

CLIPPINGS FOR TUESDAY, JANUARY 23, 2024

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*Photo:* Pompano Aqua Farm

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Pompano touted as possible bangus alternative

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*Photo:* Aqua farm visit

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PH, Vietnam to sign pact to face sea row better

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Govt allocates P5B for direct purchase of sugar

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*Photo:* Hands-On approach

SRA: Govt to buy 1.8M sugar bags under P5-B program

B. DA FAMILY

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DA puts towns on red alert for ASF outbreak

*Photo:* Cereal on the move

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**BUSINESS WORLD**

**Chicago soybean and corn recover from recent losses on strong demand**

# Manila Standard

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**POMPANO AQUA FARM.** Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. (2nd from right) feeds farm-raised pompano in floating cages in Salanguin Bay, Zambales. Laurel toured the coastal area with officials of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (see story on A3). **Jay Morales/DA-OSec**



## Agri Dept. cites Zambales firm's efforts in pompano production

IN San Antonio, Zambales, a private firm is helping blaze the trail to increase local production of pompano, a delicious, high-value aquaculture alternative to milkfish.

Government data showed that in 2022, local production of pompano (scientific name *trichinotus blochii*), only reached 457 metric tons—less than 3 percent of total imports of 16,004 tons during the same year.

Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., along with officials of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), visited Santeh

Feeds Corp.'s Silaguin Bay Fish Farm.

In the company's floating sea cages, thousands of imported fry of short-finned pompano are being raised to help reduce fish imports, provide healthier protein source for consumers, and possibly open export opportunities.

Tiu-Laurel congratulated Santeh for the successful and innovative aquaculture project that dovetails with the government's goal of expanding mariculture parks and promoting various fishery projects around the country.

"We recognize and underscore your

unique contributions to the fisheries industry like aquaculture research and use of new technology in the production of fish like pompano," he said.

Tiu-Laurel said the government is ready to extend assistance from production to post-harvest to marketing to ensure the pompano culture in the country succeeds.

He said the DA, through BFAR, will promote pompano production as part of the government's push to expand mariculture parks and modernize the aquaculture industry.

Silaguin Bay Fish Farm has 44 floating

cages that could each yield around 3 to 4 tons of pompano.

It takes around 9 months to culture pompano, with fish of up to 500 grams destined to the local market while larger ones up to 800 grams earmarked for export.

BFAR could help in locally breeding the short-finned variety by helping set up specialized facilities and equipment.

Increasing fish production through aquaculture is part of DA's effort to modernize Philippine agriculture, boost food production, and ensure the country's food security.





## Pompano touted as possible *bangus* alternative

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said that it hopes to increase pompano production, with the goal of offering the saltwater fish to consumers as an alternative to *bangus*, or milkfish.

In a statement on Monday, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. said that the DA will support the production, post-harvest processing, and marketing of the pompano in public markets.

"The DA, through (the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources) will promote pompano production as part of the government's push to expand mariculture parks and modernize the aquaculture industry," Mr. Laurel added.

He said the BFAR will assist in improving the breeding of the fish in specialized facilities.

"Increasing fish production through aquaculture is part of the DA's efforts to modernize agriculture, boost food production, and ensure food security," the DA said.

Pompano production in 2022 amounted to 457 metric tons (MT), against 16,004 MT worth of imports during the year.

The DA said it is collaborating with Sante Feeds Corp. to expand pompano production.

"In the company's floating sea cages, thousands of imported fry of short-finned pompano are being raised to help reduce fish



PHILIPPINE STAR/EDD GUMBAN

imports, provide a healthier protein source for consumers, and possibly open export opportunities," it said.

The company's fish farm in Silaguin Bay, Zambales, has 44 floating cages, with the capacity for about 3-4 tons of pompano.

The DA said that it takes nine months to culture pompano. Fish up to 500 grams are sold in public markets, while fish weighing 800 grams and above are for export. — **Adrian H. Halili**





## Increased pompano production pushed

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) is pushing to increase the local production of pompano by helping the private sector.

The DA plans to set up specialized facilities and equipment that assist in locally breeding short-finned pompano variety.

In 2022, local production of pompano reached 457 metric tons and the country imported 16,004 tons for that year.

DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. and officials of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources visited Santeh Feeds Corp.'s Silaguin Bay Fish Farm in Zambales last week.

The DA said the company's floating sea cages contain thousands of imported fry of short-finned pompano that are being raised to help reduce fish imports and provide healthier protein

source for consumers as well as for possible export.

Laurel said Santeh has been successful and innovative in its aquaculture project that is in sync with the government's goal to expand mariculture parks and promote various fishery projects around the country.

The government is also ready to extend assistance from production to post-harvest to marketing, to ensure that pompano culture in the country succeeds, Laurel added.

The DA said Silaguin Bay Fish Farm has 44 floating cages that could each yield around 3 to 4 tons of pompano.

At present, it takes around nine months to culture pompano, with fish of up to 500 grams destined to the local market while larger ones, up to 800 grams, earmarked for export, the DA said. - *Jed Macapagal*



Local production of pompano reached 457 metric tons in 2022 and the country imported 16,004 tons that year.

# Malaya Business Insight

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**Aqua farm visit.** Agriculture Secretary Francisco "Kiko" Tiu Laurel Jr. (right) feeds farm-raised pompano in floating cages in Salangin Bay, Zambales. Laurel toured the coastal area with officials of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources

DA PHOTO



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# PH, VIETNAM TO SIGN PACT TO FACE SEA ROW BETTER

STORY BY FRANCES MANGOSING

The maritime deal, which will bind the two countries to conduct activities in the South China Sea 'in accordance with principles of international law,' will be sealed during President Marcos' visit to Hanoi next week.

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# PH, Vietnam to sign pact to face sea row better

**FROM A1**

By Frances Mangosing  
@FMangosingINQ

The Philippines and Vietnam are expected to sign an agreement on maritime cooperation during the visit of President Marcos to Hanoi next week, a move that is seen to build a united front between countries locked in territorial disputes with Beijing over parts of the South China Sea.

The memorandum of understanding (MOU) on maritime cooperation between the coast guards of the Philippines and Vietnam seeks "to strengthen understanding, mutual trust and confidence of cooperation... towards the promotion, preservation and protection of their mutual interests in the Southeast Asian region," according to a copy of the final draft of the MOU seen by the Inquirer.

Such an agreement will allow both countries to better manage conflicts in the contested waters and conduct activities "in accordance with principles of international law, the national laws of each party, and international conventions to which both Vietnam and Philippines are parties."

President Marcos will visit Vietnam next week, his first overseas trip of the year, as the two nations seek to strengthen



Ferdinand Marcos Jr. —AFP

their growing strategic partnership.

"The Philippines and Vietnam share a common aspiration for a peaceful and stable region. Both countries have a history of cooperation on matters involving the South China Sea, and there is an opportunity to strengthen this strategic relationship to the next level," retired Navy Adm. Rommel Jude Ong, a professor at the Ateneo School of Government, told the Inquirer.

The Philippines has been widening its network of alliances with like-minded countries amid tensions with China, a move criticized by Beijing.

The Philippines and Vietnam are also looking to strengthen cooperation in other fields such as agriculture, culture, education, environ-

ment, information sharing and people-to-people exchanges.

In agriculture, the Philippines is expected to sign a rice deal with Vietnam during the President's visit.

According to Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., the deal "basically guarantees that they will be supplying us rice continuously even in calamity situations."

## Element of stability

During the farewell call of the outgoing Vietnamese Ambassador to the Philippines Hoang Huy Chung in August last year, President Marcos underscored the need for the two countries to cooperate in the wake of the escalating aggression by Beijing in the South China Sea.

Mr. Marcos said a maritime agreement with Hanoi would be a "very big step" for both countries and would "bring an element of stability to the problems we are now seeing in the South China Sea."

He said then that the solid ties of both countries would make it easier for them to face "common challenges" in dealing with "territorial disputes in the South China Sea."

Such a bilateral agreement could also serve as the basis of a united front with other members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which has been discussing with Beijing a code of conduct deemed crucial in easing tensions in the

South China Sea.

President Marcos had earlier expressed his frustration at the slow pace of progress in the talks between the regional bloc and China.

Both the Philippines and Vietnam are among the claimants in the South China Sea, along with Brunei, Malaysia and Taiwan. China, however, claims nearly the entire strategic waterway.

A 2016 ruling by an arbitration tribunal in The Hague rejected China's expansive claims in the South China Sea, but Beijing refuses to acknowledge the decision.

## Honor talks with action

At the Bagong Pilipinas Ngayon public briefing on Monday, National Security Council (NSC) Assistant Secretary and spokesperson Jonathan Malaya said China should make good on its promise to improve bilateral relations with the Philippines and lessen the tensions in the West Philippine Sea.

