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Ban imposed on cattle imports amid new disease

By BELLA CARIASO

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has banned the importation of live cattle and buffalo and their products from Libya, Russia, South Korea and Thailand amid outbreaks of lumpy skin disease (LSD) in the four countries.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. issued Memorandum Order No. 6 prohibiting the entry of live cattle, buffalo, their products and by-products, including milk and milk products, embryos, skin and semen from those countries.

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Ban From Page 1

The memorandum order was issued on Feb. 1 and is effective immediately.

Laurel said the ban was issued following official reports submitted to the World Organization for Animal Health by authorities noting outbreaks of LSD affecting cattle and buffaloes in the four nations from November to December 2023.

"There is a need to prevent the entry of LSD virus to protect the health of the local cattle and buffalo population," Laurel said.

In line with the suspension, the DA issued an immediate suspension of the processing, evaluation of the application and issuance of Sanitary and Phytosanitary import clearance for the above-stated commodities.

Laurel also directed DA veterinary quarantine officers to ensure the tight inspection of all arrivals of milk and milk products, including embryos, skin and semen derived from cattle and buffalo including live animals at ports of entry.

Data from the Bureau of Animal Industry showed that the country imported a total of 35.7 million kilos of buffalo meat products in January to November 2023.

— With Catherine Talavera



PH farm sector grows faster at 1.2% in 2023 – DA chief

THE country's agriculture sector grew at faster rate of 1.2 percent in 2023 based on the latest data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

"We are pleased that agriculture has contributed positively to growth of the economy last year. But certainly, we could do more," Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu-Laurel Jr. said in a news release on Thursday.

Tiu-Laurel said the growth was driven by higher poultry and livestock production, increased fruit harvest and record

rice output last year.

The PSA said the agriculture sector expanded by 0.6 percent in 2022.

As of November 2023, agriculture employed around 25 percent of the 49.7 million Filipinos in the labor force.

It also contributed 9 percent of last year's gross domestic product.

Earlier, the Department of Agriculture (DA) recorded the highest rice harvest at 20.06 million metric tons in 2023.

Tiu-Laurel said this helped trim rice imports to 3.5 million

metric tons from 3.8 million metric tons in 2022 and boosted farmers income.

Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund of the Rice Tariffication Law that provided financial and other assistance to farmers is one of the factors that helped increase rice output.

In line with the DA's goal of modernizing agriculture, increasing food production, ensuring food security and raising farmers and fisherfolk income, Tiu-Laurel said the DA will increase spending on farm inputs, post-harvest and stor-

age facilities, and build more irrigation systems.

"Certainly, agriculture is a low-hanging fruit for the economy where we could do more by providing the right inputs, mechanizing farm activities, adopting new technologies to raise yields and lower costs, effectively putting more money in the pockets of farmers and fisherfolk," he added.

The DA has received PHP167.5 billion for its budget this year, higher by 5 percent from 2023.

PNA



Bong Go urges DA, other concerned agencies to help mitigate impact of El Niño

AS the agricultural sector grapples with the challenges of the El Niño climate phenomenon, Senator Christopher "Bong" Go emphasized the urgency of preparing and implementing immediate and long-term strategies to mitigate its detrimental effects.

Recognizing the critical role of the agriculture sector in the nation's food security, Go called upon the Department of Agriculture (DA) led by Secretary Francisco Laurel Jr. to take proactive measures, especially in supporting small-scale farmers who are among the hardest hit by climatic irregularities.

"Ako po ay nananawagan sa ating Secretary Kiko Laurel ng Department of Agriculture na ilatag agad ang long term solutions at immediate solutions dito. Dapat po ay 'wag pabayaang mga magsasaka," said Go in an ambush interview after personally aiding displaced workers in Quezon, Nueva Ecija on Thursday.

He stressed the importance of keeping the farmers, the backbone of the nation's food supply, in a stable and productive state.

"Alam n'yo, dapat ang farmers natin parating busog... at dapat po ang mga produkto nila ay masaya

nilang nabebenta na kumikita sila," Go remarked, highlighting the direct link between the farmers' well-being and the nation's food security.

Being a member of the Senate Agriculture committee, Go also pointed out the precarious situation of the farmers who live a hand-to-mouth existence, advocating for substantial government support and intervention to uplift their situations.

"Sila po ang mga isang kahig isang tuka, dapat suportahan ng gobyerno. Kung maaari nga lang ay bigyan sila ng subsidy. Tulungan, bigyan sila ng ayuda, fertilizers, at iba pang kagamitan," he added.

