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New DA undersecretary for operations named

Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. of the Department of Agriculture has issued a series of special orders on the appointment of top DA officials as part of the agency's major revamp.

Laurel designated former National Food Authority (NFA) official Roger Navarro as DA undersecretary for operations.

Laurel also appointed Navarro as acting undersecretary for rice industry development, replacing Leocadio Sebastian who opted to retire effective Feb. 1 after his posi-

tion was downgraded to member of the technical advisory group.

Navarro was also named officer-in-charge (OIC) of key offices of the DA, including the Office of the National Project Director, Philippine Rural Development Project and Office of the Assistant Secretary for Operations.

Navarro also replaced Arnel de Mesa as assistant secretary for operations, who was appointed by Laurel as the full-time spokesman for the DA.

Navarro served as special assis-

tant to NFA Administrator Roderico Bioco.

Laurel promoted his chief of staff, John Alvin Balagbag, as undersecretary.

Other new appointments in the DA include the designation of lawyer Roland Tulay as OIC of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration and Office of the Undersecretary for Administration.

Laurel also ordered the recall of Executive Director Liza Battad to the Philippine Carabao Center.

— Bella Carias



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Despite price spike, DA won't impose rice SRP

By **BELLA CARIASO**

Imposing a suggested retail price (SRP) or price ceiling for rice is not an option for the Department of Agriculture (DA) amid reports that the retail cost of the staple has reached as high as P75 per kilo in the Bicol region.

The priority of the DA is rice supply, Agriculture Assistant Secretary and spokesperson Arnel de Mesa said in a radio interview yesterday.

"At present, we are not talking about that (SRP). Secretary (Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.) already announced that.

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We are focusing right now on our supply," De Mesa said. Increase in rice prices con-

tinues despite a report by the Philippine Statistics Authority that palay production in 2023

increased to 20.05 million metric tons compared to 19.75 million MT in 2022, according to Bantay Bigas spokesperson Cathy Estavillo on Wednesday.

She said consumers do not feel the increase in palay production, noting that retail prices of rice in 2023 were the highest in 14 years.

De Mesa gave assurance that the high retail prices of rice will be tackled during the meeting of the Cabinet to involve other agencies of the government.

"We have the challenge of the El Niño and we want to ensure that we will be able to sustain it or at least minimize the impact of the El Niño by providing support to the farmers like seedlings, fertilizer

and irrigation, especially small scale irrigation projects," De Mesa noted.

Based on monitoring of the DA, the retail price of local regular milled rice reached as high as P53 per kilo; local well-milled rice, P59 per kilo; local premium rice, P63 per kilo; local special rice, P68 per kilo; imported well-milled rice, P56 per kilo; imported premium rice, P62 per kilo and imported rice, P65 per kilo.

Bantay Bigas had earlier issued a warning on the increase in hunger incidence amid the continued spike in retail prices of rice and that retailers have noted a drop in the volume of rice that consumers buy in the market.



FAO says mango industry can take lead in raising food export competitiveness

By Adrian H. Halili *Reporter*

THE PHILIPPINES needs to make greater use of its mango industry in expanding agricultural exports, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said.

"The Philippine mango has a real competitive advantage. It is known globally, it is well reputed for the quality of the product," FAO Country Representative for the

Philippines Lionel Henri Valentin Dabbadie told *BusinessWorld*.

"When it comes to international trade the Philippines has been done more as an importer than an exporter in recent years," he added.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has said that it is preparing to increase exports of agricultural good, and is in the process of drafting of a Philippine Agricultural Export Development Plan.

Agricultural exports declined 13.3% to \$1.61 billion during the

third quarter, accounting for 8.2% of total exports, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. has proposed the revival of mango exports to Japan, which had imposed stricter quality standards on Philippine fruit imports.

The DA said mango exports to Japan declined sharply since 2011 with Philippine producers having to meet upgraded sanitary and phytosanitary standards.

"The Philippines however does not have the best conditions for this, you have disasters, no big land to cultivate mangoes. That is why you need to focus on where you have competitive advantage and what products can compete," Mr. Dabbadie said.

He added that the Philippines should grow mangoes with an eye towards meeting export market standards.

Mr. Dabbadie said that the FAO is working with the government to implement its One Country

One Priority Product initiative.

The project aims to identify and prioritize essential agricultural products which have growth potential and the promise making farmers more prosperous.

"Especially mangoes. This what we are working on with the government," he said.

The Philippines exported 12,548 metric tons of mangoes in 2023, according to the Bureau of Plant Industry. This was valued at about P2.9 billion.



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PHL fruits exports soar beyond P5B in '23-DA

THE Philippines exported over P5 billion worth of fruits, including mangoes and avocados, last year on the back of higher demand from newly opened markets, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said.

The DA said the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) facilitated and recorded the export of 20,325.09 metric tons (MT) mangoes, avocados and durians worth P5.167 billion last year.

Broken down, the country shipped 12,548.49 MT of mangoes worth P2.9 billion, 3,045.6 MT of avocados valued at P377 million and 4,731 MT of durian worth P1.89 billion.

"The 2023 export [volume] figures showed a 316-percent increase for avocado, 109 percent for mango, and a significant 4,000 percent for durian, respectively compared to last year," the DA said in a statement on Thursday.

