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DA: Suspension of onion imports depends on actual production

By **ROMINA CABRERA**

The suspension of onion imports is only conditional and still depends on actual production this crop season, according to the Department of Agriculture.

DA Assistant Secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa said that the agency is expecting a surge in production in onions until June.

De Mesa added that the latest data from the Bureau of Plant Industry showed that farmland dedicated to onions grew 40 percent this season.

"This is because the price of onion is good in the previous season, and farmers are encouraged to plant," he said in Filipino in an interview over radio *dzRH*.

The temporary ban is set until May and could be extended until July, as the production of onions is typically from January to June.

De Mesa stressed that the ban is still conditional if the supply remains sufficient to meet local demand.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. ordered the suspension as he said that

this would prevent further depressing onion prices due to a supply glut.

"Because good onion production is already expected and the farmgate price of onion is expected to further go down, our agriculture secretary ordered the temporary suspension. But there is a condition: if increasing onion production is not seen or not accomplished, there would be additional importation if necessary," De Mesa said.

The DA earlier said that 99 tons of onion imported last month was expected to

arrive between Jan. 1 and 15 alongside the fresh harvest of farmers.

The agency, however, said that the effects of El Niño could also affect onion production as the weather phenomenon is expected to last until around March to April.

Prices of onion have gone down to P50 to P70 per kilo and could further fall when onions are harvested next month.

In December 2022, onion prices surged to a record high of P720 per kilo due to tight supply.



35% tariff proposed on all agri imports

THE Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. (Pcafi) has proposed the scrapping of the minimum access volume (MAV) tariff-setting policy that designates lower duties to agricultural imports, saying a uniform 35 percent should be imposed on all agricultural products shipped into the country.

In an interview on Friday, Pcafi President Danilo Fausto said the proposal was made during the meeting between the country's food producers and Department of Agriculture (DA) officials led by Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel at the DA main offices on Thursday.

Fausto said the Pcafi proposed to remove the MAV tariff-setting policy designating lower duties to agricultural imports as long as they fall within volumes agreed upon with the World Trade Organization.

"The 1995 policy is long outdated, and food producers would rather have a uniform rate of as high as 35 percent on all agricultural goods being shipped into the country," he told the Philippine News Agency.

Fausto said it was explained to the DA that the policy had been rendered unnecessary when one considers that the MAV-approved volume for chicken imports is only 23.5 metric tons annually when, in reality, the Philippines imported around 400 MTs of dressed chicken in 2023.

He added that Pcafi also proposed that revenues collected from the Safeguard Measures Act (Republic Act 8800) be reverted to the industry where it was collected to enhance its global competitiveness.

He said the law had seen the collection of some P11.5 billion from the local dairy industry between 2018 and 2022, but the National Dairy Authority, a DA-attached agency, only has an annual budget of P500 million.

"Revenue collection from the food producing sector should be spent on improving the sector

because, in the first place, RA 8800 was intended to relieve domestic industries' suffering from serious injury as a result of increased imports," he said.

Optimism Fausto said Pcafi is optimistic that their proposals will be addressed as soon as possible following their "fruitful and candid" meeting with Tiu-Laurel and other DA officials.

Their optimism was strengthened by the DA chief's initiative for regular consultations, or every 45 days, with the country's food producers to "ensure that all stumbling blocks to the attainment of food security be addressed at the soonest."

"He was very open-minded and was genuinely interested in learning about our [food producers] problems. After all, we both want the same thing ... to enhance the country's food productivity," he said.

"He (the secretary) promised to immediately look into our proposals and we will discuss it again during our meeting in March. We are optimistic," Fausto said.

Meanwhile, DA Undersecretary Deogracias Victor Savellano said during the meeting that the "new-found cooperation between the private sector and the incumbent DA leadership is truly confidence-inspiring."

He said that with close collaboration between the DA and food producers, the Marcos administration's ambitious goal of boosting the country's food production capacity five-fold "just became doable."

