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MARKET WATCH

ONION GLUT SPURS HALT TO IMPORTS

By Jordeene B. Lagare
@jordeenelagare

The Department of Agriculture (DA) temporary halted the importation of onions until May in a bid to stop the nosedive in onion prices due to a supply glut.

Agriculture Secretary **Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.** said in a statement that the oversupply of onions was due to the fresh harvest and the late arrival of imports made in December.

Laurel met with representatives of the Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. (Pcafi) and determined that the supply glut was due to the arrival between Jan. 1 and Jan. 15 of 99 tons of onions imported in December.

Pcafi told Laurel their group expects a supply surplus since an additional 40 percent of land area was planted to onions and this situation is imminent despite armyworm infestations hitting some parts of Tarlac and Nueva Ecija.

The DA and Pcafi agreed to meet every 45 days to review the supply situation and recalibrate the importation schedule and volume, with the next meeting scheduled for early March.

In a statement on Friday, the DA said the harvest of more onions in February could further pull down farm-gate prices of onion, which already declined to a level of P50 to P70 per kilogram as of January this year.

In Nueva Ecija, which accounts for 97 percent of onion production in Luzon, the farm-gate price slipped to as low as P20 per kg.

This scenario forced the DA to temporarily halt the entry of onion imports until May "to prevent further depressing onion prices due to supply glut" and hinted the suspension could be extended to July. **INQ**



Onion prices plunge; DA suspends imports

By **BELLA CARIASO**

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has ordered the suspension of onion imports as the farmgate price of white onions went down to P18 per kilo amid the flooding of imported bulbs.

On Thursday, Agriculture Secretary **Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.** met with representatives of the Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. (PCAFI) to discuss the surge in domestic supply of onion due to fresh harvest and arrival of additional supply imported in December.

The DA said shipment delays resulted in the arrival of 99 tons of onion imported in December between Jan. 1 and 15.

Laurel directed the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) to halt the issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearance until July as the local harvest season has started.

"In principle, I agree with no onion importation until July. But that is on condition that if there is a sudden supply shortfall, we will have to import earlier. We don't know what would happen because of El Niño," Laurel said.

Farmers in Nueva Ecija said the farmgate price of white onions had already dropped to P18 per kilo.

Nueva Ecija accounts for 97 percent of onion production in Luzon. Luzon produces 65 percent of local onion supply.

PCAFI president Danilo Fausto

warned that the dumping of onions will occur if the flooding of imported onions will not be stopped.

"We are projecting an oversupply of onions for 2024," Fausto said in a message to **The STAR**.

Fausto said that based on data from the local government unit of Nueva Ecija, there is an increase of 40 percent of the onion area planted, from 8,477 hectares in 2022 to 12,000 hectares in 2023.

"The onions were planted starting September 2023 up to December 2023, the bulk of which are scheduled to be harvested in February up to May 2024. Because of the good price of onions in the market, other provinces like Tarlac, Pampanga, Bataan, Zambales and even in Mindoro, also started increasing the hectare of their onion plantation," Fausto added.

Laurel added that even with the reported infestation of armyworms in some areas in Tarlac and Nueva Ecija, the pest is only expected to damage around five percent of standing crops.

Efren Alvarez, an onion farmer from Bongabon, said that he was forced to harvest his produce to save the white onions from the armyworms.

"We are appealing to traders from Manila to buy our onions to help us," Alvarez said.

He added that bags of white onions were placed along roadsides in Nueva Ecija, hoping for buyers to come. — **With Catherine Talavera**



letters

Tame price increases

It's no surprise that inflation is the top concern of the people, as recent surveys have shown. The non-stop increase in prices of food and fuel, as well as other items of daily necessities, presents the biggest challenge to the average Filipino – not just those considered “poor,” but also the so-called middle class.

I am one of those “middle class” who works and have to feed my family of four, send my two kids to school. While we are a two-income family, we still find it more and more difficult to meet our daily needs, and our efforts to try and save something every month is not always successful.

The family time together, eating out and maybe buying the kids new shoes or something nice, is also getting less frequent. As they say, bilang na bilang because we have to be ready for any emergency.

Of course, we are luckier than many other families, since at least we both have work and we are still able to eat three times a day, which I know many fellow Filipinos may not be able to do.

But government must take control of price increases, as well as supply, especially of food. While external forces like wars in different parts of the world do affect costs, especially of fuel, there are things government can and must do to keep food affordable and available to the general population.

I hope our new **Secretary of Agriculture Francis Tiu Laurel Jr.** will be able to institute measures to immediately tame food prices, even as he has announced longer-term plans for improving our agriculture. Such plans are good, but hungry stomachs cannot afford to wait for the completion of these plans.