Malaya issued the reminder after videos circulating on social media showed China Coast Guard personnel harassing Filipino fishermen in Bajo de Masinloc off Zambales province recently.

The security official noted that the incident happened just as Beijing and Manila held a Bilateral Consultation Mechanism (BCM) discussion in Shanghai last week.

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## PH, VIETNAM TO SIGN PACT TO FACE SEA ROW BETTER

**FROM A2**

Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Huang Xilian had said that the two countries both committed to improve their maritime communication and hold "friendly consultation" in addressing their maritime dispute.

"We were hoping that the West Philippine Sea will be peaceful this 2024. But we are alarmed over this latest incident... We condemn this latest provocative action on the part of the China Coast Guard against our fishermen," Malaya said at the televised program.

"Since they will soon celebrate the Chinese New Year, we ask China to honor the talks between the governments of the Philippines and China with actions on the ground," he said.

Besides, the NSC spokesperson said, both Manila and Beijing would not benefit from having strained diplomatic relations.

"Moving forward, I hope the discussions [during the BCM] will be implemented," Malaya said. —WITH A REPORT FROM MAR-

LON RAMOS INQ



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## Govt allocates P5B for direct purchase of sugar

**BACOLOD CITY:** The United Sugar Producers Federation of the Philippines (Unifed) has urged the sugar planters in the country not to sell their sugar to private companies at low prices as the government has allocated an initial budget of P5 billion to directly purchase sugar from farmers at a premium price.

"To my fellow sugar planters, do not sell your sugar yet at this low price. Wait a little more because our President has stepped in to help the sugar farmers and thank you for never doubting his concern for our industry," Unifed president Manuel Lamata said in a statement.

Lamata said President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has approved an initial P5 billion for the purchase of sugar directly from the planters.

Sugar industry stakeholders have earlier called for government intervention to narrow the gap between sugar farmgate

and retail prices.

Unifed said that this gap has widened since the start of the milling season in September.

"We are very grateful to the President, to Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., and Sugar Regulatory Administrator Pablo Azcona for heeding our plea for government intervention on the plummeting sugar millgate prices," Lamata added.

Unifed, through Lamata, appealed to Marcos on Dec. 11, 2023 amid the continuous drop in sugar prices since the start of the milling season.

"We are also very thankful to Secretary Kiko Laurel and the SRA for their prompt action to look into and address the issues of the sugar industry," Lamata said, adding that Unifed took part in the recent discussion of the mechanics in implementing the buy-direct plan from the farmers at a premium price.

Lamata also thanked all the members of Unifed who never wavered in their trust in the present administration, assuring them as well that "Unifed will always look after the welfare of its members and the industry as a whole."

He said that trading prices for raw sugar have declined to P2,300 to P2,500 per 50-kilogram bag, which is below the production cost for producers.

In an apparent move to unite the sugar industry, the leaders of various groups comprising the industry sat down over the weekend to draw up measures and mechanics as the government gave its nod to intervene by buying sugar directly from the farmers at a premium price.

SRA Administrator Pablo Azcona said this is "a momentous event as the last time industry stakeholders sat down together was probably eight years ago. We hope this will be the beginning of a unified

industry that openly communicates and supports each other."

Azcona also thanked President Marcos and Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. for "keeping their commitment to help the industry, particularly the sugar farmers."

Last Friday, the Department of Agriculture, the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) and the Philippine International Trading Corp. invited all sugar federation leaders, millers, farmers and traders in a meeting at the DA's office to discuss how to go about helping farmers out through direct buying of sugar at a premium price following the drop in sugar prices since the start of the milling season.

All federations, sugar farmers and traders helped in crafting the mechanics of government participating in buying the sugar produce.

**EUGENE ADIONG**



# BusinessMirror

*A broader look at today's business*

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**HANDS-ON APPROACH** Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. (second from the right) actively participates in a visit to AquaVenture Farm, where he engages in feeding farm-raised pompano in floating cages situated in Salangin Bay, Zambales. Accompanied by officials from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, the agriculture chief conducts a comprehensive tour of the coastal area. JAY MORALES/DA-OSEC





## SRA: GOVT TO BUY 1.8M SUGAR BAGS UNDER P5-B PROGRAM

**T**HE national government is looking at buying as much as 1.8 million bags of raw sugar through its upcoming P5-billion procurement program to provide sugarcane planters with higher prices and influence retail prices of the commodity.

**Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) Chief and CEO Pablo Luis S. Azcona** said the P5-billion procurement program of the state has been approved in principle with the full support of Agriculture Secretary **Francisco P. Tiù Laurel Jr.**

Azcona disclosed that the procurement program is progressing well, with key government officials and representatives from nearly all the sugar industry's groups and federations meeting last week to discuss the measure.

At that meeting, Azcona explained that the Department of Agriculture (DA) through the SRA will be coming up with the guidelines and mechanisms of the procurement program based on recommendations from sugar industry stakeholders.

SEE "SRA," A2

even selling the stocks of raw sugar.

"SRA will be the one talking to the farmers and coming up with summarizing and incorporating ev-

Under the initial proposal, the Philippine International Trading Corp. (PITC) would be the one responsible for buying, storing and

everybody's suggestions and recommendations," Azcona told reporters on Monday.

"So, we will pass all our recommendations to the DA. And so far, the discussed agency to implement it will be PITC," Azcona added.

The plan to implement a buy-and-sell scheme in the sugar industry was disclosed by Laurel last month. **(Related story: <https://BUSINESSMIRROR.com.ph/2023/12/11/da-keen-on-scheme-that-will-boost-farmgate-prices-of-sugar/>)**

### Initial price intervention

AZCONA disclosed that the initial buying price per 50-kilogram bag being discussed by the government and industry stakeholders is around P2,700 to P2,800.

At that price range, Azcona estimated that the PITC can purchase about 1.75 million to 1.8 million bags of raw sugar, equivalent to 87,500 metric tons to 90,000 metric tons.

Azcona said the sugar that PITC will buy would form part of the country's buffer stock, while some of the supplies can be sold at the retail level through various means including the Kadiwa program.

"When we say direct to retail, of course, it includes all government programs. So, Kadiwa and all other means that we can release the sugar to as many Filipinos as we can," he said.

"Our effort is really to provide the Filipinos with a better retail price, our consumers. We are protecting our consumers which also includes our sugar farmers," he added.

The SRA chief said the P5-billion procurement budget would be able to purchase about 10 to 15 percent of the country's remaining raw sugar production.

Azcona added that they plan to finish ironing out the guidelines and mechanism of the procurement program before the month ends. **Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas**



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## DA puts towns on red alert for ASF outbreak

By Othel V. Campos

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) placed several towns in Oriental Mindoro on red alert after the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) confirmed new cases of African Swine Fever (ASF) in three towns of Occidental Mindoro.

BAI on Monday ordered the immediate culling of infected hogs and preventive culling around affected areas as it also directed local government units to strictly monitor swine-related activities within affected towns.

The agency also detected Monday the recurrence of a positive ASF case in Naujan, keeping the Oriental Mindoro town under tight monitoring and movement of hogs within town limits.

BAI confirmed the ASF cases in Occidental Mindoro on Jan. 12, a few days after several barangays in Sta. Cruz and San Jose reported unusual number of swine deaths.

Agriculture spokesman Arnel de Mesa said blood samples sent earlier this month to BAI confirmed seven ASF cases in San Jose and five in Sta. Cruz, and two cases in the municipality of Rizal as of Jan. 17.





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## CEREAL ON THE MOVE.

Workers unload sacks of rice from a truck for delivery to market vendors in Metro Manila under the watchful eyes of the Department of Agriculture to curb overpricing and profiteering by unscrupulous traders.  
Norman Cruz





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## DA says gov't setting aside P10b for fuel, fertilizers for farmers

By Darwin G. Amojelar

**T**HE Department of Budget and Management (DBM) on Monday said the government has allocated more than P10 billion to provide fuel and fertilizer assistance to farmers this year.

Under the Special Provision of the FY 2024 GAA, a total of P9.561 billion has been appropriated for the distribution of fertilizer discount vouchers under the Department of Agriculture's (DA) Production Sup-

port Services of the National Rice Program.

Of the P9.561 billion, P6.161 billion will be used for fertilizer assistance to complement the DA Hybrid Seed Program and P3.4 billion for the DA Inbred

Certified Seed Program.

The fertilizer assistance program is expected to be implemented within the major rice-producing provinces and promote balanced fertilization to increase rice productivity.

