

**CLIPPINGS FOR THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 01, 2024**

**A. SEC. FTL Jr. QUOTED**

**BUSINESS MIRROR**

**Editorial: Urgent investments needed to boost food production  
PPA, DA strong partners in supporting food security, lowering logistics costs**

**PILIPINO STAR NGAYON**

**Editorial: Palay dumami, pero tuloy ang pag-import ng bigas**

**PEOPLE'S JOURNAL**

**DA chief meets veggie industry stakeholders in upland Cordillera**

**B. DA FAMILY**

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER**

**NIA: El Niño may affect 20 percent of rice fields**

**THE MANILA TIMES**

**Nueva Vizcaya tilapia producers organize group  
P30-M INATC to be built in Batac  
Davao del Sur coffee group gets P10-M aid  
Prices of bangus, tilapia in NCR remain stable  
El Niño damage now over P100M**

**MANILA STANDARD**

**DA: El Niño damage hits P109.4M**

**MANILA BULLETIN**

**Retail prices for bangus, tilapia remain stable – BFAR  
NIA confident farm sector will withstand El Niño's impact  
Economic zone to be established at Iwahig penal farm in Palawan**

**MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT**

**El Niño damage hits over P100M**

**BUSINESS WORLD**

**Briefs: El Niño crops losses at P109M**

**BUSINESS MIRROR**

**Govt told to step up efforts to expand local fish stocks**

**C. AGRI-RELATED STORY**

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR**

**Cebu offers prospects for US agri exporters**

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER**

**Research underway to curb carbon footprint of rice farming  
Farmers: PH lost P7.2B in 2023 due to undervalued rice imports**

**THE MANILA TIMES**

**Time to scale up regenerative agriculture  
El Niño hits Negros LGUs**

## **MANILA STANDARD**

**Farmers group challenges Recto to address agriculture import woes**

## **BUSINESS WORLD**

**Forgone gov't revenue from undervalued rice imports estimated at P7.5B in 2023**

**Cebu touted as potential hub for US farm goods**

**IRRI, BASF testing carbon reduction strategies in rice farming**

**Gov't told to enforce fishing laws**

## **BUSINESS MIRROR**

**PHL output of staple crops up in 2023- PSA**

## **D. FOREIGN STORY**

### **THE MANILA TIMES**

**AMIS seen benefiting global food system**

### **MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT**

**Corn, soybeans end higher**

**editorial**

# Urgent investments needed to boost food production

**C**OMPANIES all over the world, especially big ones, allot funds for their capital spending. These firms make investments in various areas to improve their services, increase output and prop up their bottom line. They put money into technology, spend it on the recruitment and training of more people, invest in research and development or establish more branches.

Manufacturers are well aware of the importance of expanding their facilities if they want to increase their output. An exponential increase in demand for their products cannot be delivered by simply raising the workload of each worker. At some point, these companies would have to set aside the necessary funds that will allow them to build a bigger factory where they can process more orders.

This also applies to increasing the country's food production. Many in government, especially those who came from the private sector, are cognizant of the need to put in place not only the necessary policies but also the money to bankroll initiatives for beefing up food output. In fact, the **current chief of the Agriculture department** estimated that some P1.3 trillion is required to improve farm production and reduce food waste. **(See, "Government should invest P1.3T to hike food output," in the BUSINESSMIRROR, January 17, 2024).**

The amount would be used to fund irrigation projects, postharvest facilities and cold storage facilities. Irrigating the remaining 1.2 million farmlands alone would cost P1.2 trillion, according to the country's Agriculture chief. This estimate does not yet take into account irrigation facilities damaged by storms or those that should be fortified.

As for postharvest facilities, producers are badly in need of the latest technology that would allow them to significantly reduce losses. A 10-percent reduction in postharvest losses, for instance, would practically eliminate imports and allow local planters to increase their incomes. Additional cold storage facilities would also make it more cost-efficient to store food and enable planters to preserve produce.

However, these initiatives would require substantial investments, which the state failed to make in the last two decades. Other neighboring Southeast Asian states have been able to capitalize on their farm sector and are now reaping the fruits of the focus they accorded to their agri-food sector. Thailand and Vietnam are earning millions of dollars from their food exports, while the Philippines remains as a net food importer.

The price tag of P1.3 trillion may be staggering to some quarters but it is a small amount to pay for ensuring the nation's food security. The investments made in the agriculture sector will not only benefit consumers, but also the manufacturing sector, particularly food exporters. The agrifood sector can significantly contribute to the aspiration of the Marcos administration to turn the Philippines into an export powerhouse.

As for agencies and entities that would be entrusted with these funds, they should ensure that the money is used judiciously and see to it that it is channeled to programs and initiatives that will truly benefit the sector. They should work with the President towards the creation of a "New Philippines," where food is affordable and planters no longer have to borrow heavily just to feed their families and the nation.





## PPA, DA STRONG PARTNERS IN SUPPORTING FOOD SECURITY, LOWERING LOGISTICS COSTS

**T**HE Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) remains committed to pursuing a policy of active partnerships with fellow government agencies like the Department of Agriculture (DA) in supporting the initiatives of President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. to boost food production and modernize the country's agriculture sector.

PPA has been consistent over the years in investing in infrastructure developments and maintenance of ports to facilitate smooth and timely movements of agricultural goods. By fostering a partnership with the DA, the two agencies vowed to ensure coordinated efforts in addressing challenges related to the transportation and storage of agricultural products passing through PPA ports.

According to PPA General Manager Jay Santiago, it is about time that the PPA and DA converge in implementing environmentally sustainable practices in port operations to minimize the ecological

impact and ensure long-term positive effects in agriculture and fisheries.

"The key here is coming together for one goal of providing better services for the public-convergence of government agencies and convenience for all port users and the communities. It is about partnerships and creating the best port and agricultural infrastructure to develop efficient logistics and speed up the delivery and distribution of products through mechanization and modernization," said Santiago.

Earlier this month, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said that the DA is serious in its push to boost agricultural production, ensure accessibility to affordable food, and achieve food security in the country.

"The new DA will work towards more production and less costs," affirmed the secretary in a statement.

Recently, the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Animal Industry as of January 2024 confirmed new cases of

African Swine Fever (ASF) in three towns of Occidental Mindoro, prompting local government units to conduct thorough surveillance, immediately depopulate infected hogs, and implement preventive culling around affected areas.

Since 2018, PPA has been a consistent partner of DA in preventing the spread of the African Swine Fever (ASF) outbreak after Santiago issued a memorandum to all Port Managers (PM) regarding the Technical Advisory of the Department of Agriculture (DA-Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) on ASF. This instructed all the PPA ports to properly coordinate with the shipping lines at ports to properly dispose of catering wastes and leftovers, including swill, in compliance with the recommended standards.

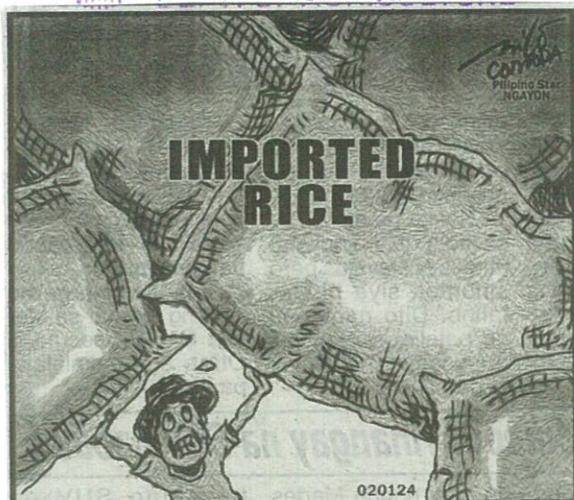
Focused on implementing projects to support food security and to reduce food logistics costs, PPA and DA vowed to work together for the common good of the agricultural communities and port users nationwide.



