

CLIPPINGS FOR FRIDAY, JANUARY 19, 2024

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Laguna de Bay revival eyed to boost fish production

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is pushing for the revival of Laguna de Bay as a major source of fish for Metro Manila residents and those in nearby provinces.

"Our aim is to produce more food at lower prices. For example, bring back

bangus or milkfish prices to P50-P70 per kilo. Maximizing the aquaculture potential of Laguna Lake is essential to achieving that goal," Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. told fish pen operators last week.

"If we can add more capacity, then

let's do it," he added.

Citing data from the Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA), the DA said the 940-square kilometer Laguna de Bay produces as much as 90,000 tons of freshwater fish annually and provides livelihood to around 13,000 fishermen.

The DA said aquaculture associations in Laguna Lake have sought the agency's help to address the increasing mortality of fingerlings in fish pens, the minimal introduction of salt water that is helpful in milkfish production and the reintroduction of fresh water.

Laurel said he would arrange a meeting with the LLDA, chaired by Environment Secretary Ma. Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, to discuss plans and guidelines for the opening of flood gates crucial for the introduction of fresh and saltwater.

— Catherine Talavera



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GOTCHA

JARIUS BONDOC



Latest surveys are results of inflationary sugar cartel

High prices clobbered 72 percent of Filipinos in December. Inflation strained them worse than low wages, 40 percent; joblessness, 28 percent and poverty, 25 percent, Pulse Asia's survey shows.

Filipinos tend to blame their highest official for their woes. President Bongbong Marcos' trust rating remained lessened in December, as it was in September compared to June.

Trust was still high at 73 percent in December, similar to September's 71 percent, given the +/- 3 percent margin of error. But those were deep drops from 85 percent in June.

Marcos' approval rating also stayed lessened in December, 68 percent, as it was in September, 65 percent. Both were big slumps from June's 80 percent.

Filipinos kept patient. While costly food and other goods troubled them, they gave Marcos time to set things right. But inflation remained high.

Why did food and commodity prices spike starting August-September? Analysts cite three reasons.

First is the delayed effects of an event in February: the almost threefold increase in sugar price.

Government allowed only three companies to import 440,000 tons of Thai sugar. The trio made a killing; buying at P24 then selling at P70 a kilo. Sen. Risa Hontiveros denounced it as "government-sponsored cartel."

Industrial users of sweeteners begged the Department of Agriculture to be allowed to import on their own at low rates. The DA forbade them, Hontiveros exposed.

Marcos Jr. was then the agriculture secretary. The Sugar Regulatory Administration that he chaired refused to accredit the usual two dozen or so sugar importers for free competition.

All sugar users were trapped. Buying from the cartel at P70, wholesalers passed on to retailers at P100 a kilo. Retailers sold to consumers at P130 a kilo.

In six months, all food prices with sweeteners were up. Affected were bread and pastries, carinderia and restaurants, snacks and canteens.

Hit too were canned and preserved foods, biscuits and crackers, juices and

sodas. DTI couldn't enforce "suggested retail prices" in two million or so *sari-sari* stores, Filipinos' main source of "tinge" (retailed) food.

DTI is presently allowing food makers to lessen packaged contents and weight to avert any more price increases. Again affected are foods with sugar: coffee, chocolate, tea, processed milk, sardines, instant noodles, canned meat and condiments.

Second cause: the agriculture department erred big in forecasting rice harvest.

The bumper harvest that it expected in the last quarter of 2023 did not materialize because of oversight. Fertilizer rates had tripled, so farmers cut back on planted hectareage.

Shortage resulted. Malacañang's reaction was to impose price ceilings. Most rice stocks disappeared from public markets. The remaining few sold at P56 per kilo. Almost thrice the P20 that Marcos promised during the presidential campaign.

Rice is a political commodity. Its high price connotes crisis. So when its price soared, non-food items were affected.

Hardest hit by costly rice were those who exist hand to mouth. Micro and small entrepreneurs raised their prices. Same with semi-skilled service workers, like barbers, manicurists, masseuses and ambulant vendors. Customers felt it.

Third cause: what new Agriculture Sec. Francis Tiu Laurel admits as logistics problems.

For instance, there was seeming overproduce of vegetables in Benguet, Pangasinan and Tarlac. For lack of cold storages, planters had to sell at bargain rates.

But traders made a killing. They distributed the produce in Greater Manila public markets at 12 to 20 times more.

Filipinos manifest their displeasure with government via surveys. In other lands consumers would rampage.

Catch *Sapol* radio show, Saturdays, 8 to 10 a.m., dwIZ (882-AM).

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Enough chicken, DA assures consumers

By BELLA CARIASO

The Department of Agriculture (DA) yesterday guaranteed that the Philippines has enough chicken supply amid consecutive importation bans in different countries, with Japan being added to the list due to the threat of bird flu.

Based on Japan's official report submitted to the World Organization for Animal Health, there was an outbreak of H5N1 highly pathogenic avian influenza in Kashima City, Saga prefecture on Nov. 24, 2023.

Domestic and wild birds and their products, including poultry meat, day-old chicks, eggs and semen from Japan are prohibited from entering the Philippines, according to Memorandum Order 3 issued on Jan. 17 by Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

"We are able to manage (bird flu) outbreak in the country. Based on the latest report, only one to two areas are still affected. It is not a big problem compared to the African swine fever," Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said at a press conference.

Laurel earlier banned imported poultry products from California and Ohio in the US amid the outbreak of avian flu.

"For the whole United States, the total contribution, the total poultry products, is about 40 percent. Based on the data, (we import) about \$175

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Enough From Page 1

million or 166,000 metric tons of poultry meat from the US but affected by the ban are only (two) US states," De Mesa said.

The DA had also banned imported poultry products from Minnesota, South Dakota and Iowa states; and Belgium and France.

Egg farmgate price down P1 per piece

The farmgate price of eggs has decreased by more than P1 per piece compared to prices in December last year but the retail price remains high, according to the Philippine Egg Board Association (PEBA).

In a message to **The STAR**, United Broiler Raisers Association and PEBA chair Gregorio San Diego yesterday confirmed an abrupt decrease in the farmgate price of eggs after the holiday season.

Based on the DA's monitoring, he said the retail price of eggs has not changed since September 2023.

In a separate interview over radio *dzBB*, PEBA president Francis Uyehara said the farmgate price of medium-sized eggs went down between P5.80 and P6.50 per piece, compared to P7 to P7.50 in December.