"Apart from strengthening the production and supply of food in the country, our President wants our local farmers to be given appropriate help," DBM Secretary Mina Pangandaman said.

"The role they play in our economy and community is very important.

Rest assured that this government will always look for the best solutions to provide assistance to them," she added.

Meanwhile, a total of P510.4 million has been allocated for fuel assistance to farmers, which also includes the operating expenses incurred in the distribution of the said assistance.

Implementation of the program shall be subject to the guidelines to be issued by the DA, in coordination with the DBM and the Department of Energy.





## Direct sugar procurement budget of P5B equivalent to 10-15% of harvest, SRA says

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said that the government's direct procurement plan with a budget of P5 billion will have the capacity to acquire 10-15% of the sugar harvest directly from farmers.

The funding level for the program implies a capacity to purchase 1.75-1.8 million 50-kilogram bags of sugar, SRA Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona said on Monday.

"The P5 billion, for the sugar industry, that's a very limited budget. It could take out roughly 10-15% of the remaining production," Mr. Azcona told reporters.

Mr. Azcona said that the current harvest is now at 60% as of Jan. 15. This translates to about 1 million metric tons (MT).

At the start of the harvest, the regulator estimated production of 1.85 million MT during the crop year.

Last week, the government said it allocated P5 billion for the direct purchase of sugar from farmers to close the gap between farm-gate and retail prices. The plan was adopted after consulting with the Department of Agriculture, the Philippine International Trading Corp. (PITC), and industry representatives.

He added that PITC will oversee the sugar purchasing, which will either be sold directly to retail markets or used as a buffer stock to ensure adequate supply.

"We are discussing whether PITC will purchase at a higher price. The farmers were hoping for P2,700 to P2,800 (per 50-kilo bag) or better," Mr. Azcona said.

Current trading prices for raw sugar range from a low of P2,200-P2,300 per 50-

kilo bag to a high of P2,500. This is below the P3,000 per 50-kilo bag the regulator projected at the start of the milling season.

He added that purchased sugar could be refined and sold at a retail price of P85 per kilo.

He said the SRA is seeking industry recommendations on how to execute the sugar procurement in a manner that will reduce retail prices.

"We were tasked to do it as quick as we can. The plan is everybody hand-in a written recommendation, and we all sit down within this week to work out all the other suggestions and issues involved," he said. "We are trying to get this out before the month ends."

Mr. Azcona added that the SRA will also be meeting with the national price council to address the prevailing high sugar prices.

"We have a very ample supply, and there is no reason for the retail price to remain high," he added.

Late last year, industry groups called for government intervention to stop the declining trading prices of sugar.

The United Sugar Producers Federation of the Philippines said that raw sugar has declined to P2,300-P2,500 per 50-kilo bag, which is below the cost of production.

Meanwhile, Mr. Azcona said that there has been a decline in the demand for sugar since September.

"There is about a 20% drop in the demand for sugar. We are thinking that manufacturers are finding alternatives to sugar... We are trying to find out. We need to take a look at our numbers again," he added.

— Adrian H. Halili



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## BRIEFS

### New ASF cases hit Occidental Mindoro

THE BUREAU of Animal Industry (BAI) confirmed on Monday the detection of new cases of the African Swine Fever (ASF) in three towns of Occidental Mindoro.

In a statement by the Department of Agriculture (DA), it said that local government have begun surveillance, immediate depopulation of the infected hogs, and implement preventive culling around affected areas.

DA Spokesperson Arnel V. de Mesa said that blood samples sent to the BAI confirmed seven cases in San Jose and five in Sta. Cruz, and two cases in the municipality of Rizal as of Jan. 17.

"Pig production in the Oriental Mindoro towns of Naujan and Calapan are now being strictly monitored due to previous ASF cases while the town of Baco is being monitored for the virus," the DA said.

ASF cases in the area were first detected during the latter parts of the year. — **Adrian H. Halili**





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## Farmers allocated P10B in fertilizer, fuel subsidies

THE Department of Budget and Management (DBM) said over P10 billion was allocated for fuel and fertilizer assistance to farmers in the 2024 budget.

Some P9.561 billion will go to fertilizer discount vouchers, a

program run by the Department of Agriculture's (DA) National Rice Program.

Some P6.161 billion will be used in conjunction with the DA's hybrid seed program while P3.4 billion will fund fertilizer sub-

sidies for inbred certified seed varieties.

"The fertilizer assistance program is expected to be implemented within the major rice-producing provinces and promote balanced fertilization to increase

rice productivity," the DBM said.

Meanwhile, the remaining P510.4 million will go to fuel assistance, including the operating expenses incurred in the distribution of the assistance. — **Luisa**

**Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**



# ASF outbreak logged in Occidental Mindoro

By **BELLA CARIASO**

African swine fever continues to wreak havoc in the country's hog industry, with Occidental Mindoro becoming the latest to report an ASF outbreak, the **Department of Agriculture (DA)** said yesterday.

In a press conference, DA spokesman Arnel de Mesa said the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI), an attached agency of the DA, is investigating the source of the outbreak.

Among the towns in Occidental Mindoro with

reported ASF cases are Santa Cruz with seven, San Jose with five and Rizal with two as of Jan. 17.

De Mesa said efforts are being made to contain the virus such as depopulation of infected hogs and preventive culling.

Pig production in the nearby province of Oriental Mindoro is being monitored due to previous ASF cases.

ASF on Mindoro Island was first detected in the towns of Naujan and Calapan, Oriental Mindoro late last year.

Earlier, Occidental Mindoro was among 12 provinces considered ASF-free. With its

inclusion in the list of ASF-affected areas, the number of provinces considered free from ASF is now down to 11.

These are Basilan, Batanes, Biliran, Bohol, Bukidnon, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao del Norte, Palawan, Siquijor, Sulu and Tawi-tawi.

The virus has spread to at least 65 provinces, the BAI said.

AGAP party-list Rep. Nicanor Briones said the hog industry has incurred at least P200 billion in losses since the ASF started infecting the country in 2019. Briones is chairman of the Pork Producers Federation of the Philippines.

— With Catherine Talavera





## Rice stocks down 25% in December – PSA

By CATHERINE TALAVERA

The country's rice inventory posted a 25.2 percent decline in December, according to data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

In its latest rice and corn stocks inventory report, the PSA said total rice stocks stood at 1.896 million metric tons as of Dec. 1, lower than the 2.53 million MT registered in the same month a year ago.

The current inventory is also a 4.2 percent decline from the 1.979 million MT registered the previous month.

Households accounted for the bulk of the inventory or 52.1 percent at 986,780 MT. This was followed by commercial warehouses with a 44.9 percent share at 851,880 MT.

Supplies from the National Food Authority (NFA) depositories cornered a 3.0 percent share at 57,130 MT.

Compared to the previous year's level, rice stocks in households declined by 33.2 percent.

Rice stocks in commercial warehouses also declined by 8.7 percent.

Stocks in NFA depositories also decreased by 54.4 percent.

On a monthly basis, rice stocks in households declined by 3.0 percent.

Stocks in NFA depositories also declined by 5.5 percent, while stocks in commercial warehouses posted a 5.1 percent month-on-month decrease.

Meanwhile, the PSA also reported that the country's corn stocks inventory increased by 51.1 percent to 685,890 MT from 454,030 MT as of Dec. 1.

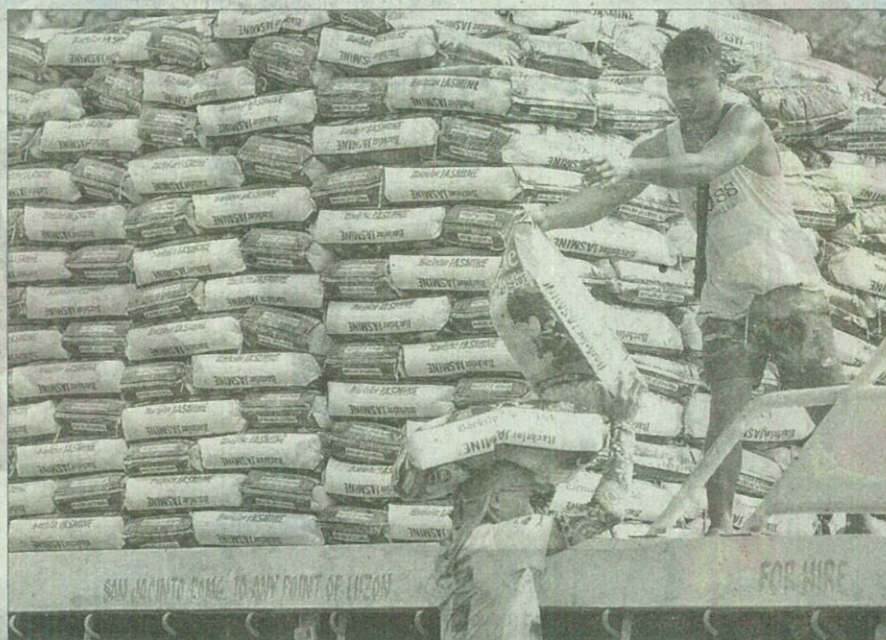
On a monthly basis, corn inventory posted a 12 percent decline from the 779,460 MT in the previous month.