Date: 01 FEB 2024 Page: 4



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### Editorial

## Palay dumami, pero tuloy ang pag-import ng bigas

NIHAYAG ng Department of Agriculture (DA) na lumabot sa 20.06 million metric tons ng palay ang naani noong 2023. Ito umano ang pinakamataas na ani ng bansa sa kasaysayan. Noong 2022 nakaani lamang umano ng 19.76 million metric tons ang bansa. Noong 2021, nakaani ang bansa ng 19.96 million MT.

Ayon kay Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr., sinisikap nilang mapapaba ang production cost ng mga magsasaka para lumaki ang kanilang kita sa aning palay. Pati na rin umano ang mga aning gulay at iba pang agricultural products.

Isa sa magandang sinabi ni Laurel, patuloy nilang tinutugis ang mga smuggler ng agri products. Hindi umano titigil ang DA hangga't hindi nasasawata ang smugglers ng bigas, gulay, sibuyas at iba pang agri products.

Pero mas maganda rin sana kung mapuputol ng DA ang nakasanayan nang pag-angkat ng bigas. Noon pa, nakadepende na ang Pilipinas sa imported na bigas at tila wala nang pagpipilit ang mga namumuno para matigil na ang pag-angkat. Natagurian pang agricultural na bansa ang Pilipinas pero ang nakahain sa hapag ay kanin mula sa bigas na galing sa Vietnam, India, China at Pakistan.

Mas malawak pa ang tanimang lupa ng Pilipinas kaysa Vietnam pero patuloy na umaangkat ng bigas. Hindi katanggap-tanggap ang nangyayaring ito na mayaman ang lupain ng Pilipinas subalit pawang pag-angkat ang ginagawa. Wala nang pagsisikap na mapaulad ang ani.

Nang maupo si President Ferdinand Marcos noong Hulyo 2022 at siya rin ang umaktong Agriculture secretary, nasabi niya na hindi katanggap-tanggap ang pag-angkat ng bigas lalo't ang bansa ay isang agricultural na bansa. Sinabi rin niya na hindi naging maganda ang pamumuno sa DA sa mga nakaraan. May mali aniya sa sistema.

Binitawan ni Marcos Jr. ang DA makalipas ang mahigit isang taon bago itinalaga si Laurel sa puwesto. Wala rin namang nabago sa DA sa pamumuno ni Marcos at maski ang bigas ay hindi bumaba ang presyo at tumaas pa. Sa kasalukuyan, umaabot sa P60 ang kilo ng bigas. Hindi rin naman natupad ang P20 bawat kilo na pangako ni Marcos.

Ang matindi pa nga ngayon, patuloy ang bansa sa pag-angkat ng bigas. Nang dumalaw si Marcos sa Vietnam, nilagdaan ang Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) ng dalawang bansa tungkol sa limang taong trade agreement sa pagitan ng pribadong sektor.

Ibig sabihin, nakadepende pa rin ang Pilipinas sa bigas ng ibang bansa at walang pagkilos para magkaroon ng sariling ani na ihahain sa mesa ng bawat Pilipino.



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## DA chief meets veggie industry stakeholders in upland Cordillera

By Joel dela Torre

**AGRICULTURE** Secretary Francisco Laurel Jr. travelled upland north to meet highland vegetable industry stakeholders and discuss how to find ways to further develop the farm sector and at the same time raise income in the Cordillera region.

Laurel visited the Benguet Agri-Pinoy Trading Center, where he conducted a dialogue with key agri officials in the region and important players to include farmer leaders, truckers, market facilita-

tors, agricultural extension workers, municipal and provincial agriculturists.

"Konsultasyon talaga ito para magkaroon tayo ng polisiya na gusto ninyo at nais din natin sa pamahalaan para ma-achieve ang layunin ni Pangulong Marcos na Bagong Pilipinas. Bago lahat. Bagong direksyon para mapaganda ang buhay ng bawat Pilipino," the DA chief said.

He assured those engaged in production of cabbage, tomato, carrots, and potatoes that no one would be left behind under the present administration.

"Kaya dinala ko itong buong team dito na kasa-

ma natin sa national office para makatulong pag-isipan iyong current situation natin and see how we can improve," the Secretary said during his January 26 visit.

The dialogue also tackled strategies that reduce the production cost of farmers and increase their income.

During the consultation, Laurel pledged to translate the efforts into tangible results for the nation, specifically focus-

ing on meeting the country's ex-

pectations of providing ample food supply, lowering commodity prices, and improving efficiency while minimizing costs.

Issues raised during the town hall meeting include the high cost of farm inputs, like fertilizers, seeds, and pesticides; lack of market outlets for Good Agricultural Practices-certified products; concerns about the unrecognized foodlane pass by authorities; and issues related to smuggling.





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DUE TO LACK OF IRRIGATION WATER

## NIA: EL NIÑO MAY AFFECT 20 PERCENT OF RICE FIELDS

By Melvin Gascon  
@melvingasconINQ

The National Irrigation Administration (NIA) is keeping a close watch on the rice fields of Central Luzon, the country's rice granary, in anticipation of a decrease in production due to the effects of the prolonged drought this year, the agency's administrator said on Wednesday.

In a television interview, NIA administrator Eduardo Guillen said they were projecting El Niño to affect 20 percent of the country's rice farms, mainly due to an expected shortage of water for irrigation in Central Luzon.

"So the directive of [President Marcos] is for the NIA to push for the planting of high-yielding rice varieties in areas with ample irrigation because with these rice varieties, our farmers can increase their yield by as much as 50 percent to make up for the 20 percent of the land area that will have a lower yield," he added.

Guillen made the disclosure as a response to Malacañang's directive for agencies to come up with measures to allow the agriculture sector to adapt to the adverse impact of El Niño.

The NIA chief urged Filipino farmers to switch to high-yielding varieties, even as he clarified that the dry spell would not be much of a concern for rice crops.

He cited how the country managed to stem the impact

of a string of typhoons that hit rice-producing regions, which even supposedly allowed for an increase in production.

"That is the situation we are seeing in this case because ample sunlight is also favorable for rice," Guillen said over the "Bagong Pilipinas Ngayon" government program.

According to him, an estimated 50,000 hectares of rice land in the province of Nueva Ecija, parts of Pampanga, Bulacan and Tarlac would be affected by the shortage of irrigation from the Pantabangan Dam, while another 30,000 hectares would be impacted in the rest of Central Luzon.

To address this, the NIA was also adopting an "alternate wetting and drying technology" which would supposedly require less irrigation and allow for an increase in yield by around 20 to 30 percent, Guillen said.

Farmers who would not be supplied with ample irrigation would receive assistance from the Department of Labor and Employment and Department of Social Welfare and Development through the agencies' cash-for-work programs, he added.

For rice farms in upland areas, the NIA will be installing a solar pump irrigation with "fertigation" and drip irrigation systems. Fertigation is the practice of applying fertilizer solutions with irrigation water, typically through a micro-sprinkler or a drip system. INQ





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## Nueva Vizcaya tilapia producers organize group

IN a move to strengthen Nueva Vizcaya's tilapia industry, the **Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Region 2 (DA-BFAR 2)** office gathered farmers to organize the Interim Provincial Tilapia Aquaculture Produc-

ers Association.