The DA noted that the BPI issued over 83,000 sanitary and phytosanitary certificates for the export of various agricultural products last year, as well as nearly 80,000 import clearances for the entry of foreign commodities.

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PHL...

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"The bureau likewise helped open markets for durian exports to China, Hass avocados to South Korea and mangoes to Australia," the DA said.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. lauded the achievements of the BPI last year, emphasizing that the bureau is in line with the Marcos Jr. administration's of "elevating the condition of Filipino farmers and, ultimately, food sufficiency and security, through mechanization and modernization."

"For nearly a century, BPI has been at the forefront of agricultural innovation, stewardship, and progress in our nation. We are here to celebrate not just the longevity of this institution but also the milestones, advancements, and commitment it has shown towards the modernization of agricul-

tural practices in our country," Laurel said during the BPI's 94th anniversary last Wednesday.

Laurel urged the BPI to sustain its "forward-thinking" approach in addressing the needs of the country's farmers toward the growth and development of the agriculture sector.

The DA said the BPI provided more than 72 MT of vegetable seeds and legumes to hundreds of farmers as well as 82,471 pieces of planting materials as part of its efforts to boost local food production and farm productivity.

"It also certified over 5.8 million bags of rice, corn and field legumes that helped increase farm yield by as much as 30 percent. The agency also issued biosafety permits to foster safe biotechnology practices in the country," the DA said.

"Over 400,000 clearances were issued by BPI for domestic transport to prevent the spread of pests in the country," the DA added. **Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas**



DA chief cites '23 BPI achievements to boost food supply, fruits exports

By Othel V. Campos

AGRICULTURE Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel has cited efforts of the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) to help sustain food security and boost exports of high value agriculture crops that hit P5.16 billion in 2023.

Data from the BPI showed exports of high value fruits at 12,548.49 metric tons of mangoes worth P2.9 billion; 3,045.6 metric tons of avocado valued at P377 million; and 4,731 tons of fresh durian worth P1.89 billion.

The 2023 export figures represented a 316 percent increase for avocado, 109 percent for mango, and a significant 4,000 percent for durian, compared to last year's figures.

The BPI likewise helped open markets for durian exports to China, Hass avocados to South Korea and mangoes to Australia.

Laurel said the BPI was instrumental in upgrading agricultural practices, including providing better seeds and planting materials, innovating farming technologies, controlling plant pests and using biological control agents, promoting safe and sustainable crop production, as well as licensing and accrediting private sector partners for development.

In 2023, the BPI provided more than 72 tons of vegetable seeds and legumes to hundreds of farmers, as well as 82,471 pieces of planting materials to help increase food production and farm productivity.



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FRUITFUL ANNIVERSARY. Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. joins officials of the Bureau of Plant Industry in visiting the exhibits at the 94th anniversary of the BPI, which showcased products of the Crop Research and Production and Services Division such as seedlings, fruits, and vegetables (**see story on A3**). Jay Morales/DA-OSec



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DA'S FIRST EL NIÑO BULLETIN

DROUGHT DAMAGE TO ZAMBO RICE FIELDS REACHES P717K

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**
[@jordeenelagare](#)

Farmers in Zamboanga del Norte province have suffered losses totaling P717,500 due to El Niño, the first blow dealt by the weather phenomenon to the agriculture sector.

In its first El Niño bulletin, the Department of Agriculture's (DA) Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Operations Center said that 22 farmers and 22.25 hectares of rice fields in the province were affected by drought.

The weather phenomenon is characterized by below-normal rainfall conditions, with a strong and mature El Niño likely to persist until February.

"Majority of global climate models suggest that El Niño will likely persist until the March-April-May 2024 season with a transition to Enso (El Niño-Southern Os-

cillation)-neutral in the April-May-June 2024 season," the bulletin said. Enso is a climate pattern marking the absence of El Niño or La Niña.

The DA has implemented various measures to combat the weather phenomenon and provide appropriate intervention to affected farmers.

These include monitoring the weather condition and actual ground situation; validating vulnerable areas; consolidating and analyzing data on planting, harvesting and source and status of irrigation systems; and regularly disseminating advisories and agrometeorological information.

It is also undertaking a joint area assessment before conducting cloud seeding operations and promoting drought-resistant crop varieties better adapted to anticipated weather conditions during El Niño. **INQ**



8 provinces experiencing drought due to El Niño

By ROMINA CABRERA

Eight provinces in Luzon are currently experiencing drought amid the El Niño phenomenon, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said yesterday.

PAGASA said that drought was observed in the provinces of Apayao, Bataan, Cagayan, Cavite, Ilocos Norte, Kalinga, Palawan and Zambales.

Drought conditions are characterized by below normal rainfall or 21 to 60 percent reduction from the average for five consecutive months, or

way below normal rainfall for three consecutive months.

The strong and mature El Niño is expected to persist until May, with transition to neutral El Niño-Southern Oscillation conditions by April to June.

El Niño, which brings warm and dry air, increases the likelihood of below normal rainfall and may bring dry spells and droughts in some areas.

Dry spell conditions have been observed so far in 19 provinces nationwide.

Provinces that experienced dry spell, or below normal rainfall conditions for three consecutive months, include Negros Occidental in the Visayas

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and Basilan in Mindanao.

Abra, Aurora, Benguet, Ifugao, Ilocos Sur, Isabela, La Union, Metro Manila, Mountain Province, Nueva Ecija, Nueva Vizcaya, Occidental Mindoro, Pampanga, Pangasinan, Quirino, Rizal and Tarlac also experienced dry spell conditions.