The retail price of eggs should decline once the farmgate price drops to encourage the public to buy more, he added.

Uyehara said the government needs to take an interest in monitoring middlemen who benefit from the slump in the farmgate price of eggs.

Egg supplies increased after the New Year celebrations but consumption declined, which led to "the more than P1 drop in the farmgate price," he added.

Based on the DA's price watch, the retail price of medium-sized eggs is still sold for as high as P9 per piece.

— With Catherine Talavera



DA bans poultry from Japan

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) imposed a temporary ban on poultry and poultry products, including eggs and day-old chicks from Japan due to an outbreak of avian influenza.

In a memorandum order signed Wednesday by DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., the agency also immediately suspended the issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearance for the inward shipment of wild birds, poultry and poultry products from Japan.

The DA said only wild birds, poultry and poultry products

imported from Japan that are in transit, loaded and accepted on or before Nov. 10, 2023 will be allowed entry to the Philippines.

DA said the import ban was imposed after Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries reported an outbreak of the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza to the World Organization for Animal Health on November 28.

The Japanese agency's report showed an outbreak of the H5N1 strain after wild and domesticated birds on November 24 in Kashima City in Saga Prefecture.

Laurel said the import ban was necessary to protect the local poultry population from exposure to the H5N1 avian influenza strain.

Based on latest data from the Bureau of Animal Industry, from January to November 2023, the country has not purchased any poultry meat from Japan.

The DA earlier also banned the importation of poultry and other poultry products, including wild birds from Belgium and France as well as from the states of California and Ohio in the United States, due to similar HPAI H5N1 issues.

Jed Macapagal



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PH bans poultry imports from Japan

By GABRIEL CHRISTEL GALANG

The Department of Agriculture (DA) temporarily banned the importation of poultry products from Japan after the outbreak of avian influenza.

In a statement on Thursday, Jan. 18, the DA said it issued a memorandum to block Japanese poultry like eggs, day-old chicks, and other products until further notice.

Signed by Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., the memorandum orders the suspension of the issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances for the inward shipment of wild birds and other poultry products from Japan.

"Only wild birds, poultry, and poultry products imported from Japan that are already in transit, loaded, and accepted on or before Nov. 10 will be allowed entry to the Philippines," the DA ordered.

The memorandum was done after the agriculture sector received an outbreak report from Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries about the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI).

According to the Japanese agency, they found the H5N1 strain on their wild and domesticated birds last Nov. 24 in Kashima City, Saga Prefecture.

Because of this, poultry products that were shipped to the Philippines beyond Nov. 10 must either be returned, confiscated, or destroyed to avoid the outbreak from spreading.

"The import ban was necessary to protect the local poultry population from exposure to the H5N1 avian influenza strain," Laurel said.

On Wednesday, the DA announced a temporary importation ban on poultry products produced in California and Ohio, United States after a similar outbreak report.



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TURBIDITY KILLING FINGERLINGS

DA EYES LAGUNA LAKE REHAB TO SLASH 'BANGUS' PRICES TO P50/KILO

By Meg J. Adonis
@MegINQ

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is working on reviving Laguna Lake, the country's largest freshwater lake, as a major source of seafood to help slash the prices of fish by more than 60 percent.

"Our aim is to produce more food at lower prices. For example, bring back bangus (milkfish) prices to P50 to P70

per kilo," Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said on Thursday. Data from the agency showed that the retail price of bangus ranged from P150 to P220 per kilo as of Wednesday.

"Maximizing the aquaculture potential of Laguna Lake is essential to achieving that goal. If we can add more capacity, then let's do it," he added.

High levels of turbidity, which destroy fish habitats, were observed in Laguna Lake in 2023.

To make sure fingerlings survive in freshwater, the amount of salt in water must be controlled.

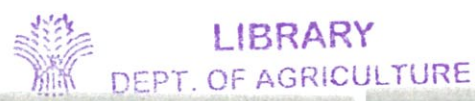
According to the DA, fish pen operators have claimed that saltwater was last allowed to flow into the lake in 2022.

Laurel said he would arrange a meeting with the Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) to discuss the problems "along with guidelines for the opening of the flood gates that is crucial for the introduction of

fresh and saltwater needed for a more productive aquaculture industry."

LLDA, which has jurisdiction over Laguna Lake, implemented in 1999 a zoning plan that allowed the use of 10,000 hectares (ha) for fish pen operations and 5,000 ha for fish cages.

Laguna Lake produces as much as 90,000 tons of freshwater fish annually and provides livelihood to around 13,000 fishermen. INQ



Dealing with the syndrome long afflicting the DA

The 21 approved agriculture road maps are still a work in progress. They must now be immediately strengthened to jump-start our agriculture transformation.

Last Jan. 18, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu-Laurel, Jr. discussed three recommendations during his bimonthly meeting with the Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food, Inc. (PCA-FI), represented by chair Philip Ong and president Danilo Faus-to, to make such road maps more compelling: ownership, action planning and implementation.

Ownership

During my stint at the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), one of my first tasks was to approve the road maps for 12 industry sectors. Having done strategic planning at Xerox Corporation global headquarters, I expressed my apprehension and said the road maps were more academic than realistic.

We therefore decided not to pay the consultants, who charged high, until the lead private sector participant in the road map formulation would sign to attest to its usefulness. Only three did so.

The other consultants had to rework their submissions until the private sector lead signed them to ensure the road map usefulness. Some took more than six months, while others could not deliver and therefore were never paid.

When businessmen saw these road maps, they were motivated to invest. These road maps were partly responsible for the Board of Investments (where I was a Governor as part of my Undersecretary job) increasing the initial registered investment level from P3 billion to more than P400 billion in three years.

COMMENTARY

ERNESTO M. ORDOÑEZ

For our agriculture road maps, several private sector participants said they would not sign because they believed they were government initiatives not consistent with their own beliefs. We must now rework these road maps in a way that the private sector will be willing to sign—and therefore “own” them.

Action planning

On Aug. 5, 2019, then Agriculture Secretary William Dar announced that road maps would be a priority during his term. The plan was delayed partly because there was no standard road map outline to follow.

On Jan. 20, 2021, the Department of Agriculture (DA) began working on the task based on an outline submitted by the Agri-

Fisheries Alliance (composed of Alyansa Agrikultura for farmers and fisherfolk, PCAFI for agribusiness, and Coalition for Agriculture Modernization in the Philippines for science and academe).