Corn stocks in commercial warehouses accounted for the bulk of the inventory or 82.8 percent at 568,010 MT.

Households accounted for 17.2 percent of the total inventory at 117,880 MT.

Compared to the previous year's level, corn stocks in commercial warehouses increased by 51.4 percent, while stocks in households increased by 49.4 percent.

On a monthly basis, corn stocks in



Workers unload sacks of rice from a delivery truck along Dagupan Street in Tondo, Manila yesterday. Federation of Free Farmers Cooperative national manager Raul Montemayor said the price of well-milled rice might reach P60 a kilo.

ERNIE PEÑAREDONDO

commercial warehouses declined by 17.4 percent while stocks in households increased by 28.4 percent.

### Retail price

Farmers' group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura president Rosendo So yesterday said the retail price of rice is expected to go down to P45 per kilo during the next harvest season in March 2024, but the price spike of the staple will persist.

Based on monitoring of the Department of Agriculture (DA) in Metro Manila markets, the retail price of local regular milled rice reached as high as P53 per kilo; local well-milled rice, P55 per kilo; local premium rice, P60 per kilo; local special rice, P66 per kilo; imported well-milled rice, P56 per kilo; imported premium rice, P62 per kilo and imported special rice, P65 per kilo.

So also said the country's rice importation is expected to go down with the current impact of the El Niño phenomenon worldwide.

"We expect our rice imports to go down to 3.1 million metric tons

because of the El Niño. It (rice import) will be lowered compared to the previous three years," So added.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) said the Philippines is projected to remain the world's top importer of rice this year.

According to the USDA, the country's total rice imports in 2024 could reach 3.8 million metric tons overtaking China.

At the same time, So underscored the timely intervention of the DA to minimize the effect of the drought on palay farmers.

"The P5,000 subsidy from the tariff last year is directly being given to the farmers. This can help the farmers to fund the irrigation," So added.

So said that the DA should continue to monitor the areas to be severely affected by the drought.

For his part, Agriculture Assistant Secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa maintained that the 3.8 million metric tons of possible rice imports is just a projection from the USDA.

— With Bella Cariaso





## EYES WIDE OPEN

IRIS GONZALES

### Amending our economic provisions

On my way to the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) Terminal 1 on Monday night last week, I could already see from a distance the sea of red lights, a signal, no doubt, that traffic was at a standstill.

It's one of those days when there were more passengers than usual.

On one side were hordes of departing Filipino workers, their lives packed in suitcases and boxes of different shapes and sizes as they prepared to leave their home country to toil in distant shores.

Adding to the crowd are their loved ones sending them off.

Roughly 4,000 to 6,000 Filipinos leave the Philippines every day to find gainful opportunities abroad.

What if, says House ways and means chairperson and Albay 2nd District Rep. Joey Salceda, instead of sending our labor force abroad, "we attract foreign investments and create jobs here in the Philippines?"

I agree with the lawmaker on this.

Perhaps if there were more better-paying jobs in the Philippines, our fellow Filipinos wouldn't be forced by circumstances to work abroad.

This is Salceda's case in pushing for amendments to the economic provisions of our 1987 Constitution.

The only way the Philippines can attract more foreign direct investments (FDI) is to ease restrictions as Vietnam did.

Thus, we now have Resolution of Both Houses No. 6, which essentially proposes to ease limits on ownership of public utility franchises, currently restricted to Filipino citizens and corporations, as well liberalize educational institutions, among other proposals.

#### A tale of two cities

Vietnam used to have tighter FDI restrictions, Salceda said. However, in 1987, it passed the Foreign Investment Law with the aim of attracting foreign capital for local development.

Soon after, Vietnam's economy grew to a stellar \$31.173 billion in 2000 from \$6.472 billion in 1990, while GDP per capita grew to \$390 in 2000 from \$95 in 1990.

Where are we in this? In 2022, the Philippines attracted \$9.2 billion in net FDI inflows compared to Vietnam's \$22.4 billion, according to available data.

#### Oligopolies

Another argument for easing economic provisions, Salceda said, is that it is expected to lead to greater competition in the domestic market.

He noted that our local companies and conglomerates find it convenient to just keep their production and investments below competitive levels.

I agree with the lawmaker on this, too. It's perhaps the reason the Philippines has failed to industrialize.

We also have to contend with our local companies' sometimes poor services because there are no alternatives.

If economic provisions in the Constitution are lifted, Salceda estimates that by 2031, we would see an annual average increase of P330.45 billion in FDI and 660,897 new jobs.



As I said before, I agree with calls to amend some economic provisions of the Constitution, like, say, easing foreign ownership caps in education and the media.

Filipinos who could not afford to send their children to study abroad have missed out on the chance to experience education from topnotch global universities. Yale University, for instance, has a branch in Singapore but none in the Philippines.

However, I don't agree with allowing foreigners to exploit our natural resources. Foreigners should not get a free pass and our lawmakers must guard against this.

#### Attracting FDIs

More importantly, I argue that there is no single solution in attracting FDIs.

Easing economic provisions in the Constitution won't bring in FDIs for as long as it remains difficult to do business in the Philippines, no thanks to corruption and political patronage.

Foreign investors want stability and good governance, not bureaucratic cobwebs and shakedowns.

This means that even if we change the entire Constitution, it's useless if we don't change our rotten culture of corruption.

Foreign investors will continue to shy away and sadly, as a result, thousands of Filipinos will continue to fly out everyday to toil in distant lands.

#### Corn production shortfall

How is the Department of Agriculture addressing the shortage in corn, especially with El Niño seen persisting until next year?

I'm wondering about this after a discussion with a livestock producer who said that their industry faces a perennial shortfall in the domestic production of corn. This producer supplies to a major local poultry brand.

Even the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) of the US Department of Agriculture has said there is a domestic production shortfall.

As such, it estimates that corn imports will increase to one million metric tons for marketing year 2023 to 2024 because of the shortfall.

Corn production is expected to decline to 8.2 million MT because of recent typhoons and the continued presence of army worm, FAS said in a September 2023 report.

The El Niño weather disturbance has also dried up some cornfields.

Clearly, our local corn producers have not been able to keep up with the demand of livestock producers who rely on corn as feedstock.

Industry estimates show local production is short by roughly 30 percent to 50 percent.

Unfortunately, industry players are unable to bring in the required corn requirements because of government efforts to withhold the MAV volume for select commodities such as corn, my sources say.

Industry players are now wondering where they will get their corn if local farmers cannot provide them with the much-needed inputs for animal feeds.

"It's a perennial problem," said my source.

As such, they are pushing for higher import volumes for corn at lower tariffs.

And while we're at it, the government should also work double time to help local corn farmers boost their production.

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# Malaya Business Insight

Date: 23 JAN 2024

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## Sugar prices seen dropping to P85/kg

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said it aims to gather all suggestions from stakeholders in two weeks to firm up the government's plan to directly purchase sugar worth P5 billion from farmers at a premium price.

Pablo Azcona, SRA administrator, said in a briefing yesterday that while the figures are not yet final, the government is hoping sugar purchased directly from producers can be sold at P85 per kg at retail.

Azcona the direct purchase scheme is being fast-tracked as this year's expected sugarcane milling period has reached more than 50

percent.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) specifically tasked the SRA to come up with the mechanism on how the program will run.

"SRA will be the one talking to the farmers and coming up with summarizing and incorporating everybody's suggestions and recommendations. But the SRA cannot join the marketing side... So, we will pass all our recommendations to the DA," Azcona said, adding the Philippine International Trading Corp. will implement the program.

The initial P5 billion allocation

See SUGAR > Page A2

## SUGAR

will allow the government to purchase a 50 kg bag (LKG) of sugar at P2,700 to P2,800 each, compared to the current pricing of P2,400 to

P2,500 LKG, noted Azcona.

Based on DA's monitoring of public markets in the National Capital Region, the prevailing

retail price as of Friday ranges from P74 to P100 per kg for refined sugar, P68 to P96 per kg for washed sugar and P60 to P90 per

kg for brown sugar.

SRA millsite monitoring showed that composite price of raw sugar as of January 7 was at P2,408.97 LKG.