"What was really great about our meeting with them (Pcafi) is that it was not just an unloading of gripes or an enumeration of problems. Constructive proposals were made. Targets were set. Deadlines for concrete action were also set," Savellano said.

He added that regular consultations would guide the government's policy-making on achieving food security during President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s term.



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DA: Laguna Lake bubuhayin, gagawing major food source

Bubuhayin ng Department of Agriculture (DA) ang Laguna Lake, ang pinaka malaking fresh water lake sa bansa, upang maging pangunahing pagkukunan ng isda para sa mga residente ng Metro Manila at kalapit lalawigan.

Ayon kay Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. ang hakbang ay nais na maipatupad upang makapag-produce ang naturang lawa ng mas maraming pagkain na abot kaya ng mamamayan tulad na lamang ng isdang bangus na maaaring maibalik sa abot kayang presyo na mula P50 hanggang P70 halaga kada kilo.

"Maximizing the aquaculture potential of Laguna Lake is essential to achieving that goal. If we can add more capacity, then let's do it," sabi ni DA Secretary Tiu Laurel.

Ang 940-square-kilometer Laguna de Bay ay nagpo-produce ng higit 90,000 tonelada ng fresh water fish kada taon na nagkakaloob ng hanapbuhay sa 13,000 mangingisda batay sa data ng Laguna Lake Development Authority, ang ahensiya na nangangasiwa sa naturang

lawa.

Nais ding tulungan ng DA ang mga aquaculture associations sa Laguna Lake na makabangon makaraang humingi ng tulong sa ahensiya ang naturang samahan para solusyunan ang malawakang pagkamatay ng fingerlings sa kanilang fishpens at magkaroon ng kaalaman sa salt water bangus production at reintroduction ng fresh water. (Angie dela Cruz)



PCAFI proposes uniform 35% tariff on all agri imports

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In an interview on Friday, PCAFI president Danilo Fausto said the proposal was made during the meeting between the country's food producers and Department of Agriculture (DA) officials led by Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel at the DA main offices on Thursday.

Fausto said the PCAFI proposed to remove MAV tariff-setting policy

designating lower duties to agricultural imports, as long as they fall within volumes agreed upon with the World Trade Organization (WTO).

"The 1995 policy is long outdated, and food

producers would rather have a uniform rate of as high as 35 percent on all agricultural goods being shipped into the country," he told the Philippine News Agency.

"He was very open-

minded and was genuinely interested in learning about our (food producers) problems. After all, we both want the same thing... to enhance the country's food productivity," he said.



Onion importation depends on El Niño impact – DA

By Joel dela Torre

AGRICULTURE Secretary Francisco Laurel Jr. said onion importation will depend largely on the impact the El Niño phenomenon brings to the table.

According to Laurel, he agrees with the idea of no onion importation until July provided there will be no sudden supply shortfall.

On Thursday, the DA chief met with representatives of the Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. (PCAFI) where he discussed the surge in domestic supply of onion due to fresh harvest and arrival of additional import supply last December.

Immediately after the meeting, Laurel ordered a temporary halt to (onion imports) until May although he floated an idea of extending the suspension through July – that is if domestic harvest of the high vale crop remain sufficient to meet local demand.

The issuance of said policy



pronouncement he added, was to prevent further depressing onion prices due to supply glut.

Shipment delays resulted in the arrival of 99 tons of onion imported in December between January 1 and 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," he said. "Hindi po natin alam ang

mangyayari dahil may El Niño," he stressed.

According to DA, warmer temperatures and a prolonged dry spell caused by El Niño could spawn more pests that could undermine onion production. The full impact of El Niño is expected to be felt around March and April.