Among the elements outlined were industry situation overview, benchmarking, local and global competitive analysis, market trends, and objectives, policies and programs. An appendix would then specify the action programs, together with their corresponding budgets, in the next two years.

Unfortunately, this appendix received low priority. This resulted in inadequate action planning and key road map elements not acted upon.

It is imperative that this be done now. Otherwise, the road map will become a mere dream rather than a real goal.

Implementation

Finally, the agriculture road map must have a public-private road map implementation team to ensure that the “no action, talk only” syndrome does not occur. During two national conferences of the public-private PCAFI, this glaring gap was discussed.

On Nov. 11, 2022, it was recommended that for each road map, the elected PCAFI committee leader, or the lead private sector participant in the road map formulation, administer an implementation team as chair, and with his or her government counterpart as cochair.

In a follow-up meeting on Dec. 15, it was further recommended that the team focus on the short term actions and budget use for the quarter, with the DA regional directors resuming the practice of providing their counterpart PCAFI private sector leaders the projects and budgets for their review and comments. None of the above was ever implemented, except for the information sharing that was restored last Jan. 5. The implementation teams must immediately be created to result in action.

A strengthened road map could only be done by ensuring ownership, action planning and implementation. **INQ**

The author is Agriwatch chair, former secretary of presidential flagship programs and projects, and former undersecretary of the DA and the DTI. Contact is agriwatch_phil@yahoo.com



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JAPAN POULTRY IMPORTS BANNED DUE TO BIRD FLU

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has imposed a temporary ban on the importation of poultry and other poultry products from Japan following reports of bird flu outbreaks.

Processing, evaluation and issuances of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances were also suspended.

The ban, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said, would help "protect the health of the local poultry population."

"Only wild birds, poultry and poultry products imported from Japan that are already in transit, loaded and accepted on or before November 10 will be allowed entry to the Philippines," the DA said on Thursday.

Shipments made after the said date will

either be returned to Japan, confiscated and destroyed.

Reports submitted by Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries to the World Organization for Animal Health in November 2023 confirmed outbreaks of the highly pathogenic avian influenza, particularly the H5N1 subtype, in Kashima City.

The DA previously imposed an import ban of poultry products from Japan in November 2022 due to outbreaks of the bird disease. This was lifted in August 2023.

The temporary halt to poultry imports from Japan follows a ban on shipments from Ohio and California in the United States, also due to bird flu outbreaks.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



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PHILIPPINE STAR/MICHAEL VARCAS

FISH CAGES in Laguna De Bay pictured as seen from Cardona, Rizal.

Laguna de Bay set for aquaculture revival

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it is planning to improve the aquaculture output of Laguna de Bay to better supply Metro Manila and nearby provinces.

In a statement on Thursday, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr., said the objective is to lower the cost of fish in the surrounding communities.

"Our aim is to produce more food at lower prices. For example, bring back *bangus* (milkfish) prices to P50-P70 per kilo. Maximizing the aquaculture potential of (Laguna de Bay) is essential to achieving that goal. If we can add more capacity, then let's do it," Mr. Laurel added.

Laguna de Bay currently produces about 90,000 metric tons of freshwater fish annually and provides livelihoods to 13,000 fisherfolk, according to the Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA).

The LLDA board includes the Departments of Environment and Natural Resources, and Trade and Industry; the National Eco-

nomic and Development Authority, the Office of the President, and the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority.

The DA said that aquaculture associations from Laguna de Bay have asked the department to address falling yields due to the rising mortality of fingerlings and to make water quality more suitable for *bangus* production following encroachment of salt water.

Mr. Laurel said he plans to meet with Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga to discuss programs for Laguna de Bay, including new rules for opening floodgates to improve conditions for aquaculture.

Fish found or grown in Laguna Lake include goby, mudfish, *ayungin*, *bangus*, catfish, *kanduli*, tilapia, and common carp.

In 1999, the LLDA allocated 10,000 hectares of Laguna de Bay to fishpen operators.

"Pollution continues to threaten the lake as a viable source of fish," the DA said. — **Adrian H. Halili**



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Special rice retail prices shoot up to P70/kilo

By BELLA CARIASO

Retail prices of special rice have reached as high as P70 per kilo amid the continued spike in the cost of the staple.

Based on monitoring of the **Department of Agriculture**, the retail price of local special rice increased by P2 per kilo from P68

per kilo.

The retail price of local premium rice reached as high as P67 per kilo, local well-milled at P57 and local regular rice P53 per kilo.

Federation of Free Farmers national manager Raul Montemayor said that the farmgate price of palay in Tarlac reached as high as P30 per kilo.

"I was in Tarlac yesterday and was told that early harvesters were getting the equivalent of P30 per kilo for dried palay, up from around P25 (per kilo) from October to November last year. Traders must be having a reading of the supply situation that is different from that of the DA, which is saying that we have ample supply,"

Montemayor told **The STAR**.

Watchdog Bantay Bigas spokesperson Cathy Estavillo warned of an increase in hunger as the price of the grain continues to go up.

Retailers confirmed that there was a drop in the volume of rice that consumers buy, Estavillo said.

At a press conference, DA Assistant Secretary and spokesman

Arnel de Mesa refused to comment on the possible increase in hunger, saying it is the National Economic and Development Authority that can answer the question.

De Mesa said the country has at least a 100-day supply of rice, and the only concern is the retail cost as the price in the international market continues to go up.

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CTALK CITO BELTRAN

See you at the fair!

That line certainly dates me and was a popular shout out back in the 60's, among people who looked forward to meeting up at fairs. Here in the Philippines that usually meant the school fair, during which rides, booths, games and three days of fun were held to break the monotony of school, a chance to show off your school facilities or grounds to outsiders or maybe get to meet students of the opposite sex.



As things progressed, it became competitive, vengeful and loud. Those three days featured sports competitions, a chance to dunk the unpopular teacher or putting Mr. Popularity "in jail" or being handcuffed with your crush and pretending innocence. It was either heavenly smelling her perfume or a total ego crush as she held you in contempt and utter disgust! By the 70's, school fairs started featuring concerts and those became the breakout events for many OPM bands.

Unfortunately, that was largely the extent of fairs in schools and universities I got to go to or visit. Being an agriculturally dependent country, it makes me wonder why the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Trade and the DepEd have not put their resources together to develop and promote "county fairs" and club events such as the 4H clubs did in the US back then.