– **SANDEE TAN-SALAZAR**, Pasig City



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Slight increase in rice prices noted in early 2024

By XANDER DAVE CEBALLOS

The price of well-milled rice slightly increased during the first week of January amid the dry spell forecast this year, based on the data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

According to the PSA report, a kilogram of well-milled rice cost ₱55.5 from January 1 to 5, which is higher than ₱54.76 in the second phase of December and ₱54.34 in

the first phase.

Despite this, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Laurel Jr. said the stock of rice is sufficient and that additional rice imports are coming into the country.

He further said that the country had an ending rice stock of 20 million tons last year and is eyeing for similar volume this year because of the possible effects of the El Niño phenomenon.

Laurel cited the rising **8**

global prices of rice in major exporting countries, particularly Thailand, which will likely reach around \$600 per ton, based on the country's rice exporters association.

Meanwhile, the phenomenon is expected to continue until February and will persist until March, April, and May, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration.

Apart from rice, the price of galunggong or mackerel scad also saw an increase to ₱209.96 per kilogram during the period, a turnaround from the ₱203.70 and ₱203.80 per kilogram during the first and second phases of December last year.

The price of a kilogram of Baguio

beans and lakatan banana also increased during the period to ₱124.45 and ₱86.87, respectively.

Prices of other agricultural commodities, however, declined. A kilogram of brown sugar had an average retail price of ₱79.03 during the period, from ₱79.74 and ₱80.15 in December 2023.

Red onion also contracted to ₱199.10 per kilogram, a significant decrease from ₱207.79, and ₱210.25 during the first and second phases of December 2023.

A kilogram of dressed chicken experienced a slight decrease in prices, from ₱194.88 and ₱194.76 in December to ₱194.31 during the first week of this year.

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DA: No onion imports until July

By GABRIEL CHRISTEL GALANG

The Department of Agriculture (DA) ordered a temporary suspension of onion importations until July when the domestic harvest of high-value crops is deemed enough to meet the local demand.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said on Friday, Jan. 19, that the momentary halt would mitigate the decline in onion prices because of excess supply.

On Thursday, he met with the Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. (PCAFI) to deal with the fresh harvest supplies and the additional onions that came

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into the country last December.

According to the DA, 99 tons of imported onion that were supposed to be delivered in December arrived late, between January 1 and 15.

"The increased supply has pushed down farm gate prices of onion between ₱50 and ₱70 a kilo, and could fall further when more onions are harvested in February," the DA reported.

Some parts of Nueva Ecija which are the main sources of Luzon onions, have dropped their prices to ₱20 a kilo.

In perspective, Luzon alone carries 64 percent of the local onion supply.

"In principle, I agree with no onion importation until July. But that is on condition that if there is a

sudden supply shortfall, we will have to import earlier," Laurel pointed out, especially with the forthcoming effects of El Niño sometime around March and April.

The agriculture sector is currently preparing for the impact of warmer temperatures which could spawn more pests that target onion production.

In December 2022, a kilo of onion cost ₱720 because of the tight supply.

PCAFI told Laurel that they're expecting a supply surplus because of the added 40 percent of land area dedicated to onions.

Despite the reported infestation of armyworms in some areas in Tarlac and Nueva Ecija earlier today, the DA stated, "A supply glut is im-

minent as the pest is only expected to damage around five percent of standing crops."

The agri chief and the PCAFI have arranged to meet every 45 days to observe possible changes and courses of action for the onion supply situation.

They will both gather again sometime in March.

Meanwhile, the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) reported the recent armyworm infestation surrounding onion crops.

They said that 366 hectares out of 10,217 hectares of farmlands planted for onion have been invaded by said pests.

"Only crops on 6.9 hectares were damaged out of the infested areas, 359.1 hectares sustained partial damage," BPI said.



Onion importations suspended until May

THE Agriculture department has ordered a temporary halt to onion imports, citing an oversupply that has led to lower returns for farmers.

The suspension, which will remain in effect up to May, was declared as the department also reported that an armyworm infestation had hit onion farms in several provinces.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. on Friday said that the halt could be extended through July provided that harvests of the high-value crop remained sufficient to meet demand.

"In principle, I agree with no onion importation until July. But that is on condition that if there is a sudden supply shortfall, we will have to import earlier," he said.

"We don't know what would (sic) happen because of El Niño."

Laurel met with representatives of the Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. (PCAFI) on Thursday to discuss the onion supply situation.

Shipment delays led to the arrival of 99 tons of imported onions between January 1 and 15 this year.

The rise in supply caused a decline in farmgate prices to P50 and P70 per kilo, the department said. It added that prices could go down further as harvest season starts in February.

In parts of Nueva Ecija, responsible for 97 percent of Luzon's onion production, prices were

► **Suspended B2**

■ SUSPENDED FROM B1

Onion importations

said to have plummeted to as low as P20 per kilo. Luzon contributes to 65 percent of total domestic onion supply.

