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Solar power irrigation inihahanda vs El Niño

Bilang paghahanda sa epekto ng El Niño at para tumaas produksyon ng mga magsasaka, isinusulong ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. ang paggamit ng solar power irrigation sa bansa.

Sa ginanap na ceremonial at palay harvesting at distribusyon ng ayuda sa mga magsasagawa sa Candaba, Pampanga, sinabi ni Pangulong Marcos na ito ang kanilang napag-usapan matapos ang pagbisita sa Vietnam ni Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

Sinabi pa ng Presidente na sa pamamagitan ng solar irrigation project ay mapapataas ang produksyon at kita ng mga magsasaka dahil sa isang unit ng solar power irrigation ay kaya nitong makapagpatubig ng may 20 ektarya ng lupain.

"Ngayong taon, palalawakin din natin ang patubig para sa mga sakahan sa pamamagitan ng Philippine, ito 'yung sinasabi ko, Philippine Solar-irrigation Project na mga Small-scale Irrigation Projects upang mapataas ang produksyon at kita ng ating mga magsasaka," ayon pa sa Pangulo.

Nangako rin si Marcos na hindi pababayaan ang mga magsasaka sa pamamagitan ng paglaan ng P31 bilyon sa ilalim ng National Rice Program para sa taong 2024 para pag-ibayuhin ang mga programa tulad ng mga production support, extension services, research at development at irrigation network services.

Inaasahan na tatagal ang El Niño sa bansa hanggang Hunyo ngayong taon. (Gemma Garcia)



Walang magugutom sa 'Bagong Pilipinas' - PBBM

SINABI ni Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. na hindi makakaranas ng gutom ang mga Pinoy sa ilalim ng "Bagong Pilipinas".

Inihayag ito ni Marcos habang pinangunahan niya ang seremonyal na palay harvesting sa Brgy. Mandili sa Candaba, Pampanga.

Sa kaniyang talumpati nitong Sabado ng umaga, hiniling ni Marcos sa publiko na makipagtulungan dahil ito ay maghahatid sa isang mas magandang Pilipinas kung saan walang maiiwan.

"Ang ating pagtutulu-

ngan na mapaunlad ang ating sektor ng agrikultura ay isa lamang sa mga pangunahing hakbang tungo sa pagbuo ng isang Bagong Pilipinas—kung saan walang nagugutom at ang lahat ay masigabong kumikilos para sa mas masaganang kinabukasan," wika ni Pangulong Marcos.

Pinuri rin niya ang mga magsasaka sa kanilang pagsusumikap at dedikasyon, na humantong sa pagtaas ng produksyon ng bigas sa Pilipinas noong 2023.

"Sa ating mga minamahal na nagsasaka,

ang inyong dedikasyon, sakripisyo at sipag ay tunay na nagsisilbing inspirasyon sa ating lahat. Ang inyong mga kamay—na masigasig na nagbubungkal ng lupang inyong sinasaka—ang siyang nagbibigay ng buhay at sigla sa ating sambayanan," ani Marcos.

Dumalo rin sa okasyon sina Department of Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., Assistant Secretary Arnel De Mesa, Pampanga Rep. Anna York Bondoc at mga lokal na opisyal ng Pampanga. (Carl Santiago)



HOMETOWN SNAPSHOT

By Yolanda Sotelo
@yzsoteloINQ

VILLASIS, PANGASINAN—The vegetable “talong” (eggplant) is commonly used as an ingredient in ordinary household dishes, but it has been elevated to restaurant-level fare by townsfolk of this agricultural town in western Pangasinan at a recent cooking festival.

During the 16th edition of the Talong Festival on Jan. 19, a total of 24 dishes with eggplant as the main ingredient were prepared into appetizers, finger food, main courses and snacks, all plated to match how dishes are served in fine dining restaurants.

The cook fest, held at the town’s gymnasium, was a cooking contest among the 21 barangays and local schools.

After the judging, the Java rice cake eggplant from cooks in Unzad village won the first prize. This dish was followed by the fried stuffed eggplant glazed with yakiniku, or Japanese barbecue sauce, of Lipay village (second prize) and the royal bibingkang (rice cake) talong of Amamperez village (third prize).

