lead the way, it is equally important that the private sector do their part.

As former DA Secretary Dar said earlier, the culture has to change, and various government agencies such as the DA, the Department of Education, and the Department of Tourism can spearhead this for the good of all Filipinos.





## Bird flu found in mammals near Antarctica for the first time, scientists say

BIRD FLU has made its way into fur and elephant seal populations for the first time on the sub-Antarctic island of South Georgia, a team of scientists confirmed on Thursday, setting off alarm bells for conservationists as the highly contagious disease has already killed millions of birds worldwide.

Scientists first suspected the presence of avian influenza near Antarctica in October 2023, following the death of several brown skua seabirds on Bird Island, part of the British Overseas Territory of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands.

Then, elephant seals started dying en masse.

In December, scientists with Britain's Animal and Plant Health and Agency (APHA) and the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) spent three weeks in the affected islands, collecting samples from dead mammals and birds.

Those samples tested positive for bird flu (HPAI H5N1) in elephant seals, fur seals, brown skuas, kelp gulls

and Antarctic terns, scientists said Thursday.

"Given Antarctica is such a unique and special biodiversity hotspot it is sad and concerning to see the disease spread to mammals in the region," said APHA scientific services director Ian Brown.

The current worldwide outbreak of H5N1, which began in 2021, has killed millions of birds on poultry farms, and scientists fear its impact on Antarctic wildlife could be devastating. The virus has the potential to infect 48 species of birds and 26 species of marine mammals, according to a report published last month by OFFLU, a global network of animal influenza experts.

The analyzed samples indicated migratory birds from South America had likely introduced the virus to South Georgia.

"Seals, that are known to scavenge, may become infected when they consume infected bird carcasses," said ecologist Alastair Ward at the University of Leeds.

Thousands of seals and hundreds of thousands of birds congregate in dense colonies in Antarctica which could allow the virus to easily jump between individuals, resulting in high mortality, OFFLU said.

Penguins — Antarctica's most iconic animals — do not yet appear to be impacted by the virus, with no reports showing above-average penguin mortality.

BAS which operates two research stations on South Georgia has mostly suspended scientific fieldwork involving human contact with animals following the confirmed cases. The International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators has also instructed boats not to land at some sites on South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula, out of caution.

Fueling global concern about the virus' spread to imperiled wildlife populations, Alaskan officials confirmed last week the first known case of a polar bear dying of H5N1.

— Reuters





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## Soybeans rebound

CANBERRA - Chicago soybean futures regained some ground on Thursday but remained near their lowest levels since December 2021 amid lacklustre demand for US exports and an improved supply outlook from South America.

Corn futures rose but were close to their lowest since December 2020. Wheat also gained.

The most active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) was up 0.9 percent at \$12.47-1/4 a bushel after slipping to \$12.34 on Tuesday.

However, prices were still down nearly 4 percent so far

this month.

Recent rains mean Brazil's harvest will be better than what many had feared and Argentina's will also be sizeable, said Rabobank analyst Vitor Pistoia, adding that the wider oilseed market was well supplied.

The price outlook for soybeans was "neutral or bearish", Pistoia said.

With harvesting now underway, crop agency Conab projected a 155.3 million metric ton 2023/24 crop, around 5 million tons less than it previously forecast but still a record high. - *Reuters*