The increased supply has pushed down farm gate prices of onion between P50 and P70

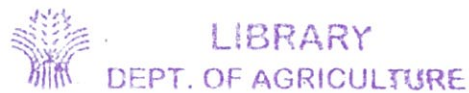
a kilo, and could fall further when more onions are harvested in February. In some areas in Nueva Ecija, which accounts for 97 percent of onion production in Luzon, prices have dropped to as low as P20 a kilo. Luzon produces 65 percent of local onion supply.

In December 2022, prices of onion surged to a record high P720 a kilo due to tight supply.

PCAFI reported to Secretary Tiu Laurel that they expect a supply surplus since an additional 40 percent of land area were planted to onions.

It added that even with the reported infestation of armyworms in some areas in Tarlac and Nueva Ecija, a supply glut is imminent as the pest is only expected to damage around 5 percent of standing crops.

Secretary Tiu Laurel and PCAFI agreed to meet every 45 days to review the supply situation and recalibrate import schedule and volume. The next meeting will be held in early March.



PH stays as world's top rice importer

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**
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The Philippines is expected to remain the world's top importer of rice this year with the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) predicting that the country would increase its procurement of the staple.

"The Philippines is projected to remain the number one global rice importer—taking a record 3.8 million [metric] tons—in 2024, followed by China, Indonesia, the European Union, Nigeria and Iraq," the USDA's Economic Research Service said in a report.

The estimated volume is in contrast to the global rice trade estimated pegged at 52.2 million MT, down by 223,000 MT from 52.4 million MT a year prior.

The report largely attributed the "substantial decline" in overall rice trade and the "small projected decreases" this year to export bans implemented by India between 2022 and 2023.

"On an annual basis, Brazil, Egypt, Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, Mozambique, North Korea, Singapore, Tanzania, Togo, and Vietnam account for the bulk of



NOT UNLIMITED RICE Farmworkers store newly harvested rice during the supply crunch last year. —FILE PHOTO

the projected decline in global rice imports in 2024," it said.

Increased imports

Asian countries China, South Korea, Malaysia and the Philippines are seen to increase imported rice purchases.

Likewise, Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cuba, Ethiopia, Iran, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Mexico, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States and Yemen are expected

to procure more rice.

In the previous year, the Philippines imported 3.6 million MT of rice, down by 5.9 percent from 3.8 million MT in 2021, based on the data from the Bureau of Plant Industry.

Vietnam accounted for 3 million MT of the total while Thailand and Myanmar exported 344,514.10 MT and 151,183.00 MT to the country.

The agency also said the Philippines bought 56,090.63 MT as of Jan. 11 this year, mostly from Vietnam, the country's leading source of imported rice over

the past years.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said earlier nearly 500,000 MT of imported rice would be arriving until February to boost local inventory in the face of the dry spell brought about by the El Niño phenomenon.

Taiwan shipped 20,000 bags of rice (equivalent to 1,000 MT) before Christmas last year while India would provide 75,000 MT, according to the agency.

Sufficient supply

India's shipment was part of the 295,000 MT of rice earmarked by the Indian government despite its export ban on non-basmati white rice.

Agriculture OIC Undersecretary Roger Navarro had said the country would have enough supply until the next harvest season begins in March with the arrival of the imported rice and the harvest by farmers from recent months.

All rice imports are subject to the tariff rate of 35 percent valid until end-2024, as per Executive Order No. 50 signed by President Marcos last month.

INQ



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NEWS BRIEF

₱64M pananim winasak ng pagbaha sa Davao

Umabot na sa P64 milyong halaga ang pinsala sa agrikultura na naitala sa Davao Region dahil sa walang tigil na pag-ulan bundod ng shear line.

Kabilang sa naapektuhan ang mga pananim na palay, mais at iba pang high-value crops sa Davao del Norte at Davao de Oro, ayon sa Department of Agriculture (DA).

Nasa 5,737 magsasaka at 7,121 ektaryang taniman ang apektado na mula nang manalasa ang shear line simula noong Enero 15.