Government and media habitually point out that many farmers' children have no desire to carry on with the back-breaking toil of farming and would rather go to the cities and work at a call center or be a food delivery rider. If they're so poor, how do they even transition to the city with nothing on them? Back breaking? Maybe, if all you plant is rice the way it's been done for the last hundred years without mechanization or solar technology.

Half of those claims are perpetuated myths used to justify the put down of farming. There is so much video evidence on YouTube about successful roof deck farming on 150 to 200 square meters, while these farmers' kids have an average of 1.5 hectares that is big enough to raise vegetables, livestock, fish and fruits to sustain a family annually.

The reason we need to put up and promote 4H clubs and fairs is for the very young people to know where their food comes from, that there is money in backyard farming and a future in farming. If you work and save you can rent, lease or buy more land through deferred payments. But children need to be taught the way they should go, grow and think.

Considering the commercial success of such trade fairs you would think that the government would have seen the potential early on, not only in terms of money but also in promoting the programs and

services of government and empowering people through public seminars. We have mistakenly bet the farm on Facebook and social media, allowed Covid to scare us and disregard the value of human interaction and exchange.

Today, for instance, marks the 12th year of the World Game Fowl Expo, Jan. 19 to 21, 2024 at the World Trade Center in Pasay City. I'm certain that this trade show for game fowl enthusiasts or "sabungeros" will attract over a hundred thousand visitors, hundreds of exhibitors and will generate millions upon millions of pesos per day.

The main attraction may be all the live hens, roosters and breeding materials for sale, but it is also the go-to event for companies such as BMeg Feeds, San Miguel Animal Health products to showcase their wide array of products as well as host mini seminars to educate the public in matters relative to animal care, feeding and medication.

Even micro businesses such as manufacturers of poultry and game fowl equipment like incubators, a variety of pens, inventory related materials and accessories look forward to the expo to promote their much-needed wares in the poultry and game fowl industry.

Barely a month after that, there will be a similar event on Feb. 9 to 11 called the Philippine Pet Expo at the SMX Convention Center and once again the fair or expo as they call it, will focus on gamefowls as well as a wide variety of pets and will be equally well-attended. After that smaller events will take place up north and down south as far as Cebu and Davao. The next Agri link fair won't be until October, I think.

The expos or fairs are certainly good for the sabong industry, livestock sector and a welcome event among pet lovers, but they are usually private sector and commercially driven. People who have related products and the capital to pay for three days' participation of about P50,000 I am told, get to sell their produce. Once again it ends up becoming an event for people with lots of cash and for people in Metro Manila.

Based on what I've seen on YouTube, the ordinary Filipinos who have products to sell, live plants or plant-based, end up going to the public markets, tiangge or live-stock roadside selling points such as in Padre Burgos, Batangas, places in Bulacan, etc. There is no system, no quality control, no security measures against stolen goods being sold or scams.

Worst of all there is no rhyme or reason. From the very little I know about state fairs and county fairs abroad, the objective is to promote commerce and agriculture within towns, counties or districts. The theme is to promote community, awareness and getting to know your fellow farmers, producers, vendors and buyers. It is not about attendance, ticket sales and big profits. Most importantly, it celebrates and honors farming and agriculture. See you at the BMeg booths...today, tomorrow and Sunday!

E-mail: utalk2ctalk@gmail.com



PREPARATION FOR EL NIÑO A MUST

FARMERS WARNED AS C. LUZON DEALS WITH DRY SPELL, DROUGHT

By Tonette T. Orejas
@ttorejasINQ

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—The seven provinces in Luzon have already experienced a dry spell and a drought this month, and this situation is projected to last until March, prompting an official of the Department of Agriculture (DA) to urge farmers, as well as livestock and poultry growers, to prepare for the El Niño phenomenon.

"Although the [water] elevation in dams is high, it is better to stay prepared up to March," Lowell Rebillaco, DA regional office focal person for disaster risk reduction and management, said at a briefing on Wednesday.

An area is experiencing a dry spell when rainfall is scarce for three months and a drought when rainfall is scarce for five months, he explained.

According to Rebillaco, the dry season in the country is occurring at the same time that El Niño, which is the unusual warming of surface waters in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean, is happening. The wet season in the Philippines starts in May or June.

What is being watched are 18,919 hectares of farmlands in the region's provinces of Aurora, Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Tarlac and Zambales, he said, noting that these lands were not planted during the 2016 and 2019 droughts.

Citing the outlook of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa), Rebillaco said a strong El Niño is expected to continue this month.

"But majority of global climate models suggest that El Niño will likely persist until the months of March, April and May 2024, with the transition to neutral in April, May and June," he added.

Optimistic

According to Rebillaco, the DA is "optimistic" that farmers in the region can withstand the dry season because they can still get irrigation from dams and open sources like deep wells.

Angat Dam in Bulacan and Pantabangan Dam in Nueva Ecija reached normal high water levels on Tuesday, data from Pagasa monitoring showed.

But almost 90 percent of Angat Dam's supply supports the drinking water needs of Metro Manila, with only 10 percent diverted to 30,000 ha of farms in Bulacan and Pampanga, National Irrigation Authority reports said.

Rebillaco said farmers had

been tapping the aquifers and local waterways to cope with the dry spell.

The regional DA reported supporting areas not prone to drought by providing 205 units of pump and engine sets, 19,000 bags of hybrid yellow corn seeds, 140 bags of glutinous white corn seeds, 19,280 bags of inorganic fertilizers, assorted vegetable seeds and P45-million worth of fuel subsidies to 14,540 farmers.

To save production in drought-prone areas, the agency reported distributing 1,842 pump and engine sets to rice farmers, 410 sets to corn farms and 180 sets to high-value crop growers. It handed out 29,680 observation wells and distributed 32,800 bags of multistress rice seeds.

At least P170 million is available for crop insurance, Rebillaco said.

Impact

In Cagayan Valley region, rice farmer Marcelo Aguinaldo, 74, of Barangay Upi village in Gamu town, Isabela, expressed concern about the perceived impact of the drought on 69 provinces in the country.

"This early, we set aside some money to buy diesel for water pumps to irrigate our rice farms during the dry months," Aguinaldo said in an interview.

Recounting the challenges of the last cropping season, he said they were rarely recovering expenses for seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, labor charges and other inputs.