The Agriculture department also said that "warmer temperatures and a prolonged dry spell caused by El Niño could spawn more pests that could undermine onion production."

The effects of El Niño dry spells are expected to be the most pronounced in March and April.

The current oversupply is in contrast to the situation in late 2022 when onion prices reached as high as P720 per kilo due to limited supply.

The PCAFI told Laurel that it expects a surplus this year, mainly due to an additional 40 percent of lands having been dedicated to onion cultivation.

The industry group said a supply

surplus remained likely despite reports from the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) of armyworm infestations in certain areas of Tarlac and Nueva Ecija.

It said the pest would affect only about five percent of standing crops and the BPI has also reported that just 366 out of 10,217 hectares of onion farmlands were infested.

Of the affected areas, only 6.9 hectares were totally damaged while 359.1 hectares sustained partial damage, the agency said.

The affected areas were in the towns of Bongabon and Talevera and Palayan City in Nueva Ecija and the towns of Anao and San Manuel in Tarlac.

Armyworms typically feed on grass but are known to consume any vegetation in their path. Control measures include the use of neem oil-based sprays or biologi-

cal controls such as earwigs, spiders, and predatory wasps.

As part of efforts to deal with the infestation, a total of 2.07 metric tons of onion seeds valued at P30.4 million have been distributed to farms in Central Luzon since December.

The BPI and regional crop protection centers have also offered insecticides and technical assistance.

An extra 1.3 tons of red and white onion seeds worth P20.3 million, along with four cold storage units for onions valued at P168 million, are set to be provided to onion-producing regions.

Local government units have also committed to purchase more organic insecticides and pheromone lures.

Laurel and PCAFI representatives agreed to convene every 45 days to assess the onion supply situation and adjust the import schedule and volume as needed. Their next meeting is scheduled for early March.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



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Pag-angkat ng sibuyas, sinuspinde ng DA

Pansamantalang sinuspinde ni Agriculture Secretary **Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr.** ang importasyon ng sibuyas hanggang sa buwan ng Mayo o posibleng magtagal hanggang Hulyo ngayong taon kung sapat naman ang ani ng produkto para punan ang demand dito ng bansa.

Ang hakbang ay pinalabas ni Laurel upang maiwasan ang pagbagsak ng presyo ng local onions dahil sa inaasahang pagbaha ng suplay nito sa bansa.

Sa pulong ni Secretary Laurel sa mga representatives ng Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. tinalakay ang posibleng pagdami ng suplay ng sibuyas dahil sa fresh harvest at dagdag na suplay na inimport noong Disyembre.

"In principle, I agree with no onion importation until July. But that is on condition that if there is a sudden supply shortfall, we will have to import earlier. Hindi po natin alam ang mangyayari dahil may El Niño," sabi pa ni Laurel.

Ang matinding epekto ng El Niño ay inaasahang papalo sa mga pataniman sa Marso at Abril ngayong taon.

Ang farm gate price ng sibuyas sa ngayon ay nasa P50-P70 kada kilo. Sa Nueva Ecija na may 97 percent onion producers sa Luzon ay may P20 lamang ang kada kilo sa ngayon. (Angie dela Cruz)



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Bumagsak na sa P50 hanggang P70 ang kilo ng farmgate price ng sibuyas at nagbabala ang Department of Agriculture (DA) na maaari pa itong bumaba pagpasok ng mga bagong ani sa Pebrero.

Kaya pinahinto muna ni **Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.** ang pag-angat ng sibuyas hanggang Mayo, na maaari pang umabot ng Hulyo, para hindi sumadsad pa ang presyo nito dahil lalong malulugi ang mga magsasaka.

Ayon sa Facebook page ng Nueva Vizcaya Agri-

Sibuyas bagsak-presyo, imported inawat pagpasok

cultural Terminal Inc., papatak sa P55 hanggang P65 per kilo na lamang ang lokal na sibuyas na puti at P85 hanggang P95 per kilo naman ang lokal na sibuyas na pula.

Ang imported na pulang sibuyas naman ay nasa P70 hanggang P75 ang kilo.

Nakipagpulong si Laurel sa Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. noong Huwebes (Enero 18) kung saan

pinag-usapan ang biglang dami ng sibuyas sa bansa dahil sa mga bagong ani at ang bagsak ng mga imported. Ayon sa DA, naantala ang ibang shipment ng sibuyas noong Disyembre 2023 at dumating ang 99 tonelada nito mula Enero 1-15.

"In principle, I agree with no onion importation until July. But that is on condition that if there is a sudden supply shortfall, we will have to

import earlier...hindi po natin alam ang mang-yayari dahil may El Niño," sabi ni Laurel.