There were also 23 provinces that experienced dry conditions or below normal rainfall in two months.

PAGASA said that generally below to way below normal rainfall conditions have been experienced in most parts of the country for the month of January, except in some

parts of Bicol and Mindanao.

El Niño damage

The damage of the El Niño phenomenon to the agriculture sector has already reached P717,500 affecting 22.25 hectares of rice areas, the **Department of Agriculture** reported in its latest bulletin.

"The damage and losses were incurred at vegetative stages of rice," the DA said.

DA Region 2 officer-in-charge Executive Director Rose Mary Aquino said that the DA encourages farmers to plant peanuts as an alternative crop amid the ongoing El Niño phenomenon, as the plant can survive

without water.

"When we were asked to submit a mitigation plan for El Niño, one of the mitigation plans we submitted was the planting of peanuts. The only requirement of peanuts for the whole drought duration is 200 cubic meters of water. The critical period is only from vegetative to re-productive, after that it only needs sunlight. When you plant (peanuts) in January, the vegetative period is from February and early March," Aquino said.

"Yes (we are encouraging farmers to plant peanuts) to address in case El Niño persists," she added. "I am very optimistic with the advent of climate change, the commodity that we can tap as a replacement especially during drought time is

peanuts."

Mitigation measures

Meanwhile, the DA said it has taken several actions to respond to the impact of the ongoing El Niño.

Among these are the regular dissemination of advisories and agro-meteorological information through municipal and city agriculturists and report officers and the monitoring of weather conditions and actual ground situation.

The DA has also conducted validation of vulnerable areas and identification of interventions for farmers to be affected. It has made consolidation and analysis of data such as planting and harvesting, source and status of irrigation systems.

Other actions taken by the DA include the joint area assessment

before the conduct of cloud seeding operations, providing information to farmers on proper crop management during El Niño, including adjusting planting schedules and optimizing fertilizer use, and the promotion of drought-resistant crop varieties that are better adapted to the anticipated weather conditions during El Niño.

The DA said earlier that it is mapping out intervention strategies to mitigate the impact of an expected prolonged dry spell caused by the El Niño on rice production as it started the series of cluster meetings for the Masagana Rice Industry Development Program.

Around 275,000 hectares of rice fields had been earlier identified as vulnerable to the impact of an El Niño-induced dry spell, according to the DA. — **With Bella Cariaso,**



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PH to resort to importation as El Niño begins to affect rice fields in Zamboanga del Norte

By GABRIELL CHRISTEL GALANG

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has reported that the persistent El Niño phenomenon is beginning to take a toll on rice paddies in Zamboanga del Norte.

To bolster the buffer stock in the wake of the El Niño, the DA said the private sector will be importing rice, with half a million metric

tons of the staple set to arrive next month. The DA said these imports will sufficiently meet demand for rice until March or the next harvest season.

In a statement, the DA-Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Service (DRRMS) said ₱717,500 has been lost as a result of the ongoing dry spell in Zamboanga del Norte, impacting 22 farmers ►14

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and covering 22.25 hectares of rice fields.

According to the DA Regional Field Office IX findings, the losses occurred during the vegetative phase of the rice or in the early stages of planting.

"Majority of global climate models suggest that El Niño will likely persist until March to May of 2024," DA-DRRMS said.

The agency said it is now taking steps to reduce the impact of El Niño,

including assessing vulnerable areas and preparing for cloud seeding operations.

Moreover, the DA-DRRMS is identifying interventions to assist farmers with issues affecting rice plants and analyzing irrigation status to alleviate the effects of the ongoing dry spell.

Last month, the DA announced that the department was formulating plans in response to the weather phenomenon.



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DA: Initial El Niño damage at P717k

THE El Niño weather pattern has caused P717,500 in initial damage at the start of the rice planting season, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said on Thursday.

The department's first El Niño bulletin also said that dry spells had so far affected 22.3 hectares of rice fields. The figures are expected to increase as more data is collected, it added.

The department has said that a "strong and mature" El Niño would last until February although fears have been raised that it could persist well into

2024.

Majority of global climate models suggest that El Niño will likely persist until May with a transition to a neutral phase up to June.

The Agriculture department said it was continuing to monitor the situation and would issue regular advisories to farmers.

According to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration, Metro Manila and 26 other provinces will likely experience a drought by the end of February.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



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DA accelerates irrigation projects

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) is ramping up its irrigation efforts through the construction of several water-related projects across the country this year.

Amounting to P10.2 million, two diversion dams were officially launched by DA Regional Field Office (RFO) 9 to the beneficiaries of the Small Water Irrigation System Association (Swisa) in Barangay Sicade and Gawil in Kumalarang, Zamboanga del Sur.

The Sicade Swisa has been granted access to the finished Sicade Diversion Dam Project, which was funded under the DA's rice program with a total cost of P5.8 million.

On the other hand, the Gawil Swisa expressed appreciation for

the P4.4-million rehabilitation of the Gawil Irrigation Project that was funded by the DA Quick Response Fund.

According to the DA, these initiatives aim to improve irrigation efficiency, empower the community to maximize their rice production capabilities and enhance the resilience of the farming community.