The activity on Jan. 25, 2023 at the Provincial Fishery Office (PFO) Nueva Vizcaya Training in Bayombong was attended by fishery coordinators and tilapia producers from various municipalities in the

province.

The PFO said the interim association will serve as the province's consultation body for tilapia industry stakeholders, representing aquaculture producers in regional and national consultations, meetings and

planning related to the development of the industry.

The PFO said the association will also provide an avenue to discuss issues and concerns of tilapia producers, encouraging them to continuously support the BFAR to intensify tilapia

production in the province.

During the event, topics discussed include the Commodity Roadmap of Tilapia presented by Melba Francisco, Cagayan Valley Freshwater Technology Outreach Station head.

The BFAR said that part of

the bureau's mandate is to foster collaboration among farmers and industry stakeholders "so that by working together, formidable challenges like farm sustainability and rising inputs can be addressed."

LEANDER C. DOMINGO





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## P30-M INATC to be built in Batac

BY LEANDER DOMINGO

**T**O address challenges of farmers in the Ilocos Region in marketing their produce, the **Department of Agriculture Regional Field Office 1 (DA-RFO1)** in partnership with the Ilocos Norte and Batac local government units (LGUs) is constructing a P30-million trading center in the province.

The Ilocos Norte Agricultural Trading Center (INATC) will be constructed in Barangay Billoca in Batac. "The project will serve as a central hub that is expected to

meet the marketing requirements of farmers, promote agricultural and agri-based products of the province and help lessen transport expenses of farmers in bringing closer their products to consumers," the DA-RFO1 said.

According to DA, which funded the construction of the trading center, the project also aims to the reliance of farmers on middlemen and ensure increased incomes for them or 15- to 25- percent higher.

Expected to be completed by August, the trading center will

be built in a 10-hectare land near the Batac City Public Market. It was donated by the Batac city government as a counterpart to the project.

Of the P30-million project cost, P26 million was allocated for the construction of the building, P3.5 million for the hauling and a delivery truck, and P500,000 for marketing equipment.

These equipment include heavy-duty digital weighing scales, plastic crates, plastic pallets, jack lifts and other equipment.

Recognizing the importance of the project to the farming community in Ilocos Norte, Gov. Matthew Joseph Marcos Manotoc said the INATC will also help farmers become better entrepreneurs.

Also expressing gratitude to the DA-RFO1 and the provincial government for choosing Batac as the recipient of the project were Batac City Mayor Albert Chua and Municipal Councilor Mark Christian Chua.

DA-RFO1 Executive Director Annie Bares also thanked the pro-

vincial and the city governments for helping realize the project.

Bares urged the beneficiaries to use and manage the facility properly "so that it could fully serve its purpose."

"If managed properly, the project will help lessen the post-production expenses of farmers, eliminate unnecessary marketing layers that reduce the income of the food producers, and create a competitive marketing for Ilocos Norte's local agricultural produce," she added.





# Davao del Sur coffee group gets P18-M aid

A COFFEE farmers' association in Sta. Cruz, Davao del Sur received P18 million worth of facilities and capital from the Department of Agriculture-Philippine Rural Development Program (DA-PRDP) over the weekend.

DA-Regional Field Office 11 (Davao Region) Director Abel James Monteagudo said on Mon-

day that they successfully turned over the facilities to the Tibolo Farmers Workers Association (Tifwa).

"Congratulations to Tifwa, and we hope that this intervention will help boost the income of the association and will help produce and market high-quality green coffee beans," Monteagudo said in a

Facebook post.

The facilities consisted of seven solar dryers, a hauling truck, a warehouse, and working capital for Tifwa, which has a green coffee beans processing and market enterprise.

The project is funded by the DA-PRDP under the Investment in Rural Enterprises and Agricul-

ture and Fisheries Productivity component and was approved in 2022 by the Regional Project and Advisory Board.

Rey Antic, Tifwa chairman, expressed gratitude to DA-PRDP for the project, which he said would improve efficiency, reduce logistics costs, and maximize the profits of his organization.

**PNA**



■ Photo shows some of the products of the Tibolo Farmers Workers Association. PRDP FACEBOOK PHOTO





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## Prices of bangus, tilapia in NCR remain stable

THE Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR) on Wednesday assured the public that the retail prices of bangus (milkfish) and tilapia (cichlid fish) remain stable in the National Capital Region (NCR).

Its latest price monitoring report showed that medium-sized bangus sourced from Bulacan and Pangasinan are priced at P180 per kilo, while medium-sized tilapia sourced from Batangas and Pampanga costs P120 per kilo. The report covers 10 major retail markets in the region.

"Two to three pieces of medium-sized bangus usually weigh one kilogram, and the same goes for tilapia," the DA-BFAR said in a news release.

It said no fluctuations in the prevailing retail prices of bangus and tilapia were observed.

"The prices of these fisheries commodities have

remained stable since the previous weeks due to sufficient supply from farms. The farmgate prices of tilapia have decreased from P90 to P93 last week to P85 to P88 this week, while bangus farmgate prices were at P130 to P140 only this week," it added.

However, minor price differences may be due to several factors, including varying sizes of unloaded supplies in wet markets.

"Large-sized bangus, for example, commands a higher price of P200 to P240 per kilo. In addition, secondary markets — which source their supply from primary markets — may sell fisheries products at marked-up prices," it said.

Meanwhile, an increase in the supply of local fresh galunggong (mackerel scad) is anticipated in the markets as Palawan, a major source of fish in Luzon, ended its closed fishing season on Wednesday.

The ban started on Nov. 1, 2023.

PNA



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## El Niño damage now over P100M

AGRICULTURAL losses due to El Niño have ballooned to P109.44 million with most of the damage incurred in rice-growing areas, the **Department of Agriculture** reported on Wednesday.

The department's latest El Niño bulletin said the weather pattern, which brings dry spells and droughts, had so far affected 2,177 hectares of rice fields in the Western Visayas and Zamboanga Peninsula.

Volume losses totaled 4,738 metric tons and some 2,602 farmers were said to have been affected.

The figures were expected to increase as data is still being collected, the department said.

The "strong and mature" El Niño is expected to last until February, it added.

Majority of global climate models suggest that the weather pattern 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 that advisories would be regularly issued to farmers.

Earlier this month, it started a

series of cluster meetings for the Masagana Rice Industry Development Program to map out interventions to mitigate the impact of a prolonged dry spell.

The provision of inputs and scaling of rice technologies are also being implemented, including cultivation methods that reduce the amount of water needed to produce rice.

The National Irrigation Administration (NIA), for its part, said that around 20 percent of total yield could be affected by El Niño.

In a briefing on Wednesday, NIA Administrator Eduardo Guillen said that the situation in Central Luzon was concerning as the water level in the Pantabangan Dam in Nueva Ecija remained low.

To lessen the impact of El Niño in the province, he said the use of alternate wetting and drying technology was being implemented to increase irrigated areas.

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

**JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL**





## DA: El Niño damage hits P109.4m

**E**VEN though the El Niño phenomenon has yet to reach its peak, damage and losses sustained by the agriculture sector due to the severe climate condition have already swelled to over P100 million, the government said.