Ayon sa DA, na-

kikipag-ugnayan na sila sa mga apektadong local government unit at mga Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office upang malaman at matugunan ang pangangailangan ng mga apektadong magsasaka at mangingisda.

Batay naman sa Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa), aasahan pa ang matinding pag-ulan dulot ng shear line sa Davao Region at Caraga. (Vincent Pagaduan)



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**PEOPLE'S
JOURNALS**
Everybody's Newspaper

JAN. 21, 2024
PAGE: C

Nearly 150 tons of cabbage sold through 'Veggie Connect'

BAGUIO City—A total of 149,689 metric tons of cabbage and Chinese cabbage from 88 farmers from the Cordillera were sold through government efforts to link farmers to buyers, arresting further wastage of vegetables in the region.

Department of Agriculture-Cordillera Administrative Region (DA-CAR) data showed that its "Veggie Connect" program enabled farmers to sell to government agencies and private sectors within the region and those from Ilocos Region, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon and the National Capital Region.

The vegetables were from farmers queuing up at Agripinoy Trading Center and those from the villages of Cada and Balili in Mankayan and Natublung in Buguias; Barangay Tinoc in Ifugao, Mountain Province; and farmer co-operatives from Sagada and Bauko in Mountain Province.

The DA said there are still buyers who have indicated readiness to receive supplies in case vegetables continue to remain unsold.

"We are linking the farmer to buyers, with the



government subsidizing the cost of logistics because we want to help the cabbage and Chinese cabbage farmers who were not able to sell their produce due to the drop in prices," DA-CAR Officer-in-Charge Executive Director Jennilyn Dawayan told the Philippine News Agency on Friday.

"They (farmers) authorized us to do the market linking activities for them," she added.

Dawayan said they asked organizations and cooperatives that were provided with DA service delivery trucks to lend some of their units to continue helping the farmers through the "Kadiwa on Wheels" program.

"We are actually helping move the food to the consumers. Affordable, if

not cheap, food from the farms of the Cordillera," she said.

Kadiwa is another DA initiative where farmers directly sell their produce without the need for intermediaries, thus lowering prices.

The same DA-CAR data showed that from October to December 2022, the volume of production for cabbage and Chinese cabbage was at 158,614.33 metric tons (MT).

The volume declined to 155,695.55 metric tons for the same period in 2023.

In January 2023, production for the said vegetables reached 16,196 metric tons and is projected to decrease to 11,010 metric tons for the first month of this year.

February will have a slight increase of 6.47 per-

cent from the actual 13,787 MT production in 2023 and an increase of 10.68 percent for March 2024 compared to the 17,545 MT in 2023, DA data showed.

"We are trying to see if there is a shift in buying patterns and demand that led to many unsold produce," Dawayan said. PNA



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DILG promotes backyard farming

THE Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) campaign to keep 42,000 villages nationwide clean and environment-friendly includes making communities self-reliant by planting fruit-bearing trees and vegetables.

DILG Undersecretary for Barangay Affairs Chito Valmocina said at the Saturday News Forum in Quezon City that Project Kalinisan (Cleanliness) encourages planting and establishing backyard fishponds.

"We at the Barangay Affairs have been instructed by the Secretary to monitor cleaning, planting and

maintenance. The key is monitoring and supervising village chiefs," Valmocina said in Filipino.

He said that out of the more than 42,000 barangay officials who won in last year's polls, over 20,000 were newly elected.

Valmocina said 25,000 villages already have their own community gardens.

He said seedlings for 18 kinds of vegetables cost about P25.

"If 300 families, especially in the provinces, are given seedlings, that's only P7,500," he said.

He said just about everybody can start planting in their back-

yards or even in small spaces where plants can grow.

He recounted that, as a long-time captain of Barangay Holy Spirit in Quezon City, they maintained backyard farms.

"My constituents have plant pots, pails, tin cans, bamboos and sacks [to grow plants] and they benefit from the vegetables. Schools in Quezon City have plants, too," he said.