"The impact of these projects extends beyond infrastructure, significantly benefiting farmers in Barangay Gawil and Sicade. The projects are designed to ease and accelerate their livelihoods, providing a substantial boost to their income," said DA RFO 9.

Kumalarang Mayor Ruel Molina emphasized that the projects will

boost rice production in their municipality.

"As Kumalarang anticipates a boost in rice production, these projects not only signify infrastructural progress but also pave the way for a more resilient and sustainable future for the local farming community," said DA RFO 9.

In Bulacan, rehabilitation of the Bustos Dam is being done through the private sector. The National Irrigation Administration (NIA), meanwhile, said that this project will ensure efficient irrigation supply.

Replacement of rubber gates in seven pier measuring 79 meters each laid above a concrete ogee dam measuring at 76.9 meter each pier.

According to the NIA, this initiative is expected to support 23,708 farmers and provide irrigation to 31,485 hectares of agricultural land across 16 municipalities in Bulacan and four municipalities in Pampanga.

A new Rubber Gate 5 was also installed in the same dam. The replacement, carried out by the ITP Construction Inc.-Guangxi Hydroelectric Construction Bureau Co. Ltd. Consortium (contractor), incurred no cost for the NIA.

According to the DA, the country has around 3.13 million hectares of total irrigable area nationwide, and about 1.2 million hectares remains unirrigated.

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Tropical fruit exports hit P5.16B

THE Philippines' tropical fruit exports were valued at P5.16 billion last year, with some of the major fruits recording an increase in export figures, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA) on Thursday.

Citing data from the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI), the DA said the Philippines was able to deliver some 12,548.49 metric tons (MT) of mangoes abroad with an equivalent worth of P2.9 billion; 3,045.6 MT of avocado valued at P377 million; and 4,731 tons of fresh durian generating P1.89 billion.

"The 2023 export figures showed a 316-percent increase for avocado, 109 percent for mango and a significant 4,000 percent for durian, respectively, compared to last year," said the DA.

Last year, the BPI supplied over 72 tons of vegetable seeds and legumes, and 82,471 planting materials to elevate farm productivity. It also certified millions of bags of

rice, corn and legumes, resulting in a substantial increase in farm yield.

Additionally, it has certified over 5.8 million bags of rice, corn and field legumes that helped increase farm yield by as much as 30 percent. The agency also facilitated safe biotechnology practices and issued numerous clearances, import permits and phytosanitary certificates, leading to significant export growth.

Last year, the BPI issued over 400,000 clearances for domestic transport to prevent the spread of pests in the country.

It also granted around 80,000 import clearances, with 84 percent processed within a day. Additionally, more than 83,000 phytosanitary certificates were issued after meeting the standards compliant of the country's global trading allies.

Moreover, the bureau facilitated the entry of durian exports to China, Hass avocados to South Korea and mangoes to Australia, aiding in market expansion.

These initiatives were recognized by Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., who commended the BPI's role to enhance food production and modernize agriculture during the DA's 94th anniversary celebration on Wednesday.

Laurel encouraged BPI to continue its "forward-thinking approach" for advancing the agriculture sector.

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Evaluation

AN opinion piece last week by my esteemed friend Boo Chanco, a widely read columnist in another paper and my co-fellow at the Foundation for Economic Freedom Inc., caught my attention. It was entitled “Bastonero,” wherein he stressed the need for a high-ranking government official to track progress made by agencies based on the promises given or programs implemented to improve the lives of our people. He noted that President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. simply does not have the time



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for this and hence must designate someone who can perform the task. Providing that feedback, real time or a bit delayed, is critical if the administration wants to ensure that real progress is made and that the President’s promises are truly delivered. **► Finer B3**

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Evaluation

Boo recalled that during the PNoy administration, it was Cabinet Secretary Rene Almendras who played this role effectively. Almendras made sure that President Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino 3rd was regularly updated on the performance of various departments, particularly those that provide indispensable services to the people such as the Departments of Education, Health, Social Welfare, Agriculture, Transportation, etc.

Under the Duterte administration, there was also a “bastonero” or baton-holder in the person of Finance Secretary Carlos “Sonny” Dominguez. However, his oversight was confined to agencies that managed the economic and financial health of the nation. He did this by heading the Economic Development Cabinet Cluster composed of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and Departments of Finance, Budget and Management, Trade, Agriculture, Public Works, etc.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are key components of good and effective governance. Besides measuring progress and accomplishments versus the original stated objectives, M&E can be a tool to gauge progress made toward reforms and institutional changes. While “profits” serve as a reliable gauge of performance in a market, evaluation performs that indispensable role in institutions whose budgetary resources come from taxpayers.

Nobel Prize winner in economics Joseph Stiglitz (1998) noted that M&E was indispensable in making decisions that would lead to better outcomes. In a democratic setting, those outcomes should be instituted in the system as part of improving the institutions of governance.

Reforms in a democratic regime come in incremental fashion. The quality of incremental changes introduced in institutions will be greatly enhanced if these are products of well-researched M&E of previous experiences and projects. Thus, Wiesner (1998) asserted that evaluation

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should be an "institution" in a truly functioning democracy.

In fairness, the NEDA has its own M&E of the performance of various agencies. Among the instruments that it uses is a logical framework (log frame), which is a table that lists program activities, short-term outputs, medium-term outcomes and long-term goals for each agency. The log frame is supposed to show the logic of how activities to be pursued will lead to certain outputs that will eventually result in outcomes, and hence, the attainment of goals identified by the agency.