Babala ng DA, ang mas mainit na panahon at mas matagal na tagtuyot o El Niño ay maaaring magdala ng mga peste na makasisira sa mga pananim. Inaasahang sa Marso at Abril mararamdaman ang kasagsagan ng El Niño sa bansa. (**Eileen Mencias/Natalia Antonio**)



Mga poultry product mula Japan, ban sa 'Pinas

IPINAGBAWAL ng Department of Agriculture (DA) ang pagpasok sa Pilipinas ng mga poultry product mula sa Japan matapos kumpirmahin ng huli ang Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) o bird flu outbreak sa kanilang bansa noong Nobyembre 28 ng nakaraang taon.

Kabilang sa mga banned product ang mga domestic at wild bird, itlog, day-old chick at iba pang uri ng poultry product mula sa Japan.

Nilagdaan din ni

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr.

ang isang memorandum order noong Enero 17 na nagsususpende sa pag-iisyu ng sanitary at phytosanitary import clearance para sa mga papasok na shipment mula sa Japan na may kargang mga poultry product.

Ani Laurel, tanging mga ibon, manok at mga produktong manok na inangkat mula sa Japan na nasa transit na, kinarga at tinanggap bago noong Nobyembre 10 ang

pinayagang makapasok sa Pilipinas.

Ibabalik sa Japan o kukumpiskahin at sisirain ang mga shipment pagkatapos ng Nobyembre 10, ayon pa sa memorandum order.

Sa ulat ng Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry at Fisheries ng Japan, nagsimula ang bird flu outbreak sa Kashima City sa Saga Prefecture noong Nobyembre 24 habang iniulat ito ng Japan sa World Organization for Animal Health noong Nob. 28.



Palay prices up 13.9% in 2023

THE average farmgate price of dry palay (unmilled rice) increased by 13.9 percent last year, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said on Friday.

Latest PSA data showed that the average price of palay for the whole of 2023 stood at P19.88 per kilogram (kg), much higher than the P17.44 per kg average recorded in 2022.

Among the regions producing palay, Ilocos Region (Region 1) logged the highest price averaged of P21.68 per kg.

In December alone, the average farmgate price of palay nationwide increased by 4.28 percent to P22.89 per kg in comparison to P21.95 per kg logged a month earlier.

Year on year, the latest figure was 29.4 percent higher than the P17.68 per kg average price re-

corded in the same month of 2022.

During the month, the highest average price of palay was P27.81 a kg was logged also in the Ilocos Region.

Mimaropa (Region 4B), meanwhile, logged the lowest average price of dry palay at P20.13 per kg during the month.

According to the PSA, 14 regions, except the National Capital Region, continued to record annual and monthly increase in the average farmgate prices of palay in December last year.

Central Luzon (Region 3) and Mimaropa (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan) posted negative growth in the price of palay during the month by 6.3 percent and 0.3 percent, respectively.

In a separate report, PSA said

that the country's palay production for the fourth quarter of 2023 is expected to increase by 1.3 percent compared to 2022's output.

PSA said that palay production for October to December was estimated at 7.32 million metric tons (MT) as of the start of November, higher than the 7.22 million MT posted a year earlier.

The rice harvest area, meanwhile, was estimated to decrease by 1.5 percent to 1.75 million hectares (ha) in the quarter from 1.78 million ha last year.

The Department of Agriculture has set the 2023 rice output target at 20 million MT. The highest local production, so far, was recorded in 2021 at 19.96 million MT. It slightly dropped in 2022 at 19.76 million MT.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



Scrap Minimum Access Volume for poultry pork imports, DA asked

THE private sector has asked the Department of Agriculture (DA) to scrap the Minimum Access Volume (MAV) in poultry and pork imports saying it has become useless since the actual import volume for these products have ballooned many times.

MAV refers to the quantities of a given imported agricultural product that the government allows entry into the Philippines at the lower in-quota tariff rate.

Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc., (PACFI) president Danilo Fausto cited the importation for chicken which he said is more than 15 times the MAV.

The Philippines has committed in 1995 to the General Agreement on Tariff and Trade-World Trade Organization (GATT-WTO) for

an import volume of 23,500 metric tons for chicken with lower tariff of 40% under MAV.

Outside MAV, tariff commitment was at 50%. However, in 2005, tariff rate became equal for in and out of MAV volume.

"Thus, our treaty commitment with the GATT-WTO shows that with this condition, there is no longer need for a MAV," he said.

Fausto said that in a meeting with DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Thursday, he asserted that MAV has to be scrapped because the actual volume for chicken, pork and corn have tremendously increased.

He also mentioned that the fees collected from the Safeguard Measures Act implementation be channeled for the competitive-

ness of the agri sector.

According to Fausto, removing MAV will result in a "level playing field among importers and exporters vis a vis local producers."

PCAFI is concerned that farmgate price of chicken reported by the United Broilers and Raisers Association as of January 4 was P89.15 per kilo liveweight.