Acknowledging the allocated funds within the DA, Go urged for these resources to be prioritized and allocated efficiently in anticipation of the adverse impacts of El Niño.

Being an adopted son of Nueva Ecija, Go specifically noted the significance of the province, the rice granary of the Philippines, stating, "May pondo naman po ang ating Department of Agriculture, unahin nyo agad in anticipation po sa magiging damage ng El Niño."

"Dahil alam naman natin, ang Nueva Ecija, dito po nanggagaling ang bigas, yung production po ng

bigas. Malaki po ang kontribusyon ng Nueva Ecija lalong lalo na ang farmers natin," he added.

The urgency of Go's appeal is underscored by recent reports from the DA, revealing that the El Niño phenomenon has already inflicted substantial losses in Western Visayas and Zamboanga Peninsula, with farmers bearing the brunt of the blow.

Adding to the concerns, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration forecasts that Northern Mindanao, a critical agricultural region, will start experiencing the harshest impacts of El Niño in the forthcoming months.

Meanwhile, the Philippine National Irrigation Administration is projecting that 20% of the rice farms will be affected by the drought, and is implementing measures to mitigate the loss of production.

Go's commitment to supporting farmers and fisherfolk in the country extends to advocating for various programs and initiatives to promote the agricultural industry, giving priority in uplifting the lives and livelihoods of small local agricultural workers given their crucial role in attaining food security.

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Agri damage hits P173 M

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said damage to agriculture in Caraga and Davao has increased to P173 million.

Losses amounting to P66 million were reported in Davao de Oro alone, DA Assistant Secretary and spokesperson Arnel de Mesa said.

He said 11,000 hectares of rice fields and 584 hectares of corn fields in the region were submerged in floodwaters.

"For high-value crops, it's about 310 hectares. The total affected (agricultural areas) covered about 12,000 hectares," De Mesa said.

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) said its members rescued 1,317 people affected by flooding and landslides.

The PCG said 743 residents of Davao Oriental, 433 in Davao de Oro, 57 in Davao del Norte and 66 others in Davao City were brought to evacuation centers in coordination with their respective provincial disaster risk reduction and management councils.

The evacuees were provided the necessary assistance until it was deemed safe for them to return to their homes.

The PCG said it continues to monitor the water levels in rivers in Davao City. — **With Bella Cariaso, Ghio Ong**



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'ASF in Occ Mindoro contained'

The outbreak of African swine fever (ASF) in Occidental Mindoro has been contained, according to the Department of Agriculture.

The DA cited a report from the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI), which showed that there was no active case of the swine disease in areas where cases have been recorded.

As of Jan. 17, Sta. Cruz town recorded seven cases; San Jose, five, and Rizal, two.

The DA said entry and exit of hogs in Occidental Mindoro is now allowed.

ASF on Mindoro Island was first detected in Naujan and Calapan, Oriental

Mindoro late last year.

Occidental Mindoro was among the 12 provinces initially included on the list of ASF-free areas.

Only Basilan, Batanes, Biliran, Bohol, Bukidnon, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao del Norte, Palawan, Siquijor, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi are now free from the swine disease.

The BAI said ASF has spread to 65 provinces.

AGAP party-list representative and Pork Producers Federation of the Philippines president Nicanor Briones said hog industry losses due to ASF have reached P200 billion since 2019.

— **Bella Cariaso**

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'Galunggong' prices to go down as closed season ends

By JEL SANTOS

The prices of "galunggong" or round scad are expected to go down following the end of the closed fishing season, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) said.

During a televised media briefing, BFAR spokesperson Nazario Briguera said galunggong fishing in northeastern Palawan resumed on Feb. 1, the end of the closed fishing season.

"Matapos ang tatlong buwan ng pansamantalang pagsasara nito as a conservation measure at inaasahan na po natin na sa mga susunod na linggo po ay tataas na ang unloading natin ng galunggong sa ating mga pamilihan (After a three-month

closed fishing season as a conservation measure, we expect that our unloading of galunggong in the markets would go up)," he said on Friday, Feb. 2.

"At kapag nag-improve na po ang supply ng ating locally produced galunggong ay inaasahan natin na bababa na rin ang presyo ng mga ito dahil mayroon na tayong karagdagang supply dahil nga po bukas na itong major fishing ground natin for galunggong doon po sa northeastern Palawan (And when the supply of locally produced galunggong improves, we are expecting the prices would go down due to the additional supply as we open our major fishing ground in Northeastern Palawan)," he added.