The NEDA also assists in the conduct of evaluation studies of specific programs of government agencies such as the Kalahi-CIDSS and Pantawid programs of the Department of Social Welfare and Development. These are usually subcontracted to research organizations such as the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) and researchers from the University of the Philippines (UP), Ateneo and other reputable academic institutions. The costs of these evaluation studies are sometimes funded by multilateral or bilateral agencies that provide support to such programs.

However, the NEDA's M&E activities are often too general, or their results delayed and not properly disseminated. Thus, their influence on the decision-making process of policymakers is constrained. The NEDA does not also have highly qualified staff to conduct in-depth M&E work because of the relatively low salaries offered by the government. It relies on reputable research organizations like PIDS and researchers from UP, Ateneo and other reputable universities to conduct the intensive and in-depth M&E studies.

A serious evaluation study will require a quasi-experimental approach to truly determine whether a program really made a difference. This approach requires "control" and "treatment" areas.

First, benchmark data will be gathered from both areas through survey interviews, after which the government program will be implemented in the "treatment" area and none for the "control" area.

After a year or two, another survey

will be conducted to determine whether the program really made a difference in the lives of residents of the "treatment" area compared to those in the "control" area. This exercise can be extended in other areas, and the survey conducted every two or three years to determine progress. This creates panel data for the program, which will be useful for future decision-making.

Unfortunately, we do not have a scientific culture in the government. This makes it difficult to measure real success or whether the program implemented caused an improvement in the community or if other external factors were at play.

In the Department of Agriculture (DA), for instance, success is normally measured by its various agencies and programs in terms of distributing the commodities assigned to them to disseminate. Its National Rice Program proudly reports the distribution of massive amounts of dole outs in the form of hybrid or in-bred seeds to thousands of small farmers. The same is true for its National Corn Program or its Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization, which recently reported that it had just distributed hundreds of millions worth of farm machineries to small farmers.

But what about increasing productivity and income, or the overall welfare of the small farmers? Are these not the end goal of all the programs that the various DA units are supposed to attain? Without seriously investing in M&E work, these questions will be difficult to answer. Sadly, the alternative is to be stuck with the usual practice of issuing press releases as a substitute

for measuring real progress made or its absence.

Ultimately, good governance suffers because we have scant ideas of what to reform due to an absence of a feedback mechanism that can be provided by a

robust M&E system to our decision-makers. This is when our two experts, "Drs. Haka-haka and Kuro-kuro," conveniently appear.

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1st El Niño damage recorded in Zamboanga del Norte

INITIAL cost of damage to the agriculture sector of the effects of El Niño has reached P717,500, according to latest data from the Department of Agriculture's (DA) Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Operations Center.

The DA attached agency in its advisory as of 4 p.m. on Wednesday, said damage from the weather phenomenon is equivalent to 22.25 hectares of rice areas tended by 22 farmers in Zamboanga del Norte.

Amid the development, DA said damage and losses were incurred at vegetative stages of rice.

DA added so far, regular dissemination of advisories and agro-meteorological information

through municipal and city agriculturists and report officers are being made using social media platforms.

The agency also said it continues to monitor weather condition and actual ground situation as well as validate vulnerable areas and identify interventions for farmers that are likely to be affected.

The DA is also consolidating and analyzing data such as planting and harvesting as well as source and status of irrigation systems apart from the conduct of joint area assessment before the conduct of cloud seeding operations.

It also said it has provided information to farmers on proper crop management during El

Niño, including adjusting planting schedules and optimizing fertilizer use and continues to promote drought-resistant crop varieties that are better adapted to anticipated weather conditions.

Citing latest data from the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, Astronomical Services Administration, a strong and mature El Niño is ongoing and is expected to continue through February this year.

However, majority of global climate models suggest that El Niño will likely persist until May but can still transition to El Niño Southern Oscillation-neutral from April to June. **-Jed Macapagal**



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BRIEFS

El Niño rice damage tops P700K

THE EL NIÑO weather pattern has, so far, wrought damage to rice farms in Zamboanga del Norte amounting to P717,500, initial reports reaching the Department of Agriculture (DA) said.

"The damage and losses were incurred at vegetative stages of rice," the DA's bulletin issued on Thursday said, noting that a total of 22.3 hectares and 22 farmers were adversely affected in the region.

Earlier, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) reported that a strong El Niño is currently affecting the Philippines and projected to last until the second quarter, bringing dry spells to 63 provinces. — **Adrian H. Halili**



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GOVT, MANUFACTURERS EYE 'PINOY SARDINES' ALTERNATIVE

BY JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS
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THE canned sardines manufacturers and the national government are mulling over rolling out a "Pinoy Sardines" brand that would serve as a cheaper alternative to branded sardines sold in the market.

Canned Sardines Association of the Philippines (CSAP) Executive Director Francisco Buencamino said the industry and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) are working towards the possibility of sell-

ing a "Pinoy Sardine" brand in the domestic market akin to the existing Pinoy Tasty and Pinoy Pandesal items.

Buencamino disclosed that the idea of a Pinoy Sardines came from Trade Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual, with the CSAP working on the matter recently.

The Pinoy Sardines brand is envisioned to be a cheaper alternative of the branded canned sardines available in the market today, he explained. The industry would be able to provide

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Govt...