This is way below production cost per kilo. For imported chicken, estimated cost was at P84.83 per kilo within MAV and P90.83 per kilo outside MAV.

On the other hand, retail price as per DA Bantay Presyo data on January 4 was at P170 to P180 per kilo.

In 2023, total chicken importation stood at 426,620 kilos. The same situation is true for corn and pork where actual import volume far

exceeds MAV.

In his Aide Memoire No. 2, Fausto also asked the government to strictly enforce Section 34, Chapter 4 of the Safeguard Measures Act (Republic Act 8800) which was aimed at protecting local farmers from any surge in imports.

This mandates that fees and safeguard duties from the implementation of RA 8800 totalling to 50% be allocated for the competitiveness of the agriculture sector adversely affected by the surge in imports.

"RA 8800 was approved last July 19, 2000. Two decades have passed and we have yet to see where the money collected under the law was allocated. More particularly coffee, pork and chicken," said Fausto.

Joel dela Torre



NEWS BRIEF

Taniman ng sibuyas napeste

Pineste ng armyworms o harabas ang tanim na sibuyas ng ilang magsasaka sa Nueva Ecija at Tarlac.

Sabi ng Department of Agriculture, 366 ektarya sa 10,217 ektaryang tinaniman ng sibuyas ang pinepeste ngayon ng army worms.

Nabatid na 6.9 ektarya ang totally damaged sa mga tanim samantalang partially damaged lamang ang mga sibuyas sa 359.1 ektarya.

Ayon sa DA, apektado ang mga tanim sa Bongabon, Talavera, at Palayan City sa Nueva Ecija at sa mga bayan ng Anao at San Manuel sa Tarlac. Wala namang naiulat na infestation sa Bataan, Pampanga, at Zambales.

Sabi ni Bureau of Plant Industry Director Gerald Glenn Panganiban, namahagi ang DA ng 2.07 toneladang buto ng sibuyas na nagkakahalagang P30.4 milyon sa mga taniman sa Central Luzon noong Disyembre at magdadagdag pa ng 1.3 toneladang mga binhi ng sibuyas na puti at pula na nagkakahalagang P20.3M kung saan magtatayo rin ng apat na cold storage para sa sibuyas na nagkakahalagang P169 milyon. (Eileen Mencias)





China island-building, fishing caused most reef damage in SCS, says study

By Jacob Lazaro
@INQjacobreports

China's island-building activities for military outposts in the South China Sea (SCS) have been responsible for the destruction of around 19 square kilometers of coral reefs, according to a recent study.

Chinese fishermen, meanwhile, have damaged an additional 67 sq km, mainly in their search for giant clams, the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AmTi) said in a report.

"In recent decades, increased fishing, dredging and landfill, along with giant clam harvesting, have taken a devastating toll on thousands of species found nowhere else on earth," AmTi said in a study titled "Deep Blue Scars: Environmental Threats to the South China Sea."

AmTi is a project of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a think tank based in Washington. Released on Dec. 18 last year, the report is authored by maritime experts Monica Sato (a Filipino based in Washington), Harrison Pretat, Tabitha Mallory, Hao Chen and Gregory Poling.

The report also cited the damage attributed to other

countries with overlapping territorial claims in the South China Sea, such as Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines. But it found China to have made the heaviest impact—or being responsible for 75 percent of the damage—due to its use of heavy equipment and drastic methods that disturb the seabed on a large scale.

Warning on Vietnam

"Its cutter suction dredgers would slice into the reef and pump sediment through floating pipelines to shallow areas to deposit it as landfill. This process disturbed the seafloor, creating clouds of abrasive sediment that killed nearby marine life and overwhelmed the coral reef's capacity to repair itself," the report said.

Both China and Vietnam were noted for extracting corals and clams, and catching fish and crabs through bottom-trawling.

Vietnam, the report said, had also engaged in reclamation activities, used clamshell dredgers and scooped up reefs for landfills using construction equipment, but its slower methods caused less collateral damage.

"More recently, however,



ILLEGAL HARVEST Philippine Navy officials inspect giant clams, several pieces of dynamite and some cyanide seized from Chinese fishermen apprehended at Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal, in this March 2001 Inquirer file photo. —ERIK ARAZAS

Vietnam has turned to cutter suction dredgers like China's. This large-scale expansion of Vietnam's South China Sea outposts remains ongoing and will have major consequences for the surrounding marine environment," it said.

"The harvesting of giant clams for their remarkable shells has become popular in recent decades because of their resemblance to elephant ivory, which

is now extremely difficult or illegal to obtain."

'Arc-shaped scars'

The prized clams, it noted, are typically used in jewelry and sculpture, and the carved shells can fetch as much as \$106,000 apiece.