Citing assessments from its regional field offices in Western Visayas and Zamboanga Peninsula, the Department of Agriculture on Wednesday said damage to crops brought about by El Niño stood at P109.4 million -- significantly higher than the initial P717,500 worth of losses reported as of Jan. 24.

The DA said El Niño has affected 2,602 farmers who till 2,177 hectares of rice fields in the two regions, with a total 4,738 metric tons of rice damaged.

"Most of the damage and losses in-

curring on rice are at reproductive stages," the DA said, adding it has taken several measures to address the threat of El Niño, including the following:

- Regular monitoring of weather conditions and actual ground situation;
- Continuous dissemination of advisories and agro-meteorological information through Provincial, Municipal/City Agriculturists and Report Officers through Facebook/Messenger;

- Information on proper crop management during El Niño, including adjustment of planting schedules and optimizing fertilizer use;

- Field validation of areas vulnerable to drought and dry spell, and positioning of interventions for farmers to be affected;

- Analyze data on planting and harvesting (rice and corn), sources of irrigation systems (dams, SWIP, SSIPs), as well as status of irrigation facilities (operational, non-operational)

- Joint area assessment before the conduct of cloud seeding operations by concerned DA operating units and national agencies; and

- Adoption of drought-resistant crop

varieties during El Niño.

Citing an El Niño advisory issued by the state weather bureau PAGASA, the DA said a strong El Niño was ongoing and was expected to continue from January to February 2024.

"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 Oscillation)-neutral in the April-May-June 2024 season," it said.

The El Niño phenomenon is characterized by the abnormal warming of sea

surface temperature in the central





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## Retail prices for bangus, tilapia remain stable – BFAR

By GABRIELL CHRISTEL GALANG

**T**he Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR) has assured the stability of retail prices for bangus and tilapia in Metro Manila.

Based on the DA-BFAR's report on Wednesday, Jan. 31, the medium-sized bangus from Bulacan and Pangasinan cost ₱180 per kilo or two to three pieces, while medium-sized tilapia from Batangas and Pampanga cost ₱120 per kilo.

Farmgate prices for tilapia and bangus have also decreased, according to DA-BFAR.

"We did not observe a fluctuation in the prevailing retail prices... The prices of these fisheries commodities have remained stable since the previous weeks due to sufficient supply from farms," the agency said.

The ₱90 to ₱93 farmgate price range for tilapia last week went down to ₱85 to ₱88.

Bangus farmgate price for this week ranges from ₱130 to ₱140.

The agency explained that these lowered price changes are caused by varying sizes of unloaded supplies in markets.

"Large-sized bangus, for example, commands a higher price of ₱200-₱240 per kilo," DA-BFAR explained. "The secondary markets, which source their supply from primary markets, may sell fisheries products at marked-up prices."

Consumers are also notified of the galunggong supply increase due to its closed fishing season set by the end of January.

The DA-BFAR anticipates a large quantity of local-fresh galunggong coming from Palawan markets, which is Luzon's major source.

"Rest assured that price and supply monitoring efforts are continuously overseen and other concerned agencies to ensure that fish commodities are affordable and sufficient for the consumers in Metro Manila," the fisheries agency noted.



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## NIA confident farm sector will withstand El Niño's impact

By GABRIELL CHRISTEL GALANG

The National Irrigation Administration (NIA) is confident that the country's agriculture sector can weather the adverse effects of the El Niño phenomenon after it put in place its comprehensive national program ahead of the dry spell.

NIA Administrator Eduardo Guillen said that the agency, in collaboration with other government entities, has already initiated mitigation preparations a year prior to the onset of the dry spell.

"We have been preparing for El

Niño since last year," Guillen said. "NIA is not the only agency that is helping [the farmers], but the whole of government... We are just guiding them."

Among the plans the administration has coordinated with local officials, Guillen shared that alternative wetting and drying technology, the "Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (TUPAD)" program, and dam watch are some of the proactive measures to address the production of rice amid the weather phenomenon.

The alternate wetting and drying technique is used to manage irrigated lowland rice with less water to maintain continuous standing water in the crop field.

"The Department of Labor and Employment [DOLE] and the Department of Social Welfare and Development [DSWD] help provide the initiative to affected farmers."

"Around 20 percent [of production] will be affected by El Niño, but if high-yielding crops are raised by 50 percent, rice production won't go down," he added.





## Economic zone to be established at Iwahig penal farm in Palawan

By JEFFREY DAMICOG

The first economic zone within a prison reservation of the Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) will be set up at the Iwahig Prison and Penal Farm (IPPF) in Puerto Princesa, Palawan.

IPPF has more than 45,000 hectares of land divided into four zones or districts. It was set up in the early 1900s.

The setting up of an economic zone, a first at the IPPF and later in other prison and penal farms in the country, is contained in a memorandum of agreement (MOU) signed by BuCor and Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) last Tuesday, Jan. 30.

"This agreement will identify areas within penal colonies which have the potential to become economic zones, focusing on Palawan to become an agricultural and economic zone," the Department of Justice

(DOJ) said in a statement.

Under the partnership between BuCor and PEZA, the DOJ said that "idle lands of the BuCor which formerly had little to no use will now be maximized to produce economic and agricultural output making a major contribution to the country's food security."

The MOU was signed by BuCor Director General Gregorio Pio Cata-pang Jr. and PEZA Director General Tereso O. Panga at the PEZA's main offices in Pasay City.

Also present during the event were DOJ Undersecretary Deo L. Marco and PEZA Deputy Director General Maria Veronica F. Magsino.

The BuCor has seven operating prison and penal farms (OPPF) including IPPF.

The other OPPFs are the New Bilibid Prison (NBP) in Muntinlupa City; the Correctional Institution for Women (CIW) in Mandaluyong

City; Leyte Regional Prison (LRP) in Abuyog, Leyte; San Ramon Prison and Penal Farm (SRPPF) in Zambo-anga City; Sablayan Prison and Penal Farm (SPPF) in Occidental Mindoro; and Davao Prison and Penal Farm (DPPF) in Davao del Norte.

Before the BuCor-PEZA MOU, the DOJ and Department of Agriculture (DA) signed in July last year a memorandum of agreement (MOA) on the Reformation Initiative for Sustainable Environment for Food Security (RISE) Project.

Under the RISE Project, 501 hectares out of the 28,788.54 hectares of land of the IPPF will be used for agriculture.

Catapang had previously explained that the RISE project will provide food security for the country and, at the same time, generate income for the BuCor as well as to persons deprived of liberty (PDLs)



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## El Niño damage hits over P100M

DAMAGE to the agriculture sector of El Niño climbed to P109.44 million from the previous estimate of 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 3 p.m. on Tuesday said the damage from the weather phenomenon is equivalent to 2,177 hectares of rice areas tended by 2,602 farmers in Zamboanga Peninsula and Western Visayas.

Those regions damaged 4,738 metric tons of rice.

The DA said most of the damage and losses incurred were at the reproductive stages of rice.

Regular dissemination of advisories and agro-meteorological information through municipal and city agriculturists and report officers are being made using social media platform, the DA added.

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. - *Jed Macapagal*





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## BRIEFS

### El Niño rice crop losses at P109M

RICE CROP losses due to the El Niño weather pattern has jumped to P109.44 million from around P700,000 last week, according to the latest report from the Department of Agriculture (DA).

In its second El Niño bulletin, the DA recorded a total of 4,748 metric tons of rice crops damaged across 2,117 hectares of farms in Western Visayas and Zamboanga Peninsula. The losses have hit 2,602 farmers.