## DA confirms ASF cases in Occidental Mindoro

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) through the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) confirmed new cases of African swine fever (ASF) in three towns of Occidental Mindoro.

BAI said in a statement yesterday local government units (LGUs) are conducting thorough surveillance and immediate depopulation of infected hogs as well as preventive culling around affected areas.

BAI said a number of barangays in Sta. Cruz and San Jose reported unusual number of pig deaths in Occidental Mindoro on

January 12.

DA spokesman Arnel de Mesa said blood samples sent earlier this month to BAI confirmed seven ASF cases in San Jose and five in Sta. Cruz and two cases in the municipality of Rizal as of January 17.

BAI added ASF cases in the island were first detected in Oriental Mindoro late last year.

Pig production in the Oriental Mindoro towns of Naujan and Calapan are now being strictly monitored due to previous ASF cases while the town of Baco is being monitored for

the virus.

Under DA regulations, a town is placed under red zone even if only one barangay tests positive, restricting hog movement within the area.

Tighter mobility restrictions are imposed if two or more barangays test positive for the virus.

DA is now awaiting requests from LGUs to activate additional surveillance groups and from affected farmers for the indemnification of slaughtered hogs.

The agency also pays P5,000 for each slaughtered swine due

to ASF with the limit at 20 heads of pigs.

Latest BAI data showed as of December 29, 2023, six regions, 10 provinces, 28 municipalities and 71 barangays have active ASF cases.

Based on data from the Philippine Statistics Authority, the country produced 1,737,119.08 metric tons (MT) of hog. Of the said volume, Oriental Mindoro produced 26,907.62 MT equivalent to 1.55 percent while Occidental Mindoro produced 8,025.71 MT equivalent to 0.46 percent for the same year. -Jed Macapagal





## Demeaning farmers no end

FROM where we sit, the Department of Agriculture has mismanaged its logistical operations for many years, leading to frequent shortages of agricultural products, especially fruits and vegetables. It has been reported that 30 percent of the farmers' produce has been wasted due to the poor logistical system.

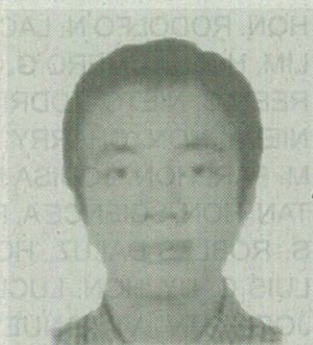
President Bongbong Marcos has stressed that "farmers should be equipped with the necessary information to limit the production of agricultural products that are only sellable in the market. He also stressed "the need to give farmers the technical know-how for them to better decide what to plant in every season."

After leading the DA for about a year, the President seems to be very acquainted with this major problem. Apparently, solving this is not easy, considering the thick layers of bureaucratic and entrenched opportunism in the Department.

During a sectoral meeting with DA officials, he also "pushed for the upgrade of the processing of goods, as well as the development of the necessary facilities to enable farmers to gain more value for their products" – two persistent issues that have characterized government's demeaning and repeated indifference to farmers, favoring instead wealthy and politically-connected suppliers and businessmen.

\*\*\*

Many countries around the world were half-expecting a Christmas truce in the war-ravaged Gaza Strip. But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would hear nothing of it, despite the deaths of thousands of women and children, insisting



*'Apparently, solving this is not easy, considering the thick layers of bureaucratic and entrenched opportunism in the Department.'*

### BLESSING THE TIDES

DODY LACUNA

that agreeing to a truce was not the right way to deal with a terrorist group such as Hamas.

The fiercest battles in World War I were fought on the Western Front in France. But something quite extraordinary happened on one Christmas Eve that no man could explain.

"Soldiers were engaged in a brutal and grueling trench warfare in the weeks leading up to Christmas in 1914.

"On the night of December 24th, humanity triumphed over war's hostility. As soldiers on both sides began to sing Christmas carols, the echoes of explosions were replaced by a haunting silence. The tunes carried across the empty battlefield, fostering a sense of community and peace.

"Soldiers suddenly ventured into no-man's land - the dangerous area between opposing trenches - in some areas of the front lines. The soldiers, who were initially wary, soon found themselves face-to-face with their adversaries. Instead of gunfire and animosity, there were

handshakes, greetings, and even gift exchanges. Trading cigarettes, food and souvenirs were examples of shared humanity.

"The truce was not universal across the Western Front, but in various pockets, soldiers, many of whom were tired and dissatisfied by the horrors of war, took advantage of the opportunity to embrace the Christmas spirit. They buried their dead, played impromptu football (soccer), and held conversations that cut across language barriers." (From Imperial War Museums (n.d.), The real story of the Christmas truce. <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-real-story-of-the-christmas-truce>. Submitted in my class, Communication, Culture and Society, last semester at the Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila (PLM).

It was a moment of peace, not brokered by man, but by the supernatural power of the God of order, of peace, of joy, of forgiveness, who could turn an abyss of death and destruction into a gathering of warm and endearing fellowship for "the universal desire for peace."

It was "a remarkable episode in warfare history," a miracle indeed that harkened back to the first Christmas which many Bible scholars believe to be "the greatest miracle in human history" when the Son of God became man, descending into the tiniest part of a woman's body to become the Savior of the world."

\*\*\*

A young Christian Pastor from the Christ's Commission Fellowship (CCF) advises people not to be woefully enamored with the leading TV networks' daily teleseryes for their violent and vulgar displays of anger, revenge and bitterness which all make for the ratings and revenues. He says he would rather be awed by real-life stories of serene and touching episodes of kindness, sympathy, comfort and forgiveness.

He mentions the life of a neglected and abused housewife, eventually abandoned by her husband who runs off with a younger woman. He squanders the family's wealth, properties and businesses with three mistresses, with whom he has several kids.

In his sixties, her husband contracts a serious illness that practically immobilizes him. In no time, his mistresses and "good weather friends" deserted him. The "suffering" wife welcomes him back into their once blissful abode, brings him to a hospital, and spends a fortune to help nurse him back to health.

The wife's friends would say she never uttered any unkind or insulting word against her husband, only affirming and healing words of comfort and love. The young Pastor says their story will not make it to any teleserye, which only offers the bitter and miserable side of life.





# Gov't sets P5B to buy sugar from farmers

**The proposed purchase cost is P300 higher than current millgate price, allowing planters to halt plummeting value of the commodity**

By **Carla Gomez**  
@carlagomezINQ

**BACOLOD CITY**—Planters and millers in the leading sugar-producing province of Negros Occidental heaved a sigh of relief after President Marcos approved an initial budget of P5 billion for the government to directly purchase sugar from farmers at a premium price.

Manuel Lamata, president of the United Sugar Producers Federation of the Philippines (Unified), said on Sunday that they were grateful to Mr. Marcos for heeding their plea for government intervention to arrest the plummeting millgate prices of sugar.

It was Unified, through Lamata, that first issued the appeal to the President for help amid continuous drop in sugar prices since the start of the milling season in September last year.

He asked the government, through the Philippine International Trading Corp. (PITC), to start buying millgate raw sugar at P2,800 per 50-kilo bags (LKg), which is P300 to P400 higher than the current millgate prices of P2,400 to P2,500 per LKg.

Sugar producers in Negros had earlier said that planters were losing because they



**OFF TO THE MILL** Workers load into tractors the sugarcane harvested from a plantation in EB Magalona, Negros Occidental, in late 2023, for transport to a milling facility. —CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

were already spending P2,500 to produce a 50-kilobag of the commodity.

Sugarcane farming is considered the "lifeline industry of the Negrense," with 54 percent of its 540,386-hectare agricultural lands devoted to sugarcane plantations, according to data from the Negros Occidental provincial government.

Negros Occidental, also dubbed as the country's "sugar capital," also accounts for about 60 percent of the sugar produced in the country, making raw sugar as the province's leading traditional export

product, having nine operational sugar factories, seven of which have refineries, data from the Provincial Economic Development and Investment Center (Pedic) showed.

## Unified move

Lamata hoped that PITC could start buying sugar from the sugar farmers across the country at a premium price in the first week of February.

He said Unified took part in the recent discussion of the mechanics in implementing the buy-direct plan from the farmers at a premium price.

According to Lamata, about 5.5 million people nationwide are dependent on the sugar industry, about 3.9 million of whom are located on Negros Island, composed of the provinces of Negros Occidental and Negros Oriental. (Negros Occidental has a population of 2.6 million as of the 2020 census).

"Unified will always look after the welfare of its members and the industry as a whole," Lamata said.

The sugar industry in the province supports 21,795 sugarcane planters and 20,768 farmers cultivating a total 188,999.96 ha of cane lands, the Pedic data said.