"In satellite imagery of the South China Sea, many reefs show arc-shaped scars, which are created when fishers dig

More recently, however, Vietnam has turned to cutter suction dredgers like China's. This large-scale expansion of Vietnam's South China Sea outposts remains ongoing and will have major consequences for the surrounding marine environment

Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative

up reef surfaces by dragging specially made brass propellers in a semicircle around the anchor chain on the front of their boats," AmTi said.

The report also quoted Philippine sources, mainly the Western Command of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, which in September last year blamed Chinese fishing vessels for the severe damage on coral reefs in the Rozul (Iroquois) Reef and Escoda (Sabina) Shoals.

To press its claim to practically all of the South China Sea, Beijing has been building artificial islands since the mid-2010s, first claiming they would serve as shelters for fishermen but eventually developing them for military use, like in the case of the Kagitingan (Fiery Cross), Zamora (Subi) and Panganiban (Mischief) Reefs.

While the Philippines, Malaysia and Taiwan have also developed maritime features to assert their claims, their efforts were not as massive as China's and Vietnam's, and steps were taken to minimize their environmental impact, the report added.

Beijing continues to ignore the 2016 international arbitration ruling that invalidated its so-called nine-dash claim in the South China Sea and upheld Manila's sovereign rights and jurisdiction over its 370-kilometer exclusive economic zone. INQ



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

CHIT U. JUAN

Local production for local consumption

I just came from an annual holiday with family and was pleasantly surprised to hear a lot of good comments about organic and all-natural food from my family. I overheard stories of "farm to table," sourcing local ingredients and more good news from a meat-eating, wine-tasting family.



We found not a few restaurants sourcing and preparing local fare, but with a chef's twist away from just meat and potatoes. Even for meals when I did not dine with them, they told me wonderful accounts of locavore restaurants in Eastern Europe.

We had the privilege of eating at a hilltop restaurant in faraway Croatia and was served a menu of locally-sourced food. The meats were from the area's local cows, ducks and hogs. The cheese was fresh and unpasteurized – and the breads were baked in house. In fact, the squacking ducks are your first greeters along with some sheep and horses (for work, not for meat).

This restaurant also made their own wines. We were taken to the wine cellar where bottles of red, white and sparkling wines were waiting in casks and bottles. What else can you ask for? All the bread was made in house and sausages and meats came from their farm and from the neighbors' farms in the village.

More and more we find ourselves appreciating local food – made from ingredients that have not traveled far. And this is something we must again give attention to. We can do this in Manila and around the country, as long as we remember local production for local consumption.

Responsible consumption and production of food simply means thinking local and trying our best not to make food travel long distances.

Think about tomatoes. Farmers are forced to pick them unripe and green – so that they can still travel and they ripen when they have already arrived in your kitchen. That does not deliver its freshest flavor to your plates. Our palates then adjust and now we have changed our sensory appreciation of tomatoes. Before you know it, you may not anymore know the taste of a real sun-ripened sweet tomato. This is why I try to eat as much fresh tomatoes when I travel to places where I know tomatoes are still sourced locally.

Then let us think about meats and how they are preserved to be able to travel long distances.

Give yourself some pleasure and order meat sourced from local farms. You may just be able to tell the difference. We tried a fast food place in faraway Mauthausen, Austria where the beef patties tasted "not mass produced" but like freshly-ground meat cooked to a perfect doneness.

In a fast food joint? Yes it is possible.

How about fish? How fresh is the fish we get from the markets? I just watched a documentary "You Are What You Eat" on Netflix and it touched on one of my favorite foods, fish. I was appalled to know how salmon is farmed and even dyed or colored to turn a beautiful salmon color. And that it is not as healthy to eat as I always thought. It will probably be best to eat fish near fishing communities and not from just anywhere.

I am happy for local rice farmers who can grow what they need for a whole year. And just like in Croatia, many people own vineyards to get 150 liters of wine annually – enough for their family's needs for a year. What rice is to our IPs, wine is to Croatian farmers. Grow enough for your annual consumption.

Before leaving Zagreb, we ate at a locavore-centric restaurant to cap our holidays. Here they proudly served Croatian wine, along with locally-sourced meats and vegetables. There is a fall or winter menu, as everything is served with seasonality in mind. This way, even if you ate out of the house, you get to taste the season's best produce as created by chefs.

In nearby Slovenia, we also chanced upon a locavore restaurant which proudly served aged Slovenian beef, local fish like sea bream and sea bass, and we tried all these without specifying that we be taken to a "farm to table" choice. It just comes naturally to these Slavic cities to respect local food, as they have been used to growing and eating local. It also helps that they are located close to Italy, making the recipes a mélange of Austro-Hungarian with Italian undertones.