Meanwhile, the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) said 20% of agricultural production may be affected by the ongoing El Niño.

"About 20% will be affected by El Niño," said NIA Administrator Eduardo Eddie G. Guillen in an interview with the state television. "But if high-yielding crops are planted, rice production won't go down," in an interview with PTV.

State weather specialists said El Niño in the country is projected to last until the second quarter, bringing dry spells to 63 provinces. —

**Adrian H. Halili**





## Govt told to step up efforts to expand local fish stocks

BY JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ

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**T**HE government should strictly implement laws that seek to combat overfishing to increase the country's fish stocks, according to a lawmaker.

AGRI Party-list Rep. Wilbert T. Lee said the government should tighten the implementation of laws to safeguard against overfishing.

While acknowledging President Marcos' stance on not imposing a fishing ban last year, Lee stressed the importance of fully implementing regulations designed to safeguard marine resources.

"While President Marcos said last year that he was not imposing a fishing ban, the government should fully implement existing fishery laws and regulations that would deter illegal fishing activities and the encroachment of commercial fishing vessels into municipal waters."

His call for stricter enforcement of the law follows the release of a Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) report revealing a 5.2 percent decline in fisheries production during the fourth quarter of 2023 compared to the previous year.

"We are pleased that our year-on-year agricultural output increased somewhat in Q4. However, it is equally alarming to witness a decline in our fisheries production. We must intensify efforts to monitor overfishing and illegal fishing, as these are major contributors to the depletion of our fish stocks."

Lee said the decline in fisheries production "is certainly very concerning considering that we are an archipelagic country with one of the longest coastlines in the world."

"We are declared the world's center of marine biodiversity, yet our fisheries output has been consistently declining," he said.

Highlighting the significance of a vibrant fish supply in promoting food security, Lee said there is a need for "proactive measures" to address the challenges faced by local fishermen.

"We believe that this administration has the necessary political will to enforce laws protecting the livelihoods of our small-scale fisherfolk and alleviate their concerns about providing for their families, especially during times of

Lee specifically mentioned the implementation of the Fisheries Code, advocating for the installation of the vessel monitoring system (VMS) and electronic reporting system (ERS) on commercial fishing vessels flying the national flag.

"The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) has already mandated the installation of VMS and ERS on all commercial fishing vessels. This move is crucial in ensuring sustainable fishing

practices and protecting the interests of our local fisherfolk."

### Galunggong supply

BFAR, an attached agency of the Department of Agriculture (DA), said it anticipates an increase in the supply of local galunggong as Palawan, a major source of round scad in Luzon, ended its closed fishing season on January 31.

Amid the low supply of round scad, the Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) warned the DA against allowing another round of fish importation.

Pamalakaya, a national alliance of organizations of small fishermen and fisherfolk, said the low supply of galunggong due to the closed fishing season in major fishing grounds may prompt the DA to issue import permit for round scad.

"Importation is not the solution to the problem of local supply and high prices. Instead, it will impact local fishermen because it will further bring down the price of their product once cheaper fish, although low quality, imported fish start to come in," Fernando Hicap, national chairman of Pamalakaya said in a statement.

Hicap said flooding the market with imported fish will not guarantee lower prices because fish traders allegedly control the farmgate and retail price.

He blamed this on the supposed failure of the government to buy fish from local producers at a reasonable price and bring them to the market, again at a reasonable price.

"Instead of importing fish, small fishermen should close rank to end the closed fishing season and maintain their exclusive right over the 15-kilometer fishing waters. The reason for the depletion of the fish stock is the entry of big fishing vessels inside the municipal waters that usually cause destruction and use unsustainable fishing methods."

### Bangus prices

BFAR assured that the retail prices of other fish species like bangus and tilapia remain stable in the National Capital Region.

While the general price situation of bangus and tilapia is stable, Bfar said "minor price differences" are possible due to several factors, including varying sizes of unloaded supplies in wet markets as well as the type of the market.

"Large-sized bangus, for example, commands a higher price of P200-P240 per kilo. In addition, secondary markets—which source their supply from primary markets—may sell fisheries products at marked-up prices," it said in a statement.

"Rest assured that price and supply monitoring efforts are continuously overseen by Bfar and other concerned agencies to ensure that fish commodities are affordable and sufficient for the consumers in Metro Manila."





## Cebu offers prospects for US agri exporters

Cebu offers strong opportunities for direct shipments of US agricultural exports, driven by the feed and food manufacturing, food service and food retail sectors, according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

"As the economic center of the Philippines' central Visayas region, Cebu offers strong opportunities for US meat, potato, dairy products, and animal feed ingredients," the USDA-Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) said in a report.

The FAS said the Cebu Port serves as a key distribution hub in the Philippines, citing international and domestic shipments in Cebu which reached 66.3 million metric tons with seven percent growth from 2021 to 2022.

The USDA cited opportunities in feed manufacturing, food service and food retail sectors.

"Animal feed producers located in Central Visayas, one of the top hog producing regions, present opportunities for animal feed ingredients, especially soybean meal, the top US agricultural export to the Philippines in 2022," the USDA said.

Other US export products for animal feeds include meat and bone meal, bakery meal, millet, soya protein, oats, whey powder and distiller's dried grains with soluble.

"Some food and beverage manufacturers based in Manila have established factories and distribution centers in Cebu to supply the Visayas and Mindanao regions," the USDA said.

It added that meat processing plants purchase mechanically deboned chicken meat as fillings for meat by-products and dumplings, while milling companies buy wheat,

dairy manufacturers import white cheddar cheese, whey powder and skim milk powder.

The USDA also highlighted opportunities brought by the opening of five-star hotels and resorts, high end restaurants, and international restaurant chains which feature US ingredients on their menus, such as premium beef cuts, pork cuts and duck.

"Most restaurants in Cebu buy fresh produce and grocery items from wet markets and retail stores, while some restaurant and hotel chains purchase food and beverages directly from importers to reduce costs," the USDA noted.

It added that quick-service restaurants buy large volumes of chicken leg quarters, chicken drumsticks and frozen potato fries.

Moreover, the report emphasized that while grocery stores in Cebu sell mainly local products, most also sell imported meat, fruits, canned goods, snacks, sauces, condiments, cheeses and wines.

"Warehouse clubs offering a wider selection of imported food and beverages experience a growing demand for American brands, with plans to expand in the Visayas region," the USDA said.

"With 40 percent of the population 14 years old and below, some grocery stores have powdered milk, cheeses, ice cream, snacks and frozen fries as their top-selling products," the USDA said.

It added that some of the more popular US products found in retail stores are beef, pork, chicken, turkey, apples, oranges, lemons, strawberries, condiments, soups, non-alcoholic beverages and wines.

—Catherine Talavera





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**IRRI-BASF PARTNERSHIP**

## RESEARCH UNDERWAY TO CURB CARBON FOOTPRINT OF RICE FARMING

The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) has partnered with a German chemical producer to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions in rice production, particularly on fields in Laguna province.

According to IRRI, it had collaborated with Ludwigshafen-based BASF Group to pursue the Optimizing Management for Reduction of GHG in Rice (Optima Rice) project, which it said supported BASF's goal of reducing emissions from crop production by 30 percent per ton by 2030.

"The joint effort is planned for multiple rice seasons in the

Philippines and will take place in Laguna, where both organizations maintain research centers for rice," IRRI said in a statement on Wednesday.

Data from the World Bank show that rice production in Southeast Asia—considered one of the world's largest rice producers—accounts for up to 33 percent of the region's methane emissions.