"For a hectare of my farm, I spent over P80,000, barely covering my family's needs," he lamented.

Another farmer, Rolly Duran, 56, from Barangay Cullalabo Norte in Isabela's Burgos town, described the drought as a "curse."

"Again, we will spend more money than we expect to earn come the harvest season between March and April. We just pray hard to God that we will still earn something," Duran added.

Isabela is the second largest province in the country, covering a land area of 1,066,456 ha. It is considered the rice bowl of northern Luzon and the corn capital of the country.

Data released by the DA Cagayan Valley in 2022 showed that Isabela ranked second to Nueva Ecija in annual average rice production from 2018 to 2020. Isabela produced an average of 1.1 million metric tons (MT) of rice annually while Nueva Ecija produced 1.2 million MT during this period.

—WITH A REPORT FROM VILLAMOR
VISAYA JR. INQ



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Japan poultry imports banned after bird flu

IMPORTS of poultry products from Japan have been banned after an outbreak there of H5N1 highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), or bird flu, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

In a memorandum order, the DA said that shipments of domestic and wild birds, poultry meat, day-old chicks, eggs, and semen from Japan were suspended starting Jan. 17.

Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries reported an outbreak of HPAI to the World Organization for Animal Health on Nov. 28.

"The Japanese agency's report showed an outbreak of the H5N1 strain (among) wild and domesticated birds on Nov. 24 in Kashima City in Saga Prefecture," the DA said.

Sanitary and phytosanitary import permit processing for poultry products from Japan has also been suspended.

"Only wild birds, poultry and poultry products imported from Japan that are already in transit, loaded and accepted on or before Nov. 10, will be allowed entry into the Philippines," the DA said.

It added that poultry shipped out after Nov. 10 would either be returned to the country of origin, or confiscated and destroyed. — **Adrian H. Halili**

TR4 disease, logistics issues prune banana exports last year

By CATHERINE TALAVERA

The Philippines is expected to have posted declines in banana exports last year due to the spread of the Banana Fusarium Wilt Tropical Race 4 (TR4) disease as well as logistical challenges, according to a report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

Based on preliminary results of its banana market review for 2023, the FAO said the country's banana exports are seen to have declined by around three percent to 2.206 million tons.

This will make the country the third largest exporter of bananas globally, falling behind Guatemala, which posted higher exports of 2.45 million tons in 2023.

Ecuador is seen to have remained the top exporter of bananas last year, exporting a total of 6.19 million tons of bananas, higher than the 5.8 million tons in the previous year.

However, the Philippines remained as the main exporter of bananas in the Asian region.

"The main exporter from the region continues to be the Philippines, which supplies some 60 percent of Asian banana shipments on average but has seen production severely affected by the spread of TR4 in the country," the FAO said.

It cited data from the Filipino Banana Growers and Exporters Association in April 2023 showing that approximately 15,000 plantations in the Philippines are affected by TR4, causing grave concern about the prospects for the country's banana industry in 2023 and beyond.

FAO added that reported logistical difficulties affecting the quality of Filipino bananas imported to Japan also caused additional concern to the industry.

While demand for bananas in Japan remained relatively stable, import quantities were reduced by the production shortages experienced in the Philippines, from where Japan typically sources some 75 to 80 percent of its banana imports.

data for the first seven months of the year accordingly show year-on-year declines in import quantities into Japan from the Philippines by two percent, and from Ecuador by 25 percent.

However, average import unit values from the Philippines increased by eight percent during the period.

On a global scale, banana exports are seen to have slightly improved to 19.17 million tons from 19.12 million tons in 2022.

"According to preliminary data and information on developments over the first six to nine months of 2023, global trade in bananas displayed signs of recovery from the more severe supply shortages experienced in the previous two years," the FAO said.

However, it noted that developments appeared to be significantly divergent among key global trade partners, as weather conditions and the economic backdrop proved to be beneficial to some, and adverse to others.

FAO said higher supplies were reported from Ecuador and Guatemala during the first eight months of the year, where production growth was seen on the back of favourable climatic conditions related to the El Niño weather phenomenon.

In contrast, excessive rainfall, flooding and the passing of tropical storms reduced supplies available for export from Colombia, Mexico, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic.

"The spread of plant diseases, importantly the devastating spread of the Banana Fusarium Wilt Tropical Race 4 (TR4) disease in the Philippines and its alarming presence in Peru and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, further continued to cause production losses as well as financial strain from the substantial costs associated with disease prevention," FAO said.

It added that suppliers in some Latin American countries were additionally impacted by losses and mitigation expenditures stemming from cases of placement of illegal substances into banana containers.



You might want to go to this fancy dinner that highlights local produce

I'm very honored and grateful to have worked in Manila Bulletin's Agriculture section in various capacities, first as editor-in-chief of Agriculture Online, then following in Zac Sarian's footsteps as Manila Bulletin's Agriculture section editor and later, editor-in-chief of Agriculture Monthly magazine as well. This line of work allowed me to learn about, observe, and experience different facets of our agriculture industry that aren't necessarily seen by the general public. It's also given me the opportunity to meet different people from the sector.

But before I was an agriculture editor, I was a food writer during the early stages of the sustainability movement, when chefs were beginning to work directly with farmers to source specific produce. Even though I was no stranger to life on a farm, it was really the act of eating and the curiosity about where ingredients come from that sparked my interest in the agriculture industry.

And even though I've resigned from my post as Agriculture editor, my interest

in the agriculture industry by way of food continues.

One of the organizations I interacted with when I was editor was the Agribusiness and Countryside Development Foundation (ABCDF), an NGO whose main purpose is to facilitate job generation in the agriculture sector. One way to do this is to introduce farmers directly to buyers, which is what ABCDF, where I am a board member, did in a collaboration with The Westin Manila and Chinoy chef and TV personality Sharwin Tee, owner of Little Grace popups.

In a two-night event called CuiSCENE no. 2: Farm-to-Table Contemporary Chinese Degustation Menu, Chef Sharwin collaborated with Chef Rej Casanova of Seasonal Tastes in The Westin Manila to come up with a Chinoy-inspired tasting menu using produce from local farmers.