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such an item by reducing their production costs through the use of cheaper raw materials like tomato paste, flavorings and tin cans.

"In introducing the new brand that the DTI wants—Pinoy Sardines—[we will reduce costs] not [by reducing] the count of fish [in a can] but [in other costs]. [We will find] new sources of tomato paste, which are imported, or work on importation privileges to bring down our costs," Buencamino told reporters on Thursday.

"[We will also] work towards vegetable oil, flavoring items from agricultural products like carrots and pepper, those being put inside the cans. WE will work something out with the DA [Department of Agriculture] on this matter to bring down the price. If there is cooking oil, we will try to negotiate it at lower cost," Buencamino added.

Buencamino said the industry is also looking at reducing costs by slashing the fees they incur in selling the canned sardines themselves such as listing fees, shelf-spacing fees, storage fees and merchandising fees at the supermarkets.

"All of what can be reduced...we will reduce, all for the intention of coming up with lower prices," he said.

Buencamino emphasized that one of the benefits of rolling out the Pinoy Sardines is that it would be the lone canned sardines product that would be covered by a Suggested Retail Price (SRP), leaving out the other branded items, just like in the case of Pinoy Tasty and Pinoy Pandesal.

Buencamino explained that local canned sardines manufacturers are

now working out on how to reduce the costs of production to be able to sell Pinoy Sardines, which includes replacing imported raw materials with cheaper locally available materials.

Buencamino added that CSAP already submitted a draft memorandum of agreement to the DTI regarding the Pinoy Sardines project.

"It would take us about one to two months if approved to launch the product," he said.

Shrinkflation

BUENCAMINO also noted that Pinoy Sardines is the industry's answer to "shrinkflation," which he strongly opposed, arguing that reducing the weight of canned sardines through fewer fish would be a disservice to the consuming public.

"Ayaw namin mag-shrink! It is not fair to our clientele, to our consumers that they will suffer this desire to lower prices by reducing [the weight of the products]. We cannot do that. The standard of our canned sardines has six Tambans in one can," he said.

"In a free enterprise market there are always substitutes. If they stop eating sardines they will take something else as their viands that are cheaper. If we reduce the weight of our cans, we are cheating the consumers," he added.

This week, the DTI greenlit price increase requests from manufacturers of 9 stock-keeping units (SKUs), which included canned sardines. Four out of 15 SKUs of canned sardines in the Suggested Retail Price (SRP) bulletin posted an average of 14 to 15 percent increase or an increase of P2.69 to P2.73. (Related story: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/01/24/dti-approves-price-hike-for-9-skus-in-srp-bulletin/>)

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DA's first El Niño monitoring report shows P700,000 farm damage in Zambo del Norte

By JASPER EMMANUEL Y. ARCALAS
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THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it has recorded at least P700,000 in farm damages due to El Niño, affecting about 22.25 hectares of rice farms.

"Based on the initial assessment of DA Regional Field Office IX, damage and losses have been reported in Zamboanga del Norte amounting to P717,500 affecting 22 farmers, with

22.25 hectares of rice areas," the DA Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Operations Center (DRRM OpCen) said in its latest report issued late Wednesday.

The DA-DRRM OpCen said the rice farms in Zamboanga del Norte that were affected by El Niño were in vegetative stages.

This was the very first damage report issued by the DA-DRRM OpCen regarding the impact of El Niño in the country's agriculture sector.

"Based on the El Niño Advisory issued on January 24, 2024, a strong and mature El Niño is ongoing and is expected to continue through January-February 2024," it said.

"Majority of global climate models suggest that El Niño will likely persist until the March-April-May 2024 season with a transition to ENSO-neutral in the April-May-June 2024 season," it added.

Some of the actions taken by the DA in relation to the ongoing El Niño

phenomenon were constant monitoring of weather conditions and actual ground situation as well as validation of vulnerable areas and identification of interventions for farmers to be affected by the dry spell, according to the DA-DRRM OpCen.

Furthermore, DA-DRRM OpCen said the department is regularly disseminating advisories and agro-meteorological information to the public, particularly to farmers, through Municipal and City Agriculturists and

Reporter Officers through Facebook.

"[We] provided information to farmers on proper crop management during El Niño, including adjusting planting schedules and optimizing fertilizer use," it said.

"[We promoted] drought-resistant crop varieties that are better adapted to the anticipated weather conditions during El Niño," it added.

The DA unit also noted that it is consolidating and analyzing data on

planting and harvesting as well as source and status of irrigation systems nationwide.

The DA earlier projected that the country's milled rice output in the first half could decline by as much as almost 190 million kilograms because of the projected impact of the El Niño on local farms. **(Related story: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/12/15/da-sees-domestic-milled-rice-output-decline-in-h1-2024-amid-el-nino-threat/>)**



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Drought hits 8 Luzon provinces, says PAGASA

AT LEAST eight provinces in Luzon are currently experiencing drought, the state weather bureau said.

More areas are also suffering from a dry spell or dry conditions with the ongoing strong El Niño phenomenon, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration said.

PAGASA said drought, characterized by below-normal rainfall conditions for five consecutive months or way below-normal rainfall for three consecutive months, is prevailing over Apayao, Bataan, Cagayan, Cavite, Ilocos Norte, Kalinga, Palawan, and Zambales.