As rice is grown in flooded fields, the World Bank explained that this was an ideal environment for bacteria feeding on decomposing organic matter, allowing these to release methane, a type of

greenhouse gas.

In this context, both IRRI and BASF want to explore direct-seeded rice varieties, among others, to further cut emissions.

This method involves directly planting seedlings on the field instead of transferring them from nurseries, thus reducing water use and methane emissions.

"This collaboration presents immense opportunities for methane and other GHG reductions to create value for farmers and help improve the production of rice in Asia, and the Philippines in particular," said

Bas Bouman, research director and head of IRRI's sustainable impact department.

Additionally, IRRI said it would study new algorithms to better measure greenhouse gas emissions in rice production.

BASF, on the other hand, plans to use its so-called AgBalance tool to estimate "greenhouse gas emission intensity" while working with IRRI on product field tests to obtain more accurate emission data.

In 2023, the Philippines produced 13.2 million metric tons of rice, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority. —MEG

J. ADONIS INQ



Date: FEB. 01, 2024 Page: 82



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GROUP SAYS DECLARED COSTS LOWER BY 22%

## FARMERS: PH LOST P7.2B IN 2023 DUE TO UNDERVALUED RICE IMPORTS

The government lost P7.2 billion in tariff revenues last year due to the Bureau of Customs' (BOC) undervaluation of rice imports, a group alleged on Wednesday, noting that the amount could have been used to extend aid to farmers.

The Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) said the declared costs for imported rice averaged P24.12 per kilogram, or 22-percent lower than the BOC's P30.78 per kilo reference price.

FFF further pointed out that the BOC could have collected an additional P2.34 per kilo in tariffs "if there was no undervaluation."

The BOC defines undervaluation as "any dutiable adjustment to the price actually paid or payable," or a failure to "disclose in full the price actually paid or payable."

The Philippines imported 3.58 million tons of rice last year, according to FFF. Eighty-three percent came from Vietnam, while less than 4 percent came from countries outside Southeast Asia.

Under the Rice Tariffication Law enacted in 2019, a 35-percent tariff is imposed on imports within South-

east Asia, while a 40-percent rate is applied for non-Asean countries.

Various groups last year pushed for these rates to be reduced to just 10 percent to arrest the surge in prices.

FFF had pointed out, however, that these could hurt the income of farmers.

According to FFF, 90 percent of last year's imported rice was undervalued, with almost half undervalued by at least 20 percent.

"Tariff losses from rice imports are only the tip of the iceberg," said FFF national manager Raul Montemayor, adding that pork, chicken, corn and vegetable imports were "much worse." He did not provide further details.

Montemayor challenged newly appointed Finance Secretary Ralph Recto to "decisively address the unabated and worsening undervaluation and misclassification of imports of agricultural commodities."

"If Secretary Recto really wants to generate more revenues for government without imposing new taxes, he does not have to look far," he said.

—MEG J. ADONIS INQ





## Time to scale up regenerative agriculture

(Second of two parts)

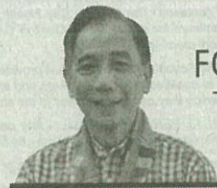
THERE is a growing movement to scale up regenerative generation in the Philippines and globally, and we should see that as a very exciting development.

In the international scene, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) has initiated the One Planet Business for Biodiversity (OP2B), which is "an international, cross-sectoral and action-oriented business coalition on biodiversity with a specific focus on regenerative agriculture," according to the OP2B website.

The WBCSD counts at least 225 leading businesses that have come together to tackle the issue of climate change.

"Our members push the boundaries of what businesses can achieve by taking action to limit the climate crisis, restore nature, and tackle inequality. So that all people can thrive in a way that's sustainable for our planet — by 2050," the WBCSD said on its website.

So, we can say OP2B is taking



MOVING  
FORWARD

WILLIAM  
D. DAR

the lead globally to scale up regenerative agriculture and is using a collaborative-based approach based on science for that purpose. OP2B said it has members with a presence in every level of the agricultural value chain across multiple sectors, and these companies are working together in a pre-competitive environment to create positive outcomes for society, nature and biodiversity for almost all stakeholders.

The movement clearly stated on its website that the current system of producing food has been primarily focused on increasing yields through the use of harmful inputs.

Hence, OP2B partners with farming groups, the scientific community and civil society to develop a proposed Regenerative Agriculture Framework with a set of objectives and impact indica-

tors and a process to assess and measure impact.

"Through our Regenerative Agriculture Framework, we are assisting in the transition and scale-up of regenerative agricultural practices on a global level. We support companies in this transition by helping prioritize actions, establishing baseline targets, and identifying key measurements to report and track," the movement said.

The need to move further forward regenerative agricultural practices and systems was amplified during the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, from Nov. 30 to Dec. 12, 2023.

During the event, heads of states agreed that the global agriculture and food system must adapt and transform to respond to the challenges presented by climate change.

Specifically, the heads of states made a declaration "to work collaboratively and expeditiously to pursue the following objectives," which are:

- Scaling up adaptation and resilience activities
- Promoting food security and nutrition
- Supporting workers in agriculture and food systems
- Strengthening the integrated management of water in agriculture and food systems at all levels
- Maximizing the climate and environmental benefits while containing and reducing harmful impacts associated with agriculture and food systems.

The participants in COP28 have set 2030 as the year to attain the aforementioned objectives, and this needs concerted action.

### Local initiatives

In the Philippines, there are private sector companies contributing significantly to the gradual shift to regenerative agriculture. Among them are Nestlé Philippines and Unilever Philippines.

Through its Nescafé Plan program, Nestlé PH is working closely with coffee farmers and their communities with the cooperation of national and lo-

cal governments, development agencies, and other partners to push forward a comprehensive regenerative agriculture model.

The model being pushed and promoted by Nestlé PH is aimed at protecting the three key resources required for growing food: soil, water and biodiversity. Hence, the company shares Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) in coffee production with farmers and introduces them to regenerative farming principles.

By setting a goal of mitigating the impacts of agriculture on the environment and helping ensure food security, Nestlé is adhering to a global Net Zero Roadmap and is aiming to source 20 percent of its key ingredients from regenerative agriculture methods by 2025 and 50 percent by 2030.

For its part, Unilever has developed its regenerative agriculture principles that aim to help farmers in Southeast Asia regenerate their lands throughout its supply chain. Also, the company aims to make its farmer-partners resilient and able to grow ingredients using practices that are in harmony

with nature.

A good example of that is Unilever PH assisting Filipino "sampalok" farmers in integrating sustainability principles into their operations. Over 800 smallholder sampalok farmers and their farmers have so far benefited from this initiative.

It was in 2020 when Unilever announced its expanded Future Foods Ambition aimed at helping consumers transition toward healthier diets and helping reduce the environmental impact of agriculture on the global food chain.

So, what should our future farms look like as we shift to regenerative agriculture? My answer is our farms should also take good care of us and our planet and feed humanity within the environmental limits of the Earth.

And how do we get there? First, we must define the research priorities and agenda in agriculture and fisheries to distribute resources sustainably and enhance regenerative agriculture practices.

And second, now is the time to scale up the proven practices of regenerative agriculture.





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## El Niño hits 4 Negros LGUs

**BACOLOD CITY:** The El Niño phenomenon has already affected 11 barangay (villages) in four local government units (LGUs) of Negros Occidental, Dina Genzola, officer in charge of the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist (OPA), reported on Tuesday, January 30.