AVANT GARDENER
YVETTE TAN

The eight-course dinner showcases traditional Chinoy dishes presented in imaginative ways. Tee specifically refers to Chinoy dishes as Chinese dishes, usually from the Hokkien region where a lot of Chinese immigrants hail from, that use Philippine ingredients that, over time, have developed into its own cuisine. It's rare to find these dishes in local Chinese restaurants as most of them serve Cantonese cuisine, but they tend to be common in Chinoy households. It is from his memory of lutong bahay (home-cooked meals) that Tee draws inspiration.

There are a couple of things that aren't part of the eight courses but should be watched out for: the appetizer, radish prepared like char siu (asado), is completely vegan, but has the rich, sweet, umami taste of Cantonese-style roast pork, and the fortune cookie everyone gets at the end of the meal, where one lucky guest per night (out of two nights) gets the chance to win an overnight stay at the hotel.

Many diners liked the first course: Earth, Land, Ocean Handcrafted Dimsum—mushroom and peas with truffle essence, lobster and chives, and pork siomai with seared goose liver. It's recommended that they be eaten in that order so the diner can experience the most delicate top the most robust in taste.

Another crowd favorite was the Fish & Kale, sous vide Asian seabass, organic kale XO sauce, kale puree, crispy rice cracker, fish milk broth, scallion oil. It's a subtle but richly flavored dish that put it in many diners top dishes for the night.

Tee, who is on a crusade to convert everyone to the joys of cooked lettuce dishes, is especially proud of the Lettuce & Kiniing, poached romaine, iceberg, and Lollo Rosso lettuce, Benguet kiniing XO Sauce, Lollo Rosso oil. The three lettuces have different tastes and different textured, despite all of them being cooked. The XO sauce, made from kiniing, cured pork from Benguet, adds richness to the dish.

One of my personal favorites was the Tofu & Mushrooms, twice-cooked tofu, mushroom tofu mousse, shiitake mapo sauce, fried oyster mushrooms. This vegan dish is a medley of flavor and texture, with the mushrooms providing umami.

All the dishes were delicious but for me, it was the vegetable-based ones that really shone. Of course, I could be biased because I really like vegetables.

I've said before that the easiest way for the regular Filipino to support our agriculture industry is to buy local and if possible, buy directly from farmers. While a dinner like this may not be for everyone, it's a huge deal that The Westin, along with many other organizations that include hotels, restaurants, and food manufacturers, are making an effort to buy directly from farmers, despite the industry's unfortunate reputation of having unstable supply, among other kinks that have to be ironed out.

The limited-run menu is available on Jan. 31 and Feb. 7, 2024, from 6 to 10 p.m. at ₱4,800 nett per person. For reservations, contact The Westin Manila.



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‘Budget gap goal doable if rice subsidies junked’

THE country’s budget deficit target could be attained by 2028 if the government removes billions of pesos worth of rice subsidies that “accomplish little” in improving production and nutrition, according to the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS).

In a discussion paper, PIDS researchers led by Senior Research Fellow Roehlano M. Briones said the government spends P30 to P40 billion annually in terms of subsidies to support producers, expand domestic supply, and keep down consumer prices, especially for rice.

However, the researchers said Food and Nutrition Research Institute (FNRI) data showed Filipino households need to spend an additional P20.7 or P21 everyday to be able to afford a nutritious diet. The recommended diet costs P68.2 per day but households were only spending P47.5 on average.

“The subsidies accomplish little in terms of outcomes such as faster improvements in nutrient intake of households. The added financial burden is, however, substantial—about P30 to P40 billion per year, which the government can itself ill afford in an era of fiscal imbalance,” the PIDS researchers said.

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Budget...

CONTINUED FROM A1

"The projected deficit in 2024 might be lowered by 4 percent if this spending were avoided, hastening attainment of the deficit target of 3 percent of GDP by 2028," they added.

The high food costs nationwide have caused Filipinos to underspend on certain food that are crucial to good nutrition, while overspending for rice.

Given the current conditions, the team estimated that while most Filipino households can afford adequate levels of energy and protein by 2030, this will not be the case for Vitamin A.

"By food group, households were [currently] underspending for fats and oils, milk and milk products, eggs, fruits, and vegetables. Meanwhile there is overspending for meat, fish, and nuts, and starchy staples (mostly rice)," the researchers said.

High food costs, the PIDS researchers said, prompted the government to implement "unprecedented policies" including "bloating" the Department of Agriculture budget, imposing rice price ceilings for rice, and selling rice through Kadiwa stores at P25 per kilogram of rice.

However, the authors said, consistent income growth could address this by allowing more households to afford food—including nutritious food that does not only involve rice consumption—nationwide.

The researchers said lower inflation will also help achieve food affordability for most of the population with regard to energy and protein.

"The interrelationships at general equilibrium imply that the two are connected—rapid economic expansion overall is accompanied by slower but still sustained growth of agriculture, and therefore easing up of food prices," the researchers said.

PIDS said the study found that maintaining current economic trends will not be enough to ensure food affordability and adequate nutrient intake for all Filipinos by 2030.

However, it lays out two promising paths to a more nourishing future—one is paved with productivity-driven progress and the other is built on strategic rethinking of food subsidies.

The paper employed scenario analysis considering the interconnectedness of different sectors within the Philippine economy, including production, consump-

tion, and trade.

The most promising outlook emerges on investing in broad-based productivity across the entire food system. This approach fosters economic growth, leading to lower food prices, improved household income, and a greatly enhanced nutrient intake for a sizable portion of the population.

"Investing in general services like research and development and infrastructure is an effective strategy for achieving affordable diets," the authors said. "Long-term government investment in these areas, especially in agriculture, is seen as a more efficient approach to enhancing food affordability and dietary quality," they continued.

They caution that relying solely on existing economic trends will leave many Filipinos struggling to afford nutritious food by 2030. According to them, the costs for both producers and consumers are expected to rise moving forward in this scenario.

It indicates that while most households could secure sufficient calories, Vitamin A deficiencies might persist. This highlights a potential nutritional gap despite adequate energy intake.

Targeted interventions

MEANWHILE, while the study acknowledges the limited effectiveness of simply subsidizing rice, it also recognizes the potential value of targeted interventions.

By strategically focusing on vulnerable groups or key commodities, carefully designed subsidy programs can offer a valuable tool for supporting those most at risk.

However, the authors emphasize the importance of moving beyond a singular focus on rice and adopting a more nuanced approach that tackles food affordability holistically.