In an apparent move to unite the sugar industry, the leaders of various groups comprising the industry sat down over the weekend to draw up measures and mechanics as the government gave its nod to intervene by buying sugar directly from the farmers at a premium price.

**Sugar Regulatory Administrator** Pablo Azcona said the last time industry stakeholders sat down together was eight years ago.

"We hope this will be the beginning of a unified industry that openly communicates and supports each other," he said.

INQ





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## SRA expects drop in domestic sugar prices

By GABRIELL CHRISTEL GALANG

Following consultations with the Department of Agriculture (DA), the Philippine International Trading Corporation (PITC), and other stakeholders, the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) expects the lowering of the price of refined sugar.

SRA Administrator Pablo Azcona told reporters on Monday, Jan. 22, that they have been seeking farmers' recommendations on how to roll out fair sugar prices that protect both consumers and makers, as well

as achieve the ₱85 retail price for refined sugar.

"Currently, the farmers are hoping for maybe ₱2,700 [per 50-kilo] bag or better," Azcona said. "If the purchase price is about ₱2,800, we can retail the price of refined sugar safely to ₱85."

Azcona also noted that sugar farmers are also asking for an additional budget, stating that the SRA will utilize PITC's sugar purchase as an additional buffer stock.

The buffer stock for sugar would secure the manufacturers, like bev-

erage companies, to have enough supply.

The SRA expects the budget for sugar purchasing to reach ₱5 billion, as it was recently approved by the government.

This would purchase around 10 percent to 15 percent of the remaining production.

The sugar agency is also running the numbers to determine the amount needed in the buffer stock and how much will be allocated to retail.

Azcona emphasized that despite

pursuing retail allocation, this could result in slower sales, and therefore will look into buffering until they can be released by the milling season to ensure decent supply.

When asked about the contrasting retail and farmgate prices, the SRA chief shared that meetings will be held with the National Price Council (NPC) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

"For now we have ample and stable supply so there is no reason for high sugar prices," he said.

In relation to their plans on

importing sugar, the industry is awaiting Washington's response after sending out the necessary letters.

Despite this, Azcona said that sugar importation is not necessary based on the current demand numbers.

He also said that the harvest season draws faster this year, as the SRA expects to reach one million metric tons of sugar in about four-and-a-half months.

Meanwhile, Azcona encouraged purchasing sugar from farmers during the months of September until May, or the end of milling season.





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# ₱10-B aid allocated to boost rice supply

PH projected to remain as world's top importer

By XANDER DAVE CEBALLOS and JOSEPH PEDRAJAS

**T**he government allocated over ₱10 billion as fuel and fertilizer assistance for farmers this year to expedite rice supply, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) said. The country will remain the top global rice importer this year, according to the projection of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

► 3



**RICE MATTERS** – Workers unload sacks of rice from a delivery truck on Dagupan St. in Tondo, Manila, on Monday, Jan. 22, 2024. Based on the latest price watch in Metro Manila markets of the Department of Agriculture (DA), the retail price of local regular milled rice is at ₱53 per kilo, local well-milled rice at ₱55, local premium rice at ₱60 and local special rice at ₱68. (Arnold Quizol)





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## ₱10-B aid allocated to boost rice supply 1◀

Based on the 2024 General Appropriations Act, ₱9.561 billion was appropriated for the distribution of fertilizer discount vouchers under the **Department of Agriculture's (DA)** Production Support Services of the National Rice Program.

Of this amount, some ₱6.161 billion will be used for fertilizer assistance to complement the agency's Hybrid Seed Program and ₱3.4 billion for its Inbred Certified Seed Program.

"Bukod po sa pagpapalakas ng produksyon at suplay ng pagkain sa bansa, nais po ng ating mahal na Pangulo na mabigyan ng nararapat na tulong ang ating local famers. Napakahalaga po ng tungkulin na ginagampanan nila sa ating ekonomiya at komunidad (Apart from strengthening the production and supply of food in the country, our dear President wants to ensure that our local farmers receive appropriate assistance. The role they play in our economy and community is of utmost importance)," Budget Secretary Amenah F. Pangandaman said. "Rest assured that this government will always look for the best solutions to provide assistance to them."

The fertilizer program is expected to be implemented within the major rice-producing provinces in the country and promote balanced fertilization to increase rice productivity.

For the farmers' fuel assistance, ₱510.4 million was allocated. This includes the operating expenses from the distribution of the said assistance.

This program is subject to the guidelines to be issued by the DA, in coordination with the DBM and the Department of Energy.

### World's top rice importer

Meanwhile, a Rice Outlook released by USDA's Economic Research Service stated it was projecting that the Philippines would import around 3.8 million tons of rice, much more than China, Indonesia, the European Union, Nigeria, and Iraq.

The report also projected an increase in the rice import of the following

countries: Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, China, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cuba, Ethiopia, Iran, South Korea, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, Nepal, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Yemen.

In a statement in September 2023 when USDA also reported that the Philippines had already overtaken China in terms of being the world's top rice reporter, Agriculture Undersecretary Leocadio Sebastian said the country's rice importation for 2024 was expected to be lower than the USDA's forecast.

"We also expect that with the intensified efforts to produce more rice locally, we will import less than the projected 3.8 MMT in 2024," Sebastian had said.

"The uncertainty of depending on external sources for our staple and the high price of imported rice makes it imperative for us to produce more locally," he added.

Meanwhile, the global rice trade for 2024 is projected to be lower, from 52.4 million tons (milled basis) in the year earlier to 52.2 million tons this year.

"The...small projected decrease in 2024 [is] largely due to export bans and other export restrictions implemented by the Government of India in 2022 and 2023," the report stated.

### Stock down 25% in December

In December last year, the country's rice inventory significantly declined, but the government assured sufficient supply that will last until the next harvest season.

A report from the Philippine Statistics Authority showed that the rice stock dropped 25 percent to 1.90 million metric tons (MT) from 2.53 MT recorded in the same period in 2022.

The latest reading is slightly lower by 4.2 percent than the November 2023 stock of 1.98 million MT.

Rice supplies from the National Food Authority (NFA), which had a share of three percent in the total inventories, declined by 54.4 percent compared to the same period in 2022.

It was followed by the household sector, down by 33.2 percent, and the commercial sector, down by 8.7 percent. They had a share of 52.1 percent and 44.9 percent of the total inventories, respectively.

Month-on-month, decreases were seen in all rice inventories with stocks from the commercial sector declining by 5.5 percent, NFA depositories by 5.1 percent, and the household sector by three percent.



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## BAI confirms swine flu outbreak in 3 Occidental Mindoro towns

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS

[@jearcalas](#)

**T**HE Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) on Monday announced that Occidental Mindoro is no longer free from African swine fever (ASF) after confirming outbreaks of the transboundary animal disease in three towns in the province.

In a statement, the Department of Agriculture (DA) disclosed that the BAI confirmed the new ASF cases in Occidental Mindoro, the

first in the province.

With this development, both Oriental Mindoro and Occidental Mindoro have confirmed ASF

outbreaks already.

The DA said the local government units concerned are now conducting necessary protocols to address the ASF outbreaks including "thorough" surveillance, depopulation and culling of affected pigs.

"BAI also detected Monday recurrence of a positive case in Naujan, keeping the Oriental Mindoro town under tight monitoring and movement of hogs within town limits," the DA said on Monday.

"BAI confirmed the ASF cases in Occidental Mindoro on January 12, a few days after a couple of barangays in Sta. Cruz and San Jose reported an unusual number of pig deaths," the DA added.

The DA explained that the blood samples from Occidental Mindoro

were sent to BAI this month, which yielded positive results: seven cases in San Jose, five cases in Sta. Cruz and two cases in Rizal.

"ASF cases in the island were first detected in Oriental Mindoro late last year. Pig production in the Oriental Mindoro towns of Naujan and Calapan are now being strictly monitored due to previous ASF cases while the town of Baco is being monitored for the virus," the DA said.

The areas with confirmed ASF outbreaks are now placed under red zone in compliance with the DA's prevailing rules and regulations in addressing the disease. Areas placed under red zones have restricted hog movement.

"The DA is now awaiting

requests from LGUs [local government units] to activate additional surveillance groups and from affected farmers for the indemnification of slaughtered hogs. The DA pays P5,000 for each slaughtered swine due to ASF, with the limit at 20 heads of pigs," it said.

The DA noted that Mindoro province supplies hogs to Metro Manila and to some parts of Region VI.

In 2022, Occidental and Oriental Mindoro combined for a hog production of 34,933.33 metric tons (MT), about 2 percent of the country's total output of 1.737 million MT during the period, based on Philippine Statistics Authority data.