As of January 26, a total of 117.22 hectares of rice lands and 143 farmers were affected in the province.

Total damage reached up to P7,079,836.

The worst hit was Himamaylan City with eight barangay and 75 rice farmers affected.

A total of 59.22 hectares of rice lands were affected in the city with damage placed at P2,414,586.

Two barangay in Cauayan town were affected, two rice farmers and 52 hectares and crop damage worth P4,105,000.

One barangay in Isabela was af-

ected with 6 hectares, one farmer and damages worth P560,250.

Genzola said the affected rice lands are either in vegetative stage or harvestable stage.

She cited the state of the land that has already cracked causing the rice to die.

"When we received the reports, we immediately sent agriculture extension workers to validate and compute the value of the damages," she said.

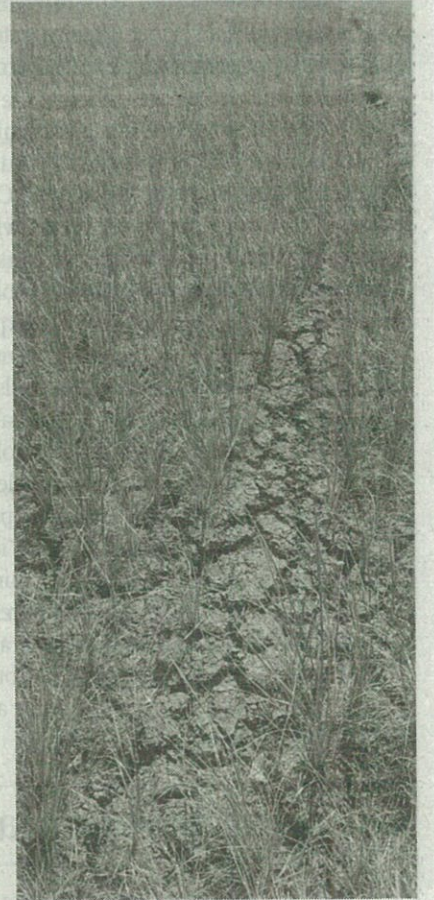
Genzola said she hopes the affected farmers have crop insurance as the OPA is coordinating with the Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. and the provincial government has also allocated a budget for its own crop insurance program.

Most of the affected rice are considered "rain fed" and located in upland areas, she said.

**EUGENE Y. ADIONG**

### DROUGHT, DROUGHT

Mother Nature provides what plants need, such as rain and hazard as well, in the form of El Niño phenomenon, which would turn an otherwise healthy soil into a barren one like in the photo taken in one of the villages in Negros Occidental. The phenomenon has already affected 11 barangay (villages) in four local government units in the province, according to Dina Genzola, officer in charge of the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist (OPA).  
**PHOTO BY THE OPA**







## Farmers group challenges Recto to address agriculture import woes

By Othel V. Campos and Maricel V. Cruz

**T**HE Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) challenged newly appointed Finance Secretary Ralph Recto to decisively address the unabated and worsening undervaluation and misclassification of imports of agricultural commodities.

"Tariff losses from rice imports are only the tip of the iceberg. The situation with imports of pork, chicken, corn, and vegetables is much worse. If Secretary Recto really wants to generate more revenues for the government without imposing new taxes, he does not have to look far," FFF president Raul Montemayor said Wednesday.

The FFF noted that 90 percent of the

total volume of rice imported in 2023 was undervalued, with almost half undervalued by 20 percent or more.

About 3.582 million tons of rice were imported in 2023, of which 83 percent was sourced from Vietnam. Less than 4 percent of total imports came from non-ASEAN countries, validating claims that the reduction in tariffs on non-ASEAN rice imports has not succeeded in

diversifying the country's sources of rice, FFF noted.

The group lamented the continued failure of the Bureau of Customs (BOC) to curb the undervaluation of rice imports, which has resulted in billions of pesos of foregone tariff revenues that could have been used by the government to assist rice farmers.

An analysis of BOC data revealed that costs for imported rice, excluding tariffs, averaged only P24.12 per kilogram (kg) in 2023, 22 percent lower than the BoC's reference price of P30.78/kg. FFF said.

Montemayor stressed that an additional P2.34 per kilo in tariffs could have been collected by the BoC if there was no undervaluation.

"The total revenue loss in 2023 alone was almost P7.5 billion from the 3.2 million tons of imports for which the

BoC maintained reference prices. If we go back to 2019 when the Rice Tariffication Law or RTL was enacted, the accumulated foregone tariffs due to undervaluation would reach almost P25 billion," he added.

Rep. Wilbert Lee of AGRI party-list meanwhile cited the need for the government to tighten the implementation of laws against overfishing to increase the country's fish stock.

The Philippine Statistics Authority earlier reported a 5.2 percent decrease in the fisheries production in the country for the fourth quarter of 2023 compared to the year before.

Lee said the decline in fisheries production "is certainly very concerning considering that we are an archipelagic country with one of the longest coastlines in the world."





## Forgone gov't revenue from undervalued rice imports estimated at P7.5B in 2023

FORGONE government revenue from undervalued rice imports was estimated at about P7.5 billion, according to the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF).

The total was calculated from 3.2 million metric tons (MT) of imports, for which the Bureau of Customs (BoC) maintains reference prices, FFF National Manager Raul Q. Montemayor said in a statement on Wednesday.

Mr. Montemayor added that undervalued rice imports have cost the government P25 billion since Republic Act 11203, or the Rice Tariffication Law, became effective in 2019.

He said that forgone revenue could have funded government aid to struggling rice farmers.

The law funds the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund, which is in-

tended to modernize the rice industry. The law allowed private traders to bring in rice shipments without restriction while paying a 35% tariff on Southeast Asian grain.

The FFF noted that the declared costs for imported rice, excluding tariffs, were averaging P24.12 per kilogram in 2023.

"This was 22% lower than the BoC's reference price of P30.78 per kilo. An

additional P2.34 per kilo in tariffs could have been collected by the BoC if there was no undervaluation," it said.

The FFF said that less than 4% of total imports came from non-ASEAN countries, "validating claims that the reduction in tariffs on non-ASEAN rice imports has not succeeded in diversifying the country's sources of rice."

The government extended lowered tariffs on rice via Executive Order No. 50. Rates for rice imports were kept at 35% regardless of the minimum access volume and country of origin, in the hope of tapping more sources of rice.

It added that 90% of the total rice imports last year were undervalued, while half of this was undervalued by 20% or more.— **Adrian H. Halili**





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## Cebu touted as potential hub for US farm goods

THE US Department of Agriculture (USDA) said that Cebu City has the potential to service direct exports of US agricultural products, according to a report by the USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS).

"Cebu offers strong opportunities for US meat, potato, dairy products, and animal feed ingredients," the USDA said.

It added that the Cebu port remains the largest domestic shipping port in the Philippines, serving as a distribution center for some agricultural products and a gateway to other parts of the Visayas.

The USDA said that Cebu presents opportunities for shipments of animal feed ingredients, especially soybeans, as the area is in one of the top animal feed producing regions in the Philippines.

The FAS said that some hotels and restaurants in the city purchase produce and beverages directly from importers to reduce costs.

"Quick-service restaurants import US poultry cuts and potato fries, while some restaurants and hotels buy US prime beef and pork cuts, dairy products,

and fruit from grocery stores," it added.

The FAS said that some Cebu-based restaurants and hotels occasionally surpass their Manila counterparts in sales.