3 towns in Occidental Mindoro now ASF-free

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said that several towns in Occidental Mindoro are now free from the African swine fever (ASF).

The DA's Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) said that the latest analysis of blood samples from pigs in three towns showed negative results for the disease.

"Last week, the province of Occidental Mindoro set up meat inspection checkpoints and quarantined producers after announcing an ASF outbreak in the towns of San Jose, Santa Cruz, and Rizal," the BAI said in a statement on Friday.

"The tests, conducted at the Regional Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory, confirmed the absence of ASF in the local pig population," it said.

The bureau also said that recent blood tests were carried out to obtain Recognition of Active Surveillance on ASF (RAS-ASF), indicating that there are no active cases of ASF in the area.

After receiving the negative result of the blood tests, the local governments have proactively sought the RAS-ASF from BAI which is also essential for permitting the transportation of pigs in Occidental Mindoro.

"This measure is implemented to prevent the potential spread of ASF and maintain the

biosecurity of pig farms in the province," said BAI.

The bureau emphasized the collaboration between the DA-BAI, local government units, and various agencies on the success in mitigating the spread of ASF.

"This underscores the importance of coordinated actions in addressing and preventing the outbreak of infectious animal diseases," it said.

Latest report from the BAI showed that as of January 19, ASF is present in 21 provinces from 12 regions in the country.

Affected provinces include Abra, Apayao, La Union, Cagayan, Zambales, Quezon, Laguna, Mindoro Oriental, Mindoro Occidental, Camarines Norte, Camarines Sur, Sorsogon, Negros Oriental, Leyte, Northern Samar, Southern Leyte, Misamis Occidental, Sultan Kudarat, Agusan del Norte, Surigao del Norte, and Agusan del Sur.

Earlier, the DA said that it is streamlining the process to expedite trials and approvals of the vaccine to be released for the hog industry.

In 2019, before the ASF hit the Philippines, the swine population of the country was estimated at around 13 million heads but this went down to around 10 million, with imported pork filling the gap.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL
AND NIKKI DE LOS REYES



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Cattle from Thailand, three others, banned

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has banned the importation of live cattle and buffaloes, including related by-products, originating from Thailand, Russia, Libya and South Korea following reports of disease outbreaks.

Confirmed outbreaks of lumpy skin disease (LSD), which damages the affected animal's skin — making hides less valuable — or even cause death, prompted the imposition of the temporary ban on the entry of live animals and products such as milk, embryos, hides and semen.

Processing of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances was also suspended.

While there is no official record of imported meat and dairy products from Thailand, Russia, Libya and South Korea, Agriculture

Secretary Francisco Tiur Laurel Jr. said "there is a need to prevent the entry of LSD virus to protect the health of the local cattle and buffalo population."

"More rigorous and tight inspection on all arrivals of milk and milk products, including embryos, skin and semen derived from cattle and buffalo including live animals by DA veterinary quarantine officers assigned at ports of entry shall be conducted," he added.

LSD fatalities are often low, but the economic impacts can be high, including decreased milk production and animal infertility.

Reports submitted by four countries to the World Organization for Animal Health from November to December 2023 confirmed outbreaks of the LSD virus.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



Steady fish prices seen as closed season ends

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

THE supply and prices of fish in the market are seen to stabilize as the closed-fishing season ends, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) said on Friday.

Nazario Briguera, BFAR chief information officer and spokesman, said that fish unloading, specifically of galunggong (round scad), is also expected to increase for the next few weeks.

"The fishing ground in Palawan for galunggong has been reopened. This means it opened yesterday, February 1, after a three-month temporary closure as part of conservation measures," Briguera said in a public briefing.

In line with this, the BFAR official said that they expect an increased unloading of fish in the market.

"And when the supply of our locally produced galunggong improves, we expect that its prices will also decrease because we will have additional supply as our major fishing ground in northeastern Palawan opens," said Briguera.

The three-month closed-fishing season started in November 2023. This is done annually through the bureau's Administrative Circular 225 that aims to conserve and protect the economically important species in the said fishing ground during their spawning period.

Briguera also assured stable prices of other freshwater fish such as bangus (milkfish) and tilapia.

"We have not observed any increase in the prices of these commodities based on the regular price monitoring conducted by BFAR in the ten major wet markets in the NCR (National Capital Region)," the BFAR official said.