The Department of Agriculture, for its part, reported that the El Niño phenomenon has caused at least P717,500 worth of losses at the start of the rice planting season in Zamboanga del Norte.

The weather phenomenon has initially affected 22.3 hectares of rice fields in the province, the DA said in its first El Niño bulletin.

The El Niño phenomenon is expected to persist until May this year, PAGASA said.

Ana Solis, Climate Monitoring and Prediction Section chief of PAGASA, said it is possible that 2024 will be one of the warmest years for the country.

**Rio Araja, Othel Campos, and
Alena Mae Flores**



Sibuyas P10 per kilo sa sakahan

DAHIL sa pagbaha ng mga imported na sibuyas, napipilitan ang mga magsasaka na ibenta sa mas mababang presyo ang inani nilang sibuyas.

Ayon kay Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) national president Leonardo Montemayor, umaaray na ang mga magsasaka sa Pangasinan, Nueva Ecija at Mindoro Occidental sa baba ng presyo ng sibuyas simula nang bumaha ang mga imported sibuyas noong Disyembre.

May mga pagkakataon na binebenta na lamang ng mga magsasaka sa bayan ng Bayambang, Pangasinan ang kanilang ani sa P50 per kilo hanggang sa pinakamababang P10 per kilo.

Nakadagdag sa kalbaryo ng mga magsasaka ang pamemeste ng army



worm sa kanilang pananim kaya lalong bumaba ang presyo nito.

Dahil dito, nanawagan si Montemayor sa Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. na maging pro-active sa pagkakaloob ng insurance sa mga sibuyas farmer.

Nagpatupad na ng temporary ban sa importasyon ng sibuyas ang Department of Agriculture upang mapigilan ang tuluyang pagbagsak sa presyo ng mga lokal na sibuyas.

Ang suspensiyon ng importasyon ay magtatagal hanggang Mayo pero posibleng umabot pa ito ng Hulyo.



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NEWS BRIEF

El Niño hinagupit na mga palayan - DA

Ramdam na ang hagupit ng El Niño sa sektor ng agrikultura kung saan ay umabot na sa mahigit P700,000 ang naging pinsala nito sa pagsisimula ng planting season ng palay.

Batay ito sa unang El Niño bulletin ng Department of Agriculture (DA) na layong ipabatid sa publiko ang epekto ng naturang weather phenomenon.

Dahil sa mas mababa sa normal na tubig ulan, naapektuhan ang nasa 22.3 ektarya ng mga sakahan.

Inaasahang tataas pa umano ang bilang na ito habang pinagsasama-sama ang higit pang datos mula sa iba pang rehiyon.

Sa ngayon ay nasa walong probinsya sa Luzon ang nakakaranas na ng tagtuyot o mas mababa sa normal na pag-ulan sa loob ng limang magkakasunod na buwan.

Kabilang dito ang Apayao, Bataan, Cagayan, Cavite, Ilocos Norte, Kalinga, Palawan, at Zambales. (Natalia Antonio)

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'Cagayan town peanut production declining'

CAGAYAN – Enrile town in this province may lose its title as the peanut capital of the country amid the decline in production.

Mayor Miguel Decena Jr. issued the warning in his speech at the launch of Peanut Farms and Industry Encounters through the Science and Technology Agenda at Cagayan State University.

Decena said data from the municipal agriculture office showed that peanut plantations in the town were down to 250 hectares in nine barangays.

He said peanut farmers cannot hire workers because of the high cost of labor.

Former Department of Agriculture secretary Proceso Alcala declared Enrile as the peanut capital of the Philippines in 2015.

Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development executive director Reynaldo Eborá said the agency aims to increase peanut production in the country from 1.24 tons to three tons per hectare through its industry strategic S&T program for legumes.

"We hope to sustain the availability of quality seeds, reduce the incidence of insect pests and diseases as well as minimize post-harvest losses for the peanut industry," Eborá said.

— Bella Cariasó



Ukraine's Black Sea grain export success tested by Red Sea crisis

PARIS/KYIV- Ukraine has managed to boost its Black Sea grain exports to a level not seen since before Russia's invasion, although the Red Sea shipping crisis poses a new challenge to its crucial agricultural trade.

Kyiv's success in replacing a UN-backed Black Sea export deal with its own shipping scheme has brought relief for Ukrainian farmers and importing countries while representing a naval breakthrough for Ukraine's military as a land counteroffensive has stalled.

The export turnaround helped Ukraine's economy to steady last year and further tamed global food prices after Russia's invasion in February 2022 drove them to record highs.

Kyiv shipped around 4.8 million metric tons of foodstuffs in December, mostly grain, from its Black Sea ports, surpassing for the first time volumes achieved under the previous UN-sponsored corridor. Moscow quit that deal last July saying commitments to safeguard its own exports were not being respected.

Before Russia's invasion, Ukraine exported about 6 million tons of food monthly via the Black Sea.

"The alternative Black Sea export corridor from Ukraine has definitely been a positive signal for the agricultural industry," Svetlana Malysh, senior Black Sea agriculture analyst at LSEG, said, adding: "There are lot of concerns related to the situation in the Red Sea."

Ukrainian grain exports by sea in January could drop by around 20 percent compared with last month, a senior Ukrainian official said last week, mostly because of the Red Sea crisis.