"Some of the more popular US products found in retail stores are beef, pork, chicken, turkey, apples, oranges, lemons, strawberries, condiments, soups, non-alcoholic beverages, and wines," it said.

The USDA recommended that exporters provide trade support such as sampling, consumer and trade promotions, and trade servicing, especially for new-to-market products.

It said some companies incur additional shipping costs, have longer lead times, and are deprioritized at times, leading to occasional shortages during peak season, when shipping directly to Manila.

"A shipment from Manila takes an additional month before arriving in Cebu. US exporters may consider contacting agents, distributors, or importers based in Cebu to explore potential direct shipments," it said. — **Adrian**

**H. Halili**





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IRRI, BASF testing carbon reduction strategies in rice farming

THE International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) said it will test carbon-reduction schemes in rice farming in partnership with Germany's BASF AG.

"The joint effort is planned for multiple rice seasons in the Philippines and will take place in Laguna, where both organiza-

tions maintain research centers for rice," IRRI said in a statement.

IRRI said the partnership plans to explore climate-smart farming techniques like direct-seeded rice varieties, nitrogen stabilizers, nutrient and residue management, novel chemistry

tailor-made for rice farmers, and water-saving technologies such as alternate wetting and drying management.

"This collaboration presents immense opportunities for methane and other greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions to create value for farmers and help improve the

production of rice in Asia, and the Philippines in particular," IRRI Sustainable Impact Department Head and Research Director Bas Bouman said.

BASF will use its AgBalance technology to assess the emission intensity of rice farming. —

Adrian H. Halili





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## Gov't told to enforce fishing laws

A PARTY-LIST lawmaker has called on the government to put more muscle into implementing laws on illegal fishing and slap violators with the stiffest penalties to prevent overfishing and help increase the country's fish stock.

"While President Marcos said last year that he was not imposing a fishing ban, the government should fully implement existing fishery laws and regulations that would deter illegal fishing activities and the encroachment of commercial fishing vessels into municipal waters," Party-list Rep. Wilbert T. Lee said in a statement on Wednesday.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported on Tuesday a 5.2-percent decrease in fisheries production in the fourth quarter of 2023. For the entire year, fisheries output was down by 6.5%, lower than the 5% decrease in 2022.

"There is a need to monitor cases of overfishing and illegal fishing as this is the main reason of the decrease in fish stocks," Mr. Lee said in Filipino. — **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**





## PHIL output of staple crops up in 2023—PSA

**L**OCAL planters managed to increase their output of rice and corn—the country's staple crops—despite higher input costs, according to data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).



FARMERS in Cauayan City, Isabela thresh their corn harvest to take advantage of the good weather in this BUSINESSMIRROR file photo.

Figures released by the PSA showed that palay or unmilled rice production in 2023 reached a record 20.06 million metric tons (MMT). Output last year was 1.56 percent higher than the 19.756 MMT recorded in 2022.

Data from the statistics agency showed that rice output in 2023

was boosted by irrigated farmlands which produced 15.279 MMT, 2.2 percent higher than the 2022 volume of 14.938 MMT.

In contrast, the output of rain-fed farms fell to 4.779 MMT from the previous year's 4.817 MMT.

The Philippines also produced more corn last year, according to

PSA data. The combined output of yellow and white corn reached 8.405 MMT, higher by nearly 2 percent than the 8.255 MT recorded in 2022.



Output of yellow corn, which is used for animal feeds, rose by nearly 5 percent to 6.367 MMT, from the 2022 volume of 6.088 MMT.

However, white corn production last year fell by almost 6 percent to 2.037 MMT, from 2.166 MMT recorded a year ago.

Rice and corn bolstered the performance of the crops subsector last year, based on data from the PSA.

Crop production amounted to P1 trillion in 2023 and P290 billion in the fourth quarter of 2023. It posted a growth of 0.7 percent in 2023 and 0.1 percent in the last quarter of last year.

The crops subsector managed to eke out gains despite elevated fertilizer and oil prices last year. The government had given out subsidies to planters to help them cope with the spike in the prices of inputs.

Data from the PSA also showed

that livestock's output was valued at P263.374 billion last year and P72.1 billion in the fourth quarter of 2023. It grew 2.47 percent in 2023 and 2.7 percent in the October to December period.

For poultry, the value of production at constant 2018 prices reached P262.028 billion last year and P67.65 billion in the fourth quarter of 2023.

PSA data showed crops accounted for 58.7 percent of the total value of production in agriculture and fisheries; livestock, 14.6 percent; poultry, 13.7 percent; and fisheries, 13 percent.

The value of agriculture and fisheries production amounted to P1.763 trillion in 2023 and P493.72 billion in the fourth quarter of last year.





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## AMIS seen benefiting global food system

THE Agricultural Market Information Systems (AMIS) plays a crucial role in enhancing transparency and policy coordination in international food markets, an economist of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said.

Maximo Torero, FAO chief economist, stressed during the recent Global Forum for Food and Agriculture 2024 in Berlin that AMIS has helped prevent unexpected price hikes and strengthen global food security.

AMIS was launched in 2011 by the G20 Ministers of Agriculture following the global food price hikes in 2007-2008 and 2010. The information system, composed of G20 members plus Spain and eight additional major exporting and importing countries of agricultural commodities, assesses global food supplies (focusing on wheat, maize, rice and soybeans) and provides a platform to coordinate policy action in times of market uncertainty. Hosted by FAO, AMIS involves nine international organizations and aims to address the inherent risks and uncertainties within agrifood systems.

Torero also emphasized the importance of expanding AMIS' focus to include logistical considerations, especially in the

context of rising insurance costs and geopolitical risks on crucial transportation routes.

"Logistics is also important, not just because of ports being closed but because of prices of insurance companies going up and risks that we are facing in the Red Sea, risks that we face in the Black Sea, and risks that we could be facing because of lower levels of water in the Panama channel, which are central for us to move commodities across the world," he explained.

AMIS, Torero added, plays a pivotal role in reducing information asymmetry, a crucial factor in preventing wrong policy responses such as export distortions, market volatility and potentially excessive speculation.

The FAO chief economist also highlighted AMIS' contribution to providing comprehensive information on supply and demand dynamics, enabling market participants to make informed decisions during periods of excessive volatility.

Acknowledging the challenges faced by the initiative, particularly in obtaining information from certain countries, he stressed the need for continuous updates and finding alternative ways to address data gaps.

**CONRAD M. CARIÑO**





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## Corn, soybeans end higher

CHICAGO- US corn and soybean futures rallied on Tuesday, closing higher on a round of bargain buying after both commodities fell to multiyear lows, although supportive news about supply and demand was lacking, analysts noted.

Wheat followed the firm trend, bouncing after a slide to one-week lows.

Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) March corn settled up 7-1/2 cents at \$4.47-3/4 per bushel, rebounding after a dip to \$4.36-1/2, the lowest on a continuous chart of the most-active

contract since December 2020.

CBOT March soybeans ended up 24-1/2 cents at \$12.18-3/4 a bushel, bouncing after falling to \$11.87-3/4, the lowest on a continuous chart since November 2021. CBOT March wheat finished up 12 cents at \$6.05-1/2 a bushel.

For the month, benchmark corn futures have fallen 5 percent and soybeans are down 6.1 percent, reflecting rising investor confidence about developing crops in Argentina and Brazil coupled with ample US supplies after bumper 2023 harvests. - *Reuters*