"Despite the lower price of rice in a Subsidy scenario, about 45 percent of calorie availability of Filipinos already obtained from non-cereal sources, hence policies that focus on just the key staple may be insufficient to make a serious dent in the size of total calorie intake," expounded the authors.

"Adopting a transformative agenda that prioritizes broad-based productivity enhancements alongside targeted interventions holds the key to ensuring a future where nutritious food is accessible and affordable for all Filipinos," the authors stressed.

They emphasize that prioritizing productivity and embracing a holistic approach can help the Philippines take decisive steps towards achieving its ambitious goal of ending hunger by 2030. **Cai U. Ordinario**



Banana exports down as of Sept

PHILIPPINE banana exports are estimated to have declined in 2023 partly due to pests and the spread of fruit-related disease, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said.

Based on the FAO's latest banana market review, the Philippines exported a total of 2.20 million metric tons (MT) of bananas as of the first nine months last year, a decrease of 3.0 percent from the 2.27 million MT delivered in 2022.

"The spread of plant diseases, importantly the devastating spread of the Banana Fusarium Wilt Tropical Race 4 (TR4) disease in the Philippines and its alarming presence in Peru and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, further continued to cause production losses as well as financial strain from the substantial costs associated with disease prevention," the FAO said.

In April 2023, the Pilipino Banana Growers and Exporters Association reported that around 15,000 plantations in the Philippines were affected by TR4.

Despite lower shipments, the Philip-

pines continued to be the main exporter of bananas in Asia last year.

"The main exporter from the region continues to be the Philippines, which supplies some 60 percent of Asian banana shipments on average," the FAO said.

Demand for Filipino bananas in some key markets was said to have been affected.

The FAO cited China's imports of the fruit, which was hindered by supply shortages experienced in the Philippines, Cambodia and Laos.

It added that about 50 to 60 percent of China's banana imports were sourced from the said countries.

Likewise, net imports by Japan are foreseen to decrease by an estimated 3 percent in 2023, to approximately 1.0 million MT.

"While demand for bananas in the country remained relatively stable, import quantities were reduced by the production shortages experienced in the Philippines, from where Japan typically sources some 75 to 80 percent of its banana imports," said the FAO.

Global exports of the fruit, meanwhile, are seen to grow by some 0.3 percent in 2023 and reach 19.3 million MT, a more positive performance than the 6 percent decrease experienced in 2022.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



Accelerating development: The Indonesian experience

BEING a retired academ-
cian, I keep myself abreast
with development trends by
reading materials from schol-
arly publications. Thankfully,
this limits my social media
engagement as I do not have
enough time to read and respond to the many
opinionated, verging on thrash, views that
populate social media.

I recently came across a Deutsche Bank pub-



**FINER
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**FERMIN
ADRIANO**

lication entitled "Indonesia: A
rising economic powerhouse"
(Jan. 8, 2024), which sum-
marized why the country
was on its way to becoming
an economic superpower in
the next two or three decades,

joining China, the United States and India.

Three factors were identified as the engine of
Indonesia's economic transformation:

➤ **Finer B2**

■ FINER FROM B1

Accelerating

First is its abundant natural
resources that are critical materi-
als for the electronic vehicle (EV)
industry, whose growth is mainly
being driven by a shift to more
climate-friendly technologies.
Indonesia is the world's biggest
producer of nickel, the second-
largest producer of tin and the
fourth-largest producer of bauxite,
which have made Indonesia a pre-
mier battery manufacturing site.

The second factor is Indonesia's
ability to reap the benefits of its
demographic dividends. Indone-
sia's population is estimated to
be around 274 million, the fourth
largest in the world after India,
China and the United States. Its
median age is 31 from a work-
ing age population (15 to 59) of
around 177 million by the end of
this year. It has a labor force twice
as much as the Philippines.

With proper education and
skills training, Indonesia's labor
force is expected to contribute
substantially to its rapid economic
growth. In contrast, China, Thai-
land and Vietnam's labor forces
are fast aging.

The third factor is that with
increasing incomes, the ranks of
the middle class in Indonesia are
swelling. In turn, they will create
significant demand for products
and in the process, fuel economic
growth further.

It is estimated that Indonesia's
per capita income was around
\$5,000 in 2022, higher than the
Philippines' \$3,499 and double
that of India. The World Bank
reported that around 20 percent

of Indonesia's population joined
the middle class during the last 15
years due to rising wages. Around
55 million belong to the middle
class. This huge and viable market
is virtually the population of the
United Kingdom and more than
most European countries.

Indonesia's path to sustained
and high economic growth was
achieved through a deliberate
effort on the part of its govern-
ment to introduce much-needed
economic reforms.

First and foremost was the effort
to improve the ease of doing busi-
ness in the country. It enacted the
Omnibus Law in 2020, which re-
placed 79 investment-related laws
and in the process, dramatically
streamlined business regulations.
It made labor laws attractive for
investors, reduced the corporate
income tax from 25 percent to
22 percent, lifted the "Investment
Negative List" that restricted for-
eign investments in certain sectors
and expanded tax incentives.

The second was Indonesia decid-
ing to increase value-added from
its resources by banning exports
of unprocessed minerals. This
forced global manufacturers to
locate their processing operations
in Indonesia. The country was able
to do this because, as noted earlier,
it is a big mineral player.

Finally, Indonesia is benefiting
from the rising value of commodity
exports. Given the fact that base met-
als and coal constitute 14 percent and
16 percent, respectively, of its total
exports, an increase in prices provides
windfall gains, even more so with

the shift from exporting unprocessed
minerals to processed ones.

The Indonesian government
knows full well that it can become
a future key EV hub if it is able to
fully develop downstream mining
industries. And with the surplus
it is generating from its mineral
exports, Indonesia is also prepar-
ing itself to face the challenges that
climate change is imposing.

Construction of a new capital is
underway in Nusantara, Borneo.
It is expected to be inaugurated
this August 17 to coincide with
Indonesia's Independence Day.
Experts have predicted that global
warming will inundate 40 percent
of Jakarta and thus, President
Jokowi decided to transfer the
country's capital.

The urban development project is
expected to cost Indonesia around
\$32 billion. Foreign investors have
been invited to participate in the
massive urban development pro-
gram so that Nusantara can become
fully operational by 2045.

Indonesia has provided the Phil-
ippines the blueprint on how to at-
tain sustained and high economic
growth rates. Just like Indonesia,
the Philippines is a mineral-rich
country and the resources, if prop-
erly utilized, can accelerate our
economic development.