According to the agency, medium-sized bangus sourced from Bulacan and Pangasinan are priced at P180 per kilogram (kg), while medium-sized tilapia sourced from Batangas and Pampanga costs P120 per kg.

"The DA (Department of Agriculture)-BFAR did not observe a fluctuation in the prevailing retail prices of bangus and tilapia. The prices of these fisheries commodities have remained stable since the previous weeks due to sufficient supply from farms,"

BFAR said.

Additionally, there has been a decline in the farmgate prices of tilapia from P90 to P93 per kg last week to P85 to P88 per kg this week.

Similarly, bangus farmgate prices were recorded at only P130 to P140 per kg this week.

"While the general price situation of bangus and tilapia is stable, the agency notes that 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," said BFAR.

For instance, large-sized bangus were sold at a higher price ranging from P200 to P240 per kg.

Furthermore, the agency also noted secondary markets that acquire their stock from primary markets may retail fisheries products at increased prices.

REMATE

ANG DIARYO NG MASA

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Tobacco farmers, nagpasak- lolo sa gov't sa WHO global tobacco conference

HUMINGI ng tulong ang mga Filipino tobacco farmer sa mga opisyal ng gobyerno na idepensa ang kanilang kabuhayan sa nalalapit na World Health Organization conference on tobacco control.

Tinukoy nito ang pangako ng gobyerno na palawakin ang tobacco production sa ilalim ng bagong roadmap.

Habang naghahanda ang international delegates na magsama-sama para sa WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Conference of the Parties (COP), nagpahayag naman ng pagkabahala ang grupo ng mga magsasaka ukol sa mahalagang papel ng tratado sa paghubog ng global tobacco policies at potensyal na epekto sa kanilang kita.

"Our lives are deeply intertwined with tobacco farming," ayon kay Leonardo Montemayor, dating agriculture secretary at board chairman ng Federation of Free Farmers.

"With the Department of Agriculture roadmap affirming its long-term support for tobacco farming, we hope that the Philippine government will take that commitment to heart when championing our industry in this upcoming COP," dagdag na wika ni Montemayor.

Tinukoy naman ni Philippine Tobacco Growers Association president Saturnino Distor ang Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program ng gobyerno bilang ebidensiya sa potensyal ng industriya.

Ang FCTC, ay international treaty na pinangangasiwaan ng COP, magdaraos ng 10th biennial meeting sa Panama sa darating na Pebrero 5-10 para i-assess ang progreso ng treaty implementation. Kinansela ang pulong na itinakda noong Nobyembre 2023.

Layon nito na tugunan ang mga mahahalagang usapin sa tobacco regulation at global public health, nakatuon sa "novel and emerging tobacco and nicotine products."

Ang WHO FCTC ay binatikos ng public health experts para sa pag-promote ng mahihigpit na polisiya laban sa mga nasabing produkto, sa kabila ng harm reduction bilang "a key tobacco control strategy."

Sa kabilang dako, inilunsad naman ng National Tobacco Administration ng DA ang STEP para palakasin ang industriya at tiyakin ang "longevity" nito.

Tinuran naman ni Undersecretary Deogracias Victor Savellano na maaari namang suportahan ng industriya ang local economies at panatilihin ang kabuhayan ng mga magsasaka.

Sinabi pa ni Savellano na ang export potential ng indigenous tobacco ay maaaring magpalakas sa foreign exchange reserves ng bansa. Ayon naman sa NTA, nag-employ ang tobacco sector ng mahigit sa 2.1 milyong Filipino at nakapag-ambag sa kita ng pamahalaan, na may P160 billion na nalikom sa excise taxes noong 2022.

RNT



TAAS-PRESYO NG ISDA SINISI SA RECLAMATION

Itinuturong dahilan ni Senador Cynthia Villar ang polusyon at malawakang reclamation sa pagtaas ng presyo ng isda sa bansa, partikular ang bangus at galunggong.

Ayon kay Villar, chairperson ng Senate committee on agriculture, kakaunti na lamang ang nahuhuling isda sa karagatan dahil namamatay ang mga ito sanhi ng mga nakakain na basura tulad ng plastic.

"Ang ating municipal water polluted na. Na-judge tayo sa third plastic polluter in the world, siyempre 'pag plastic kinain, patay kaya nangamatay [ang mga isda]. Sinisira ng plastic ang source of fingerlings," sabi ni Villar.