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## ASF outbreak sa Mindoro kinumpirma ng DA

Kinumpirma kahapon ng Bureau of Animal Industry ng Department of Agriculture (DA) ang mga bagong kaso ng African Swine Fever (ASF) sa tatlong bayan ng Occidental Mindoro.

Agad umanong nagsagawa ang mga lokal na pamahalaan sa mga nasabing bayan ng masusing pag-subaybay, agad na i-depopulate ang mga infected na baboy, at ipatupad ang preventive culling sa paligid ng mga apektadong lugar.

Natukoy din ng BAI noong Lunes ang pag-ulit ng isang positibong kaso sa Naujan, na nagpapanatili sa bayan ng Oriental Mindoro na mahigpit na subaybayan ang mga baboy sa loob ng mga limitasyon ng bayan.

Kinumpirma ng BAI ang mga kaso ng ASF sa Occidental Mindoro noong Enero 12, ilang araw matapos ang dalawang barangay sa Sta. Cruz at San Jose ay nag-ulat sa 'di pangkaraniwang bilang ng pagkamatay ng mga baboy.

Sinabi ng tagapagsalita ng DA na si Arnel de Mesa na ang mga sample ng dugo na ipinadala noong nakaraang buwan sa BAI ay nagkumpirma ng pitong kaso ng ASF sa San Jose, lima sa Sta. Cruz, at dalawang kaso sa munisipalidad ng Rizal noong Enero 17.

Ang lalawigan ng Mindoro ay nagsusuplay ng mga baboy sa Metro Manila at sa ilang bahagi ng Rehiyon 6. (Dolly Cabreza/Eileen Mencias)



## Gov't, private sector tackle plan to buy sugar from farmers

**THE Department of Agriculture (DA) and Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) have convened sugar industry leaders to tackle government's plan to buy sugar directly from the farmers at a premium price amid the continuing low farmgate prices, usually between P2,400 and P2,500 per 50-kilo bag.**

In a statement on Sunday, SRA Administrator Pablo Azcona said that the Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. and Philippine International Trading Corp. president and chief executive officer Under-

secretary Emmie Liza Perez-Chiong met with sugar federation leaders, millers, farmers and traders at the DA central office in Quezon City on Friday.

"(It was) a momentous event as the last time industry stakeholders sat down together was probably eight years ago. We hope this will be the beginning of a unified industry that openly communicates and supports each other," Azcona said.

Those who attended the meeting were leaders of the United Sugar Producers Federation, Confederation of Sugar

Producers Association Inc., National Federation of Sugarcane Planters, Luzon Federation of Sugarcane Growers and Associations, Panay Federation of Sugarcane Farmers Inc., Philippine Sugar Millers Association, Philippine Association of Sugar Refiners, and groups of sugar farmers and traders.

The price of P3,000 per 50-kilo bag is considered a fair market price, but farmgate prices are still only between P2,400 and P2,500, particularly in Negros, the country's sugar capital.

PNA





## Shearline causes ₱108-M agri, infra damage in Davao Region, Caraga

The damage to agriculture and infrastructure in Davao Region (Region 11) and Caraga (Region 13) due the effects of shearline has reached ₱82 million and ₱26 million respectively, data from the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) and National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) showed on Monday, Jan. 22.

OCD spokesperson Edgar Posadas said the initial estimate in agricultural damage was pegged at ₱82 million in the two affected regions, with majority of the affected goods being crops and rice. ► 8

## Shearline causes ₱108-M agri, infra damage in Davao Region, Caraga 1◀

"This is subject to change because with the improvement in the weather, those conducting rapid assessment, led by officials from the local government units (LGUs), can now go out," Posadas said in a public briefing.

Meanwhile, a situation report from the NDRRMC said infrastructure damage amounted to ₱26.87 million in Davao de Oro and Davao del Norte, both in Region 11.

The extent of infrastructure damage in Caraga has yet to be validated.

Further, Posadas mentioned that there were 20 totally damaged and 142 partially damaged houses in both regions.

Meanwhile, the death toll related to the bad weather in Davao Region further increased to 16.

Posadas said there were 12 fatalities in Davao de Oro—11 in the municipality of Monkayo and one in Maragusan; two in Davao City; and one each in Davao Oriental and Davao Occidental. He said the majority of the deaths were due to landslides and flash floods.

The shearline has also affected 152,642 families composed of 670,807 individuals in Davao Region and Caraga.

Of these, 8,590 families or 32,116 individuals were displaced by flooding and landslides.

"We elevated our status to Blue Alert for our Emergency Operations Center in OCD Caraga and OCD Region 11. That means we have additional personnel augmenting our operations, including those from the uniformed services, and that is complemented by our Blue Alert here

at Camp Aguinaldo," Posadas said.

At present, Posadas said there are 11 areas placed under a state of calamity due to the bad weather in Mindanao, seven of which are in Davao Region and four others in Caraga.

The national government and local government units in the affected regions have provided ₱52 million worth of relief assistance to the affected individuals in the form of family food packs, family kits, and hygiene kits.

"I'd like to reiterate that the government is here. Government resources [are] available if those from the local government are not enough. We have regional resources as facilitated by the OCD, DILG [Department of the Interior and Local Government], and DSWD [Department of Social Welfare and Development]," the OCD spokesperson said.

### More comprehensive mapping system

Meanwhile, Vice President and Education Secretary Sara Duterte visited the wake of landslide victims in Davao de Oro as she called for the implementation of a "robust mapping" system to identify danger zones in municipalities.

In a statement posted on Facebook, the official shared about his visit to the families of the victims last Jan. 20, two days after the landslide that has so far claimed 12 lives in the towns of Monkayo and Maragusan in Davao de Oro.

She lamented how the tragedy caused the lives of the victims, and shared photos of her personally talking with the victims' families to hear

about their grievances.

Duterte then called for the establishment of a "robust mapping" system by the Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council.

"Ang mahalagang hakbang na ito ay makakatulong sa mga residente na makaiwas sa mga mapanganib na lugar sa panahon ng mga bagyo o malakas na pagbuhos ng ulan, kung saan sa huli ay sinisiguro ang kanilang kaligtasan (This important step will help residents avoid danger zones in times of typhoons or strong rains, which will ensure their safety)," she wrote. "Ang sistema ng mapping ay napakahalaga dahil ito ay nagbibigay sa ating mga komunidad ng mahahalagang impormasyon tungkol sa mga mapanganib na lugar at potensyal na panganib sa pagguho ng lupa (The mapping system is very important because this gives our communities vital information about danger zones and potential landslides)."

The Vice President enjoined local government units (LGUs) to coordinate better because disseminating proper information will strengthen communities and avoid tragedies.

Aside from the mapping system, the Vice President also underscored the importance of proactive measures like pre-emptive evacuation in hazard-prone areas and asked residents to follow the bulletins issued by the Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Response Team.

The flooding and landslides on Jan. 18 has affected nearly 45,000 families or over 187,000 people in the Davao Region, the NDRRMC had earlier said. (Martin Sadongdong with a report from Raymund Antonio)





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## QC mayor pushes urban farming

QUEZON City Mayor Maria Josefina "Joy" Belmonte on Monday urged lot owners to convert their idle lands into urban farms and enjoy tax exemption.

Belmonte told *The Manila Times* the city's Food Security Task Force (FSTF) has implemented a simplified procedure in applying for idle land tax exemption to landowners who use their land for urban farming.

In 2020, Belmonte approved an ordinance which provided for tax exemption to landowners who use their idle lands for gardening and composting for a minimum of three years.

The produce from their land can be used for personal or public consumption, she said.

The mayor saw the concept as "a win-win solution for both the landowners and the city."

Under the simplified process, landowners applying for idle land tax exemption must submit via email an application letter, a duly accomplished application for waiver of idle

land tax for food security, the latest photos of their property, and at least one copy of any of the following documents: latest real property tax official receipt/ tax bill; tax declaration; or land title.

The FSTF will send an inspector to validate the application by visiting the idle land.

The applicant will then be issued an urban agriculture activity certification (UAAC) signed by the mayor.

The UAAC will be forwarded to the City Assessor's Office for idle land tax delisting.

"We highly encourage landowners of idle lands to make use of their land for urban agriculture, which can help the city achieve its food security goals, especially now that we simplified our process," FSTF co-chairman Emmanuel Hugh Velasco said.

There are 1,026 urban farms in the city being managed by 25,650 urban farmers.

**ARLIE O. CALALO**





Ngayong araw na ito ang ibabahagi ko sa inyo ang ilang naging kaganapan sa idinaos na week-long celebration ng 26th Halamanan Festival 2024 sa bayan ng Guiguinto Bulacan.