He said Quezon City Mayor Josefina "Joy" Belmonte will issue an ordinance to promote farming in Metro Manila's biggest city.

PNA



Studies: SEA's agri sector grapples with challenges

STUDIES on challenges to agriculture in Southeast Asia include one that analyzes the current concerns surrounding a potential rice crisis due to attacks on the infrastructure of Ukraine's food export system and the onset of a severe El Niño in Asian rice-producing regions.

The paper, titled "Back in the Soup: Now What?" by food security expert and Harvard University professor emeritus C. Peter Timmer examines the global rice market's outlook as of early September 2023.

Timmer's paper is among the studies published in the December 2023 edition of the Asian Journal of Agriculture and Development (Ajad).

Ajad is an internationally refereed journal published by the Philippine government-hosted, Los Baños-based Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca).

According to Searca Director Glenn Gregorio, the combined optimism of the authors "offers a glimpse of hope for the ongoing role of the region as a significant global producer and exporter."

Highlighting the possible repercussions of a spike in rice prices leading to widespread hunger through extensive hoarding, Timmer recommends that governments stabilize expectations to avert a rice crisis by maintaining a "reasonable interaction with market players," Searca said.

Taking a historical perspective, he examines past rice crises and how different states addressed them.

Timmer emphasizes that "the focus should be on the impact of higher rice prices on the food security of the poor, rather than aggregate inflation."

The paper by Jordan Calura and co-authors, titled "A Soil Analysis Approach to Assessing Potential Loss of Productive Lands Under Agricultural Land Conversion," assesses the productivity of agricultural lands in Pura, Tarlac, Philippines, predisposed to agricultural land conversion.

Soil surveys and composite sampling indicate marginal suitability for rice and other crops, but with appropriate soil management, the land can be highly suitable for crop production.

The authors argue that land in Pura is productive and can benefit both agricultural production and land conversion.

For his part, Colorado State University professor emeritus Robert Zimdahl commentary, titled "Institutionalizing Agricultural Ethics," it is argued that the agricultural science curriculum lacks

consideration of the ethical dilemmas of agriculture on society.

Zimdahl suggests that agriculture—being a fundamental human activity—requires a defined moral foundation.

He warns that ignoring these ethical dilemmas may lead to justifications for technology and production practices being ignored, increased societal unrest, pressure for political action due to public dissatisfaction, and the continued concentration of food production in the hands of agribusiness companies, leading to the gradual disappearance of small farms, farmers, and rural communities.

Meanwhile, in their paper titled "Digital Technology Adoption and Potential in Southeast Asian Agriculture," Jose Ma Luis Montesclaros and Paul Teng of Nanyang Technological University in Singapore gave an affirmative response to the question of whether digital technologies can play a more significant role in addressing the ongoing challenges faced by the region's agriculture sector on food security, income, trade, and employment.

The authors propose a common framework for understanding the emerging digital technology in agriculture, offering insights into its adoption status in the region, key challenges, and policy opportunities for scaling up.

They identify shared challenges across the region, stemming from "climate change, degradation of land and freshwater resources, pests and diseases, declining crop productivity, high input costs, decreasing rural labor force, and aging farmers," that need innovative solutions.

Examining the role of youth in farming, Kringle Marie Mercado and Henny Osbahr, in their paper "Feeding the Future: Knowledge and Perceptions of the Filipino Youth Toward Agriculture," explore the youth's inclination to enroll in agricultural degree programs.

According to Mercado and Osbahr, the youth play a crucial role in sustaining and developing a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive agriculture industry.

Their case study in General Santos City in Mindanao reveals that while the youth are exposed to agricultural information, it has not translated into practical knowledge, with limited awareness of agricultural professions.

They suggest intervention programs starting early in the youth curriculum, along with social initiatives emphasizing in capacity building, to cultivate interest in the industry and encourage engagement in its professions.