Ito rin aniya ang

malaking problema ng may 15 kilometrong mga municipal water na malapit sa Metro Manila.

Dahil sa polusyon, sinabi ng Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) na mahigit 46% na lamang ang nakukuhang isda sa karagatan ng Pilipinas mula sa dating 70%.

Maliban dito, iginiit pa ni Villar na lumiliit na ang karagatang pinagkukunan ng isda dahil sa walang patid na reclamation sa Manila Bay.

Dismayado naman ang senador dahil sa kabila ng ipinasang batas para limitahan ang paggamit ng plastic sa mga produkto o i-recycle ng mga kompanya ang kanilang mga botelya ng plastic ay hindi

na naipapatupad ng mabuti sa kasalukuyan.

Samantala, inihayag ng Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) na ligtas pa rin kumain ng bangus basta sariwa at maayos ang pagkakaluto nito.

Ito ang sabi ng BFAR matapos lumabas ang mga ulat na maraming sample mula sa Mindanao ay nakitaang positibo sa microplastic.

Sabi ng BFAR, nakikita ang microplastic sa iba't ibang lugar at pagkain sa buong mundo. Subalit wala pa umanong kongkretong ebidensiya na may negatibong epekto ang pagkain ng microplastic sa kasalukuyang lebel ng kontaminasyon nito.

Dagdag ng BFAR, wala ring health advisory na inilalabas tungkol

sa pagkain ng bangus na positibo sa microplastic.

Sabi ng BFAR, makikipag-ugnayan ito sa Department of Science and Technology (DOST) para sa mga pag-aaral tungkol sa microplastic.

Suportado ng BFAR ang mga panawagan na kailangang magkaroon ng kasunduan tungkol sa katanggap-tanggap na antas ng microplastic contamination para matukoy ang maaaring panganib nito sa mga tao.

Nanawagan din ang BFAR sa publiko na mag-recycle o siguruhing maayos ang pagkakatatapon sa mga plastic para mabawasan ang plastic pollution sa mga ilog at karagatan. (Dindo Matining/Eileen Mencias)



NEWS BRIEF

Mga bangus mula Mindanao, positibo sa 'microplastics'

Sinabi kahapon ng Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) na kailangan pa nila ng karagdagang pananaliksik ukol sa microplastics matapos matukoy ang mga bakas nito sa ilang species ng isda, partikular na ang bangus sa Mindanao.

Nanawagan si Nazer Briguera, tagapagsalita

ng BFAR sa mga mananaliksik na magsagawa ng malalim na pag-aaral sa microplastics.

Aniya, hindi pa umano naglalabas ang World Health Organization (WHO) ng pamanatayan sa mga tuntunin ng toxicity at epekto nito sa kalusugan ng tao.

Ang mga microplas-

tics ay maliliit na particle galing sa mga plastik na basura.

Paliwanag pa ng tagapagsalita ng BFAR, ang microplastics ay hindi nakikita ng mata.

Ang mga pag-aaral sa epekto nito sa lasa ng isda at iba pang pagkaing-dagat ay hindi pa naisasagawa. (Dolly Cabreza)

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Gov't raising P100M for bamboo dev't, promotion in 2024

THE Philippine government targets to spend over PHP100 million on developing the capabilities of the domestic bamboo industry and promoting Filipino innovations in bamboo architecture despite budgetary constraints.

In an interview on Thursday, Department of Agriculture (DA) Undersecretary Deogracias Victor Savellano said concerned officials still have to work out from which agencies the funding will be drawn, but added that most of it will probably come from his department.

Savellano said the heightened impetus to modernize the local bamboo sector comes from the growing international demand for engineered bam-

boo—high-value products that are sought-after by the construction industry.

"Engineered bamboo production is a multi-billion-dollar global industry now... and we want the Philippines to take advantage of this growing demand. The export potential for this is huge and we cannot waste time," he said.

However, Savellano lamented that the Philippine Bamboo Industry Development Council (PBIDC), which is tasked with spearheading the government's bamboo development and promotion efforts, cannot fully execute its mandate because it remains an unfunded agency.

"The council is struggling

to remain operational because of budget issues... but we keep going because we really want to take our world-class bamboo products to the global market," said Savellano, who is concurrently PBIDC vice chairman.

The PBIDC, an attached agency to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), is currently consolidating budgets to implement the 2024 program, he added.