But again, just like with other
development issues, the Philip-
pines is stuck in long, endless
and unproductive debates with
so-called progressive groups on
what to do with our mining in-
dustry. This makes me wonder why
"progressive" is used by the media
to describe such groups as their
mindsets are stuck to a Jurassic
development ideology.



Red Sea attacks unlikely to hit cereals exports to Asia for now, says French farm office

PARIS- Attacks on ships in the Red Sea are unlikely for now to affect exports of French cereals to Asia, notably China which is a key market for France, since they are targeted at ships going towards Israel, farm office FranceAgriMer on Wednesday.

The Iran-allied Houthi militia have been attacking commercial ships in the region since November in an escalation of Israel's war with Palestinian Hamas militants in Gaza.

The Houthis have said that they would target ships heading to Israel and that their actions are a show of support for the Palestinians.

"(Wheat exports) going to China are going to go through the Suez Canal and the Red Sea in the opposite way as the one that is threatened," Marc Zribi, head of FranceAgriMer's grain unit, told reporters, after a meeting with representatives of the French grain trade.

"Now, if that zone of the Bab al-Mandab Strait and that part of the Red Sea became a real zone of open conflict in the weeks to come there would certainly be a significant impact but at this stage it's not the case so we can think that exports out of Europe to Asia should not be impacted too much," he said.

The Bab al-Mandab Strait is at the southern end of the Red Sea.

Still, shipments data showed some French wheat exports to China that set off in December have been rerouted since the attacks.

Among the 12 wheat cargoes that have left France for China since last month, five travelled through the Suez Canal and Red Sea, while seven chose the longer route around Africa, including two that had turned back in the Mediterranean, LSEG shipping data showed.

FranceAgriMer in a supply and demand outlook slightly lowered

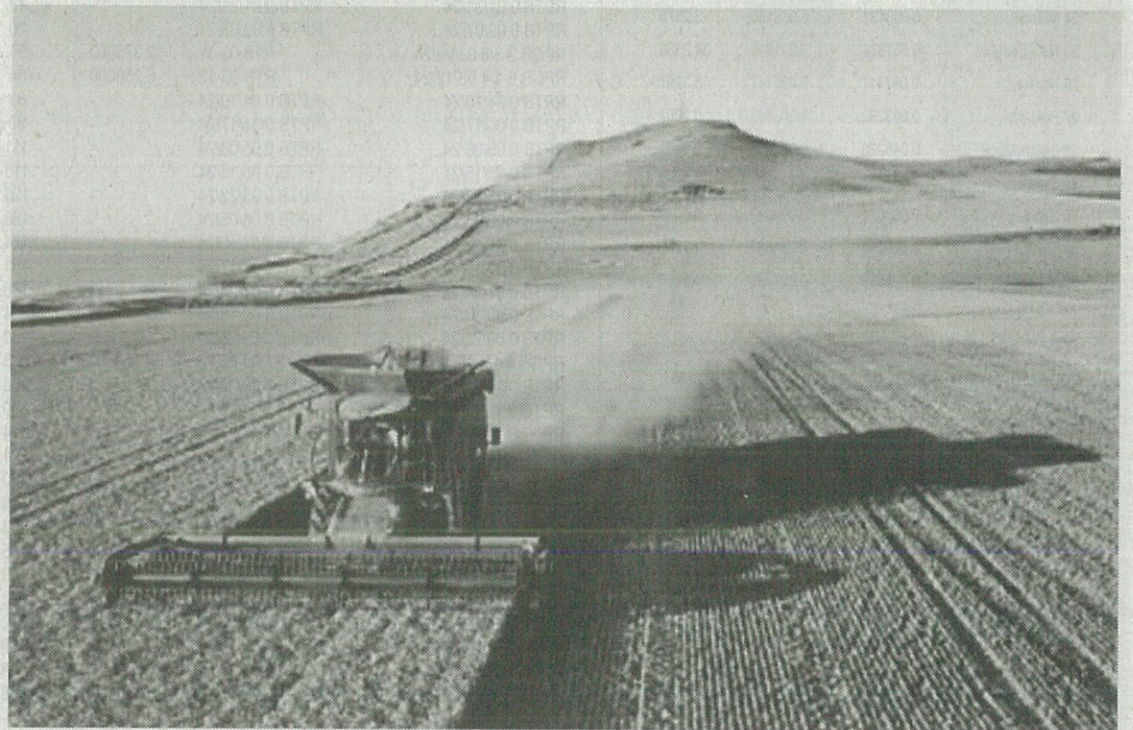
its forecast for French soft wheat exports outside the European Union in 2023/24 citing lower demand from China and Black Sea competition in Egypt.

Meanwhile, the US on Wednesday returned the Yemen-based Houthi rebels to a list of terrorist groups, as the militants attacked their second US operated vessel in the Red Sea region this week and the US military carried out fresh strikes.

Attacks by the Iran-allied Houthi militia on ships in the region since November have slowed trade between Asia and Europe and alarmed major powers in an escalation of the war between Israel and Palestinian Hamas militants in Gaza.

The Houthis say they are acting in solidarity with Palestinians and have threatened to expand attacks to include US ships in response to American and British strikes on the group's positions.

- Reuters



A french farmer harvesting his field of wheat in Escalles, near Calais. (Reuters Photo)



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Soybeans, corn rebound

CANBERRA- Chicago soybean futures inched up on Thursday but remained close to two-year lows as traders bet the market would continue to be well-stocked despite concerns over a potentially smaller harvest in top producer Brazil.

Corn futures also rose slightly, hovering just above their lowest in three years, while wheat fell towards a seven-week low.

Rainfall in South America has boosted the outlook for soybean and corn supplies, while the wheat market continues to be flooded with inexpensive Black Sea grain.

The most-active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade

(CBOT) edged up 0.2 percent to \$12.07-3/4 bushel after falling to \$12.03 last Friday, marking its lowest since November 2021.

"There are some concerns for the Brazilian crop, but any losses seem like they will be recouped by a rebounding Argentinian crop," said Andrew Whitelaw, an analyst with Episode 3 in Canberra.

"The trade is largely expecting soybeans to be well supplied," he said.

Some private forecasts for Brazil's soybean harvest are sharply lower than official estimates, with EarthDaily Agro predicting a 2023/24 crop of 149.2 million metric tons. - *Reuters*