On my way to the airport the van driver shared his talk on a ride with a local chef. He asked what menu she had at her restaurant, to which she quickly replied: "There is no fixed menu. We go by what is in season!" How wonderful to be able to hear such a remark from our own local chefs. It is my hope to sometimes find an item missing in a menu just because it is NOT in season, and that is OK. I think we try too hard to replicate Continental dishes when we do not have continental ingredients that are freshly-sourced – unless they are flown in and would have cost thousands in miles, in pesos and actual miles traveled.

The way to go is to demand more local ingredients that chefs can play with, to come up with new creations from old local ingredients. I had that experience in Manila with a meal prepared by a young chef, Don Baldosano, who forages and uses local vegetables with an explosion of interesting flavors and mouthfeel. Even his drinks are from fermented local fruits like banana and jackfruit. And he can name the farm and source of almost all his ingredients.

That is our ideal scenario. Growing your own food or simply knowing where your food comes from is a step in the right direction. So let us push again for locavorism. The closer we are to our supply, the fresher the food will be. Be a locavore.

★



Seaweed: food solution post-nuclear war

A NEW study about the potential of seaweed as a resilient food source was published in the scientific journal "Earth's Future" by a team of researchers from the Alliance to Feed the Earth in Disasters (Allfed), Louisiana State University, University of the Philippines Diliman Marine Science Institute (UP MSI) and the University of Canterbury.

Researchers have discovered that seaweed can be a crucial pillar for food security in the context of abrupt sunlight reduction scenarios, as seen in scenarios like nuclear winter. Surprisingly, seaweed is resilient in adverse conditions, so its growth and potential to enhance food security increases after more severe nuclear conflicts.

Using an empirical model based on the seaweed *Gracilaria tikvahiae*, in combination with nuclear winter climate data, the researchers simulated global seaweed growth. The results demonstrate that seaweed has the capacity to be cultivated in tropical oceans even after a major nuclear war between Russia and the United States.

Such a war would deliver 150 Tg (glass transition temperature) of black carbon to the atmosphere and could block out the sunlight for years but enough to drive photosynthesis. This scenario leads to increased vertical mixing and decreased phytoplankton production, providing more nutrients to the seaweed.

Previous studies show that agriculture and fisheries production would plummet, so alternative food sources like seaweed will be critical in ensuring good security in sunlight reduction scenarios. Ocean modeler professor Cheryl Harrison from the Louisiana State University mentioned the seeming inevitability of crises like nuclear war and

large volcanic eruptions. Her advice: "... we need to be ready. Because the ocean does not cool as rapidly as land, marine aquaculture is a very good option."

Seaweed can be quickly scaled up to meet a substantial portion of global food application demand, reaching about 70 percent within just seven to 13 months. Most of this can be used for animal feed and biofuel, as human consumption is limited to 10 to 15 percent due to the high iodine content in seaweed, which could cause adverse health effects.

Seaweed farming

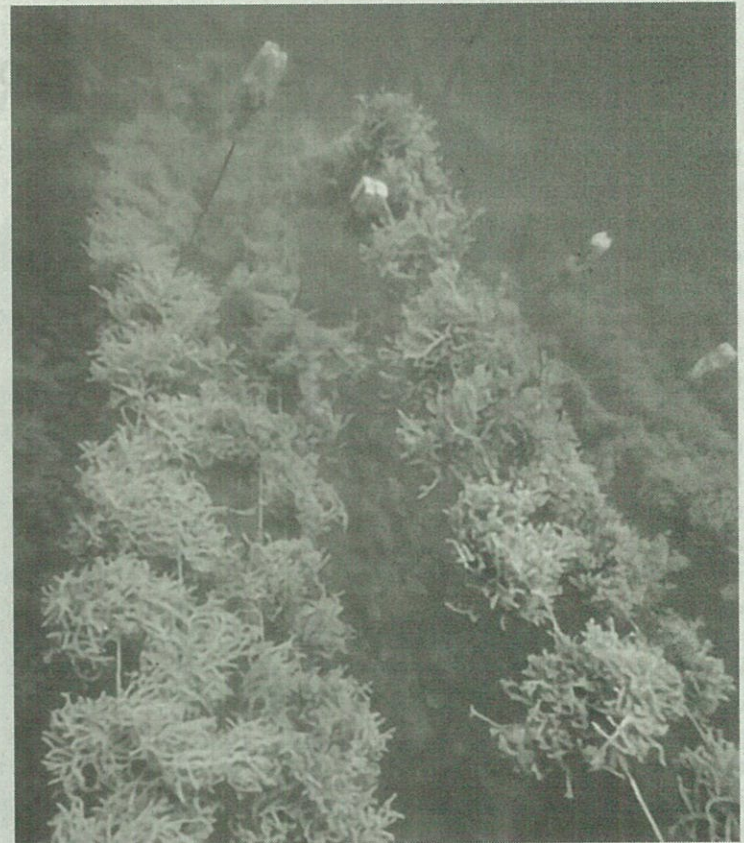
Researchers also suggest investing in seaweed farming as a proactive measure for global food security, both now and after a catastrophe. This could potentially avert a significant number of deaths from starvation, according to resilient food expert professor David Denkenberger from the University of Canterbury.