For his part, PBIDC executive director Rene Butch Madarang said that after a recent conversation with Senate President Miguel Zubiri, he is optimistic that the proposed Philippine Bamboo Industry Development Act will be passed this year.

PNA



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

CHIT U. JUAN

Feeding the next generation

We have to start them young, as the saying goes. This is why, more than ever, we need to teach good habits to schoolchildren and the young in our own households. How do we change a whole generation to eat better and have healthier, more productive lives?



Start in school. In Korea, children are taught to eat good food at a young age. My niece, who is Korean, only gives her children freshly-cooked food and would not think about giving them fast food or instant noodles or TV dinners (for the Boomer generation, TV dinners were the hit in the 60s as you could microwave a complete meal to eat in front of what was the latest appliance then – a television or TV set, ergo TV dinner.)

They are also taught in Korea to pack up trash, clean up their garbage and throw their paper wastes in proper bins. At a young age, sorting waste is already part of the culture.

I have been wanting to put up Earth Gardens in public schools where children can learn how to grow vegetables. Today, you can at least bring your children to urban gardens such as the one in the center of Bonifacio Global City or the Sweet Spring farm of Kiko Pangilinan in Alfonso, Cavite. Kids must know what food looks like, how it is grown, for them to better appreciate its value.

Follow through at home. For continuity and consistency, we also practice what the school preaches by following the same good practices at home. We sort trash to recyclable, biodegradable and not recyclable. We also serve good food and not convenience foods. The whole idea is to convert the present and future generations to what we were in the 60s. We bought milk in glass bottles, even if they were reused soda bottles with a cap made up of rolled banana leaves. For sanitation and health safety, we can now use glass bottles with better covers but still reusable.

Food literacy. We educate our young in school and we teach them by serving better food at home. Food and nutrition must be subjects taught in elementary school and parents will help with good practices at home. We teach them to eat more vegetables and fruits and be able to name fruits in season. If we bought every fruit in season, children will learn more about mangosteen and santol, aratiles and chico – more than Fuji apple and mandarin oranges, which are temperate and not tropical fruits. Children must learn about jackfruit or *langka*, *guyabano* or soursop, *malunggay* or moringa, mango, avocado and try them at least once a year, when they are in season.

Develop young leaders. We need to develop or discover new heroes or champions in food literacy and nutrition. Children starting school age must be taught how to choose better food. If we have champions they can copy or emulate, it would be easier to make kids eat vegetables, fruits and other nutrient-dense produce. But it has to be an NGO or government to start this, as commercial companies cannot advocate these while promoting their manufactured products.

Take them to nature farms. Children must see the fun and excitement in growing plants beyond the science experiments in school. We recently visited the University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU) in Los Baños, Laguna where you can tour its perma culture farm or garden. You can see stingless bees, flowers, herbs and edible plants in a natural setting. The perma garden also teaches visitors how to reuse what otherwise would be thrown as garbage – paper food boxes, wooden forks, plastic bottles, discarded rubber tires, etc. They have an edible vegetable growing as a tree called *lagikway*, which could be the answer to food security in the very near future.

Start with your own plot of food. In the same division of UP, they have a plot measuring only two meters by two meters where you can grow food, embed clay water jars for slow irrigation, put a vine for sitaw and other crawling vegetables. It almost tells you that one has no reason to say I have nowhere to plant or grow my food. One plot we saw had various vegetables and it was small enough to be able to get water everyday even if tended by only one person, even a young child.

Talk about food with children. Where do chickens come from? What fish is better to eat? Why should we eat less red meat? What is organic pork? Most children these days do not even see real chickens or live fish. Though we see cows in books, they may not have seen a live carabao or goat yet. But to be able to do this, we must first also refresh our knowledge about where all our food comes from. Watch films on Netflix like *You are what you eat*, *Food Inc.*, *Kiss the Ground* and many more documentaries about food and nutrition.

A friend told me that we now have lesser years living with medicine or maintenance medication than years without. That length of time is still getting shorter as we decide to eat less nutritious food. And he continues that children will contract non-communicable diseases (NCD) earlier in life because it is mostly food-related. Diabetes, chronic kidney disease and cancer – all of these are NCDs – are being diagnosed in the young. And that is sad, because health care costs will go up and we may have a sick generation sooner than later.

That is also expensive for public health programs. Imagine hiring an employee at 20 who is already on maintenance anti-hypertensive medications or undergoing dialysis. We do not want that.

So get to know food and how nutrient-dense your food is or is not. Remember what the father of medicine Hippocrates said: "Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food."