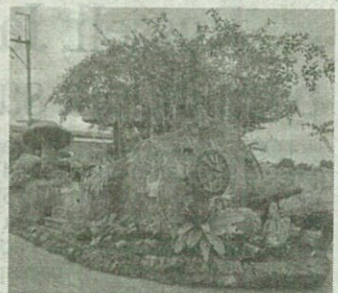
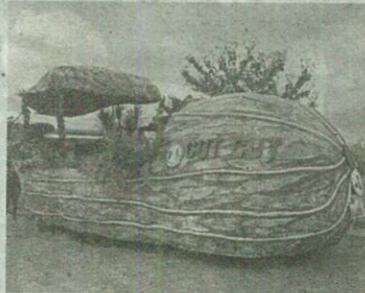
pisthan ng Patrong San Ildefonso de Toledo at paggunita sa pagkakatatag ng Guiguinto bilang isang malayang lokal na pamahalaan noong 1915.

Dahil sadyang hitik sa kalinangan at sining ang



**Basta't magaling, sa Guiguinto nanggaling...**

## 26th HALAMANAN FESTIVAL 2024



**Ang ilang magagandang Float na kabilang sa Grand Parade ng 26th Halamanan Festival.**

Ang motto ng bawat empleyado ng bayang ito ay "Basta't magaling, sa Guiguinto nanggaling."

Ngayong taon sa pagdiriwang na sinimulan noong January 17, 2024 ay naimbitahan ang Masaganang Buhay team ng Magsasakang Reporter para i-cover ang napakasayang okasyon.

Ayon kay Mayor Atty. Agatha "Agay" Paula Cruz, ang Bayan ng Guiguinto ay sentrong Halamanan at Bulaklakan ng Bulacan.

Dahil sa industriya ng paghahalaman ang isa sa pangunahing kabuhayan ng mga Guiguintenyo.

Ginaganap ang taunang pagdiriwang bilang pasasalamat sa masagana at mabuting taon ng mga taga Guiguinto.

Sinimulan ito ng dating Punong Bayan at ngayo'y Kinatawan ng ika-limang Distrito ng Bulacan na si Congressman Ambrosio C. Cruz, Jr.

Mula sa simple pero makabuluhan na pagdiriwang ay naging tanyag ngayon dahil at kakaibang saya at ligaya ang nadarama ng bawat isang nakikiisa sa okasyon.

Tanyag na ngayon ang kapistahan sa lalawigan ang HALAMANAN FESTIVAL dahil dinarayo na ng libu-libong turista.

Sinabi ni Rene Villanueva, Head ng Tourism ng Guiguinto, higit pa nilang pinagyayabong at pinapalago ang indutrya ng paghahalaman dahil nakapag-aambag ng malaki sa ekonomiya ng bayan at sa kabuhayan ng kanilang mamamayan.

"Dinarayo kami ng mga lokal at dayuhang turista dahil sa aming adbokasiya," ani Villanueva.

Nabatid na 1998 nang inilunsad ang taunang festival alinsabay sa ka-

kabiyak ni Congressman Boy Cruz na si Ginang Prescila Cruz ay naisipan namang gumawa ng isang sayaw bilang bahagi ng paglulunsad ng Halamanan Festival taong 1998 din.

Nabuo ang Bulaklak ng Halamanan na katutubong sayaw sa bayan ng Guiguinto. Ang musika nito ay iniakda ni Agnes Anduna na nilapatan naman ng titik ni Juanita Santos.

Si Gng. Prescila Cruz din kasama ang ilang guro ang unang nagtathal nito sa kauna-unahang Halamanan Festival.

Simula noon ay naging isang tradisyon na ang pagtatathal nito sa

Dr. Roel Dela Cruz, Municipal Agriculture Head ng Guiguinto, nais nilang makilala sa buong bansa at buong mundo na kapag nabanggit ang Guiguinto ay bayan ng magagandang halaman.

Binanggit ni Dr. Dela Cruz ang ilang programa sa pagdiriwang ay ang pagpili ng Hari at Reyna ng Halamanan, Bird

Cruz ay mapapanood ninyo.

Samantala, para sa iba pang tips at sikreto sa pagtatanim ng iba't ibang uri ng halaman sa pamamagitan ng organikong Pamamaraan ay maari po kayong manood at makinig ng aking TV at Radio program na Masaganang Buhay tuwing Linggo, alas-7:00 hanggang alas-8:00 ng



**Ang Magsasakang Reporter kasama sina Rene Villanueva, Head ng Tourism Department at Dr. Roel Dela Cruz, Municipal Agriculture head ng Guiguinto, Bulacan.**



bawa't pagdiriwang ng Halamanan Festival.

Nitong 2023 National Workshop ng Philippine Folk Dance Society na ginanap sa Baguio City ay ipinakilala, itinuro at itinanghal ang sayaw na ito sa mga mananayaw at mga tagapagturo ng katutubong sayaw mula sa iba't ibang sulok ng bansa.

Simula roon ay kumalat na ang pagtuturo nito sa maraming lungsod at lalawigan sa Luzon, Visayas at Mindanao. Tinawid nito ang iba't ibang kultura at pinatunayang ang Bulaklak ng Halamanan ay isang piyesang kainindak-indak at kagiliw-giliw.

Inihayag naman ni

Show, Car Show, Folk Dance Competition, Pawshion Show, Landscape Competition, Halamanan Indakan, Ulat Bayan 2024, Grand Parade of the Float, Concert at iba pa.

Kabilang ang celebrity na si Gilian Ward at sikat na banda na Ben & Ben sa mga nagpasaya sa mga nakikiisa sa okasyon.

Sa Linggo, Enero 28, 2024 ay mapapanood ninyo sa programang Masaganang Buhay TV at Radio Show ng Magsasakang Reporter ang ilang kaganapan sa Halamanan Festival 2024.

Maging ang interview ng Magsasakang Reporter kina Rene Villanueva at Dr. Roel Dela

umaga sa OnePH Signal TV, Channel 1 ng TV-5. Mapapakinggan din po sa Radyo Singko 92.3 News FM.

Maaari rin kayong manood at mag-subscribe at mag-follow sa aking Youtube Channel na ANG MAGSASAKANG REPORTER at Facebook profile na Mer Layson at Facebook page na Ang Magsasakang Reporter, TV host Vlogger, Tiktok na Magsasakang Reporter para sa iba pang kaalaman at impormasyon sa pagtatanim ng iba't ibang uri ng halaman sa pamamagitan ng organikong pamamaraan.

Tuwing araw ng Martes ay regular ninyong mababasa ang aking kolum dito sa **Pilipino Star Ngayon** (PSN) ng Star Group of Publications.

Sa mga tanong at komento ay maaari ninyo akong i-text, huwag pong tawag ah, sa 09178675197. STAY SAFE, HAPPY FARMING, GOD BLESS US ALL.





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## Soybeans, corn recover

SINGAPORE- Chicago soybean and corn futures gained ground on Monday, as short-covering and strong demand for US cargoes underpinned prices, with both markets recovering from several weeks of bleak performances.

Wheat prices climbed for a fourth consecutive session.

The most-active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) was up 0.4 percent at \$12.18-1/4 a bushel, and corn gained 0.1 percent at \$4.46 a bushel. Wheat rose 0.3 percent to \$5.94-3/4 a bushel.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) on Friday confirmed

private sales of 297,000 metric tons of US soybeans to China, the first soybean sales announcement under its daily reporting rules since Dec. 19 and the first to the world's top buyer of the oilseed since Dec. 15.

A weekly USDA report showed US corn and wheat export sales for 2023-24 exceeded analysts' estimates in the week ended Jan. 11.

US corn futures have dropped for the last six weeks and soybeans have declined for past five weeks amid expectations of ample supplies. - Reuters





## Chicago soybean and corn recover from recent losses on strong demand

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US corn futures have dropped for the last six weeks and soybeans have declined for past five weeks amid expectations of ample supplies.

US corn inventories last month swelled to their largest level since 2018, the US Department of Agriculture said on Friday, as global supplies recover from multi-year lows.

"Projections for large harvests in Argentina and Brazil continue to dampen market sentiment while the USDA's latest WASDE

report, published on Jan. 12, included a 1.1% upward revision from its December 2023 report to its forecast for world corn production in 2023/24, providing further fuel to market bears," BMI research wrote in a note.

Traders continue to monitor crop conditions in South America after analysts slashed estimates for Brazil's soybean crop due to earlier hot, dry weather. Drought fears have eased due to recent rains, though, and bumper harvests are expected elsewhere in South America such as Argentina.

Large speculators increased their net short position in CBOT corn futures in the week ended Jan. 16, regulatory data released on Friday showed. — **Reuters**