In the Philippines, low-tech seaweed farming is the most commonly implemented infrastructure.

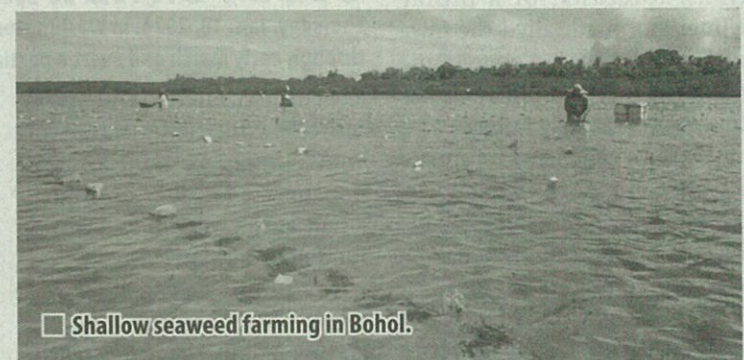
Laboratory head professor Michael Roleda of Algal Physiology laboratory of UP MSI said they are engaged in the "selection and curation of novel and climate change resilient cultivars of tropical seaweeds (e.g., eucheumatoids and gracilarioids) that possess superior traits in terms of growth, chemistry and disease resistance."

UP MSI's gene bank provides a platform for selective breeding and production of high-quality seed stock for distribution to seaweed farmers. The institute's efforts significantly contribute to the goal of scaling up seaweed for future food production and security.

UP MSI is one of seven academic institutes of the College of Science,



■ Seaweed farming using submerged long lines in Quezon province.
PHOTO FROM MYROLEDA ALGAE LAB



■ Shallow seaweed farming in Bohol.

University of the Philippines Diliman. It aims to advance, disseminate and apply knowledge through research and development, and public service and extension in the marine sciences and related disciplines, playing a big role in shaping the discourse on the Philippine waters.

The study's preprint was selected as one of the most exciting and

interesting entries out of 17,000 submissions to the European Geosciences Union conference in Vienna (2023), and discussed in their press conference and blog. According to lead author Florian Ulrich Jehn from Allfed, this study opens avenues to further research about seaweed as a food solution after a nuclear war.

THE MANILA TIMES



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Rice prices up at start of year

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

PRICES of a number of agricultural commodities such as rice and pork increased, while prices of onions and some condiments fell during the first phase of January, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported on Thursday.

Data from the government showed that the average price of well-milled rice stood at P55.50 per kilogram (kg) from January 1 to 5, representing a 2.13-percent increase from the P54.34 per kg logged in the same phase of De-

cember 2023.

The highest price of well-milled rice was P59.06 per kg as observed in Central Luzon (Region 3). Ilocos Region (Region 1), meanwhile, posted the lowest retail price at P50.92 per kg.

Average price of pork, meanwhile, reached P344.31 per kg during the same period, showing an increase of 1.33 percent from its average retail price of P339.78 per kg as observed in the first phase of December 2023.

Among the regions, Davao Region (Region 11) registered the highest average retail price of pork liempo at P375.87 per kg, while the lowest average retail price was reported in Cagayan Valley at P293 per kg during the same period.

Similarly, the average retail price per kilogram of galunggong (round scad) went up by 1.55 per-

cent and was recorded at P206.96 per kg from the average retail price of P203.80 per kg logged the previous month.

Vegetables such as Baguio beans and string beans both posted increases in prices by 10.37 percent and 7.0 percent, respectively.

During the period, average price of Baguio beans was recorded at P124.45 per kg, higher in relation to the previous month's P112.75 per kg.

The average price of string beans also went up to P94.91 per kg from December's average price of P88.70 per kg.

Prices of red onions and other commodities

An average retail price of P199.10 per kg was reported for red onion during the first phase of January, indicating a decline of 5.3 percent from the P210.25 per kg in the same phase last month.

Among regions, Region 10 (Northern Mindanao) had the highest average retail price of the bulb at P228.92 per kg, while the National Capital Region logged the lowest average retail price of red onion at P142.75 per kg.

Data from the PSA also showed that declines were logged in the

prices of sugar.

At the national level, the average price of a kilogram of brown sugar was P79.03 or 1.39 percent lower than P80.15 a kg posted during the first phase last month.

In the same period, dressed chicken had an average retail price of P194.31 per kg, representing a slight decrease of 0.2 percent from P194.76 per kg posted the previous month.

Northern Mindanao recorded the highest average retail price of dressed chicken at P209.28 per kg. The lowest average retail price was logged in Central Luzon at P181.62 per kg.