Editorial



GM

MANILA BULLETIN
FEBRUARY 3, 2024



Time to check higher malnutrition among children of fisherfolk

It is quite ironic that the children of fishermen who provide us with food have a higher rate of malnourishment and stunting.

This is according to the Department of Science and Technology-Food and Nutrition Research Institute (DOST-FNRI) data from a National Nutrition Survey. Citing a study conducted by a former director, FNRI Senior Science Research Specialist Dr. Eva Goyena said the data shows that there is a higher rate of stunting and low weight among children in families headed by fisherfolk. The study also showed that children from lower-income families have higher cases of Vitamin A, iodine and iron deficiency.

A fish harvest does not necessarily mean nutritious food for the families of those living in the coastal areas. The FNRI official said that while the fisherfolk sell the good parts of the fish in the market, they keep the entrails, like intestines and other internal organs, and the heads, for themselves to eat.

She cited the higher rate of stunting in geographically isolated or depressed areas (GIDA) which include fisherfolk communities in the Western Visayas particularly Panay Island, BARMM (Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao), Zamboanga Peninsula, MIMAROPA (Oriental Mindoro, Occidental Mindoro, Romblon, Palawan), and Bicol Region.

Many studies have confirmed that malnutrition does not only cause stunting, it also affects the learning ability of the child.

We are disseminating the result of our study to inform the policymakers, particularly the local government units (LGUs) in the coastal areas

to prioritize programs for the fisherfolk, she said.

The problem of malnutrition in the Philippines has been a concern of government and the private sector, especially the non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The UNICEF cites the problem in numbers: "Every day, 95 children in the Philippines die from malnutrition. Twenty-seven out of 1,000 Filipino children do not get past their fifth birthday. A third of Filipino children are stunted, or short for their age. Stunting after two years of age can be permanent, irreversible and even fatal."

Malnutrition is also a window to the problem of hunger. A survey conducted by the Social Weather Stations (SWS) in December 2023 revealed that approximately 12.6 percent of Filipino families have experienced involuntary hunger—being hungry and having nothing to eat—at least once in the previous three months. Conducted from Dec. 8 to 11, 2023, the study showed that hunger increased from 9.8 percent in September 2023 to 12.6 percent in December 2023.

There are many programs that aim to fight hunger, specifically malnutrition, among children. Recently, the Children's First One Thousand Days Coalition launched its operating manual to guide and coordinate programs of the private and public sectors.

As fish will be a major food commodity during the church season of Lent, which starts a few days from now, it would be a good time to reflect on the fisherfolk and their families. And what one can do as a community head, civic leader, company decision maker, or a government official to prioritize programs for the children of the fishermen.



Fixing food could produce \$10 trillion

THE ways food is produced and consumed across the world is racking up hidden costs in health impacts and environmental damage amounting to some 12 percent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) a year, according to a new report on Monday.

In the research, a consortium of scientists and economists found that transforming food systems across the world could prevent 174 million premature deaths, help the world meet its climate goals and provide economic benefits of \$5 trillion to \$10 trillion.

While intensive food production has helped to feed a global population that has doubled since the 1970s, the report found that this has come with a growing burden on people and the planet.

Poor diets lead to obesity or undernutrition and associated chronic illness, while polluting farming practices drive global warming and biodiversity loss, threatening potentially catastrophic climate impacts that would whiplash back on the world's ability to produce food.

"We have an amazing food system," said Vera Songwe, an economist with the Africa Growth Initiative at the Brookings Institution, and part of the Food System Economics Commission (FSEC), which produced the report.

"But it has done that with a lot of cost to the environment, to people's health, and to the future and to our economics," she said.

Researchers estimated total underappreciated costs from food systems of up to \$15 trillion a year. That includes around \$11 trillion each year from the loss in productivity caused by food-linked illnesses like diabetes, hypertension and cancer.

Environmental costs are estimated at \$3 trillion from current agricultural land use and food production methods, which scientists say account for a third of planet-heating greenhouse gas emissions. The authors also compared computer modelling of the consequences by 2050 of continuing current trends and of a hypothetical food system transformation.

They said that on the current pathway, food systems alone will push global warming above the Paris Deal's more ambitious thresh-

old of 1.5 degrees Celsius since preindustrial times.

Heating could reach a catastrophic 2.7 C by 2100, they said, while food production would be increasingly battered by climate change.