Strikes on shipping in the Red Sea by the Iran-aligned Houthis who control much of Yemen have stymied trade between Europe and Asia. The Houthis say they are acting in solidarity with Palestinians as Israel strikes Gaza. Their actions have prompted US and British air strikes against Houthi targets.

Passage through the Red Sea is very important for Ukraine as almost a third of its exports via

the Black Sea corridor are sent to China.

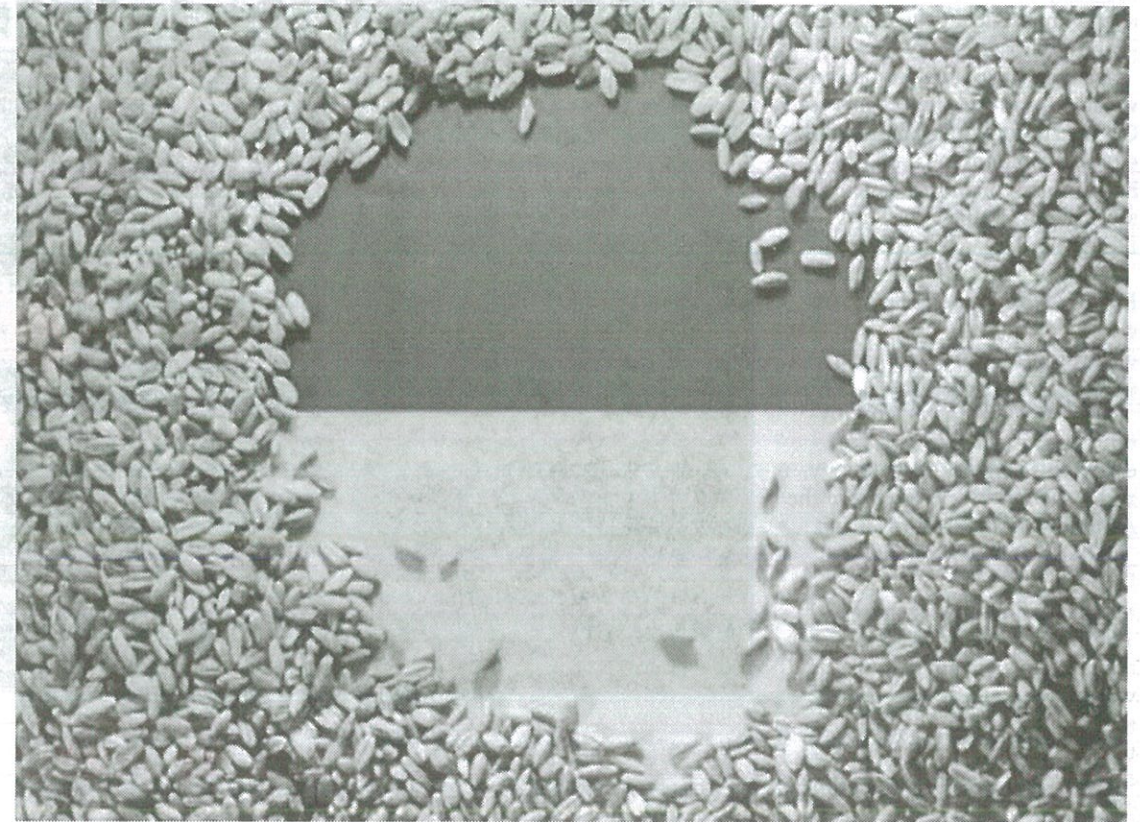
Under its new export scheme, Ukraine is also supplying grain to Pakistan for the first time since Russia's invasion, said Alexander Karavaytsev, senior economist at the International Grains Council.

Grain ships are increasingly being diverted away from the Suez Canal-Red Sea route, according to analysts and traders.

"The Red Sea situation is likely to hamper long-haul shipments from Ukraine," Karavaytsev said.

Ukrainian Black Sea food exports remain substantial. Over January 1-19, about 1.9 million tons were shipped via sea ports and another 1.7 million tons are still scheduled for January, said Spike Brokers, which tracks and publishes export statistics.

Ukrainian producers have welcomed the sea route as an improvement on both makeshift routes via the European Union and the UN-sponsored corridor, under which protracted cargo inspections with Russia drove up vessel charges. - Reuters



Ukrainian flag is covered with grains. (Reuters Photo)

Malaya Business Insight

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Corn, wheat inch up

SINGAPORE- Chicago corn futures edged higher on Thursday, with the market trading close to its highest level in two weeks, supported by concerns over lower production in Brazil.

Soybeans inched higher, while wheat jumped to its highest in more than two weeks as short-covering by investors drove gains in agricultural products.

"Brazilian corn crop is the main worry for the market," said one trader in Singapore. "Overall, prices are pretty low to encourage some short-covering with weather threat to the crop."

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

(CBOT) was up 0.1 percent at \$4.52-1/2 a bushel, not far from its highest since Jan. 12 at \$4.52-3/4 a bushel reached earlier in the session.

The corn market dropped to a three-year low last week.

Soybeans gained 0.4 percent at \$12.45 a bushel and wheat rose 0.9 percent to \$6.16 a bushel, after climbing to its highest since Jan. 8 at \$6.17-1/4 a bushel earlier on Thursday.

Forecasters are expecting lower production from Brazil's second corn crop, reflecting a smaller planted area.

Meanwhile, stressful heat is forecast for crop areas of Argentina, which has been on course for a bumper harvest. - *Reuters*