Obesity would also increase globally by 70 percent, they said, while around 640 million people would still be underweight.

Imagining a better system, the report's authors said more effective policies could improve diets, drastically reducing diet-related deaths due to chronic diseases, while transforming food systems into a source of carbon storage by 2040, helping the world stay within its climate goals.

But the report, which comes as farmers across parts of Europe stage protests over a variety of grievances including incomes and environmental regulations, acknowledged that change would be challenging.

The authors urged policymakers to compensate those left behind by a shift to a more sustainable system, noting that promoting healthier diets would have different priorities and focus in different parts of the world.

The authors said that policymakers will work to compensate those left behind by changes.

The report comes after the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization released research in November estimating that the hidden costs of food systems across the world were around \$10 trillion a year, or nearly 10 percent of GDP.

Johan Rockstrom, of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and the FSEC, said the fact that both groups had come up with a "very dramatic number," exceeding \$10 trillion, was reason to have confidence in the findings.

But he warned that the future projections were "conservative" because even if the world manages to transition away from fossil fuels, the food system can push the world above 1.5 C on its own.

"[That] likely means irreversible changes to major life support systems on Earth, which means that the price tag correlated to the food system would accelerate very rapidly for hidden costs that are not included in these analyses," he said.

AFP



A 'greener' way of producing corn

SOLAR technology that reduces carbon emissions. Capturing and recycling heat while minimizing its loss. Automation that maximizes energy use while streamlining operations. These are some of the cutting-edge equipment used by Cargill Philippines to increase and improve corn production in an environmentally friendly process.

The farm-to-table method falls under the Agri-Sagana initiative, which the Philippine office of the global food and agri-business company launched in November 2022. Focused mainly on the farmers of Cagayan and Isabela, especially women, Agri-Sagana was designed to help them improve their agricultural yields and livelihoods, and contribute to national food security.

Launched in collaboration with the Asia Society for Social Improvement and Sustainable Transformation, the project also aims to empower 10 cooperatives and 8,000 corn farmers through a Virtual Coop Training Hub and infrastructure support for environmentally sound practices.

The planned improvement of corn quality and the use of systems that are protective of biodiversity are intended to benefit 500 to 1,000 farmers.

Sonny Catacutan, country president of Cargill Philippines, describes the measures that lead to a "greener" way of producing corn:

- Solar drying. Instead of relying solely on electricity or fuel, specially designed solar panels or drying structures incorporate solar energy. This significantly reduces the demand for nonrenewable energy sources and lowers the carbon footprint associated with corn drying.

- Energy-efficient technologies minimize overall energy consumption during the drying process. These include advanced drying machines equipped with sensors and heat insulations to likewise decrease heat loss.

- Recycling and reuse. During the corn drying process, a considerable amount of heat is generated. Innovative systems capture and recycle this heat.

- Smart automation and control systems optimize energy usage and ensure efficient operations based on real-time data.



■ A corn farmer in Cagayan. PHOTO FROM CARGILL PHILIPPINES WEBSITE



■ The launch of the Agri-Sagana project in Tuguegarao City, Cagayan, in 2022. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

- Monitoring systems track energy consumption and system performance, allowing for continuous optimization.

- Miscellaneous carbon-reducing efforts during the corn-drying set-up such as using eco-friendly materials for construction; implementing waste management strategies to reduce, reuse or recycle byproducts; and minimizing any potential harm to surrounding ecosystems.

Regenerative farming

Meanwhile, regenerative farming is implemented to produce healthier crops, bring about climate change

mitigation and develop resilience against pests.

In one method, crop rotation has the farmer alter the types of crops grown in a particular area across different seasons or years. This helps keep the soil's robustness, ward off pests naturally and avoid exhausting the same nutrients year after year.

Meanwhile, minimal tillage counters traditional farming's rigorous plowing and tilling of the soil, which disrupts its structure, exposes it to erosion and potentially releases carbon into the atmosphere. It reduces the intensity and frequency of mechanical soil disturbance; as a result, soil health

is enhanced, carbon sequestration happens and chemical inputs are reduced.

To further empower the farmers with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed, Agri-Sagana will be providing them training and resources, translated into the local Ilokano dialect. The official rollout is scheduled for the first quarter of 2024, preceding the planting season during a CornVention.

Catacutan described their long-term goal in investing in sustainability and farmer empowerment: "To drive transformative impact to strengthen our food systems and contribute to food security in the Philippines." **CORA LLAMAS**