The Java rice cake eggplant is a complete meal in itself. Its main ingredients are eggplant, ground



Humble ‘talong’ gets high-end treatment in Pangasinan cook fest



LOCAL HARVEST Farmers harvest the long hybrid eggplant variety which grows year-round in Villasis, Pangasinan.

CELEBRATING EGGPLANT The cook fest in this year’s Talong Festival held at the municipal auditorium in Villasis town, Pangasinan, showcased (from left) a Java rice cake eggplant, eggplant parmesan nacho chips and tuna-stuffed eggplant. An average of 18 recipes are presented every year during the festival, also featuring an eggplant-themed street dancing competition as shown in the 2023 staging of the celebration. —PHOTOS BY WILLIE LOMIBAO

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

BALANCED NEWS + FEARLESS VIEWS

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pork and cooked rice, and is garnished with parsley, bell pepper, carrots and tomatoes.

For bagging the first prize, the Unzad team won P7,000 from the local government.

The fried stuffed eggplant glazed with yakiniku sauce won the judges' nod for its unique blend of the eggplant with pork, shrimp and other vegetables, then coated with eggs, flour, breadcrumbs and then fried into golden brown perfection.

The team from Lipay village, which brought home P4,000, created their own yakiniku sauce.

A snack called "royal bibingka with a twist" took third prize. It is the usual glutinous rice flour-cum-coconut cream and milk snack that just got healthier with eggplants.

According to former Mayor Dita Abrenica, an average of 18 recipes are presented every year during the festival, so around 300 eggplant dishes have been concocted already since the cook fest began 16 years ago.

A book on 100 ways to cook eggplant was published by the

local government to feature the recipes in the festival's early years.

The festival is a part of the town's annual fiesta celebration, during which a day is dedicated to the eggplant through the cook fest and crowd-drawing street dancing.

During the street dancing, high school students, garbed in costumes, mostly in purple and green to mimic the eggplant, performed around the town's major streets. Elementary

school children also participated in the "retro dances" accompanied by 1970s to 1980s music.

Quality produce

Villasis has around 400 hectares devoted solely to eggplant production, and local officials saw it fit to hold the Talong Festival as a strategy to market the town's top produce and carve a name in the agricultural tourism industry.

The town, according to Mayor Nonato Abrenica, prides itself as the "Vegetable Basket of the

North" as it also produces rice, okra, *sili* (chili pepper), tomatoes and ampalaya (bitter gourd).

"But we have achieved the branding of being the one producer of quality eggplant [in northern Luzon]," Abrenica said. "We will keep on improving the festival and will continue helping the farmers as agriculture is one of the town's economic backbones."

He said the municipal agriculture office was still consolidating the vegetable production data and how much it contribut-

ed to the town's coffers in 2023.

Councilor Chrisanto Balila, agriculture chair committee, said the town's agricultural villages along the Agno River are suitable for eggplant farming as the vegetable grows well in sandy soil.

Data from recent years showed that Villasis produced an average of 20,000 metric tons of eggplants every year, contributing to the entire production of the Ilocos region, which is the country's top producer of the vegetable.

In the second quarter of 2023, the region produced 60,000 MT of eggplants, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority.

Municipal Agriculture Officer Diony Carino said vegetable farmers in the town get a 20-percent to 30-percent discount per bag of fertilizer, and are given seeds assistance both by the Department of Agriculture and the local government.

Prices also do not dramatically drop because eggplant is not simultaneously harvested but successively (as the vegetable matures), unlike other produce like tomatoes, which easily rot because these are harvested all at the same time.

Farmers, Balila added, have no problem marketing their produce because Villasis has its own "bagsakan" (wholesale) market and is a neighbor of Urdaneta City, which hosts another popular wholesale market and trading center. **INQ**



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FARMER BONGBONG President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., with the help of a farmer, operates the Rice Combined Harvester during a ceremonial harvesting and assistance distribution event in Barangay Mandili, Candaba, Pampanga, on Saturday, Feb. 3, 2024. Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel accompanied the President. PHOTO BY RENE H. DILAN

PH registers record-high rice production in 2023

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said on Saturday that the Philippines produced a record-high 20 million metric tons (MT) of rice last year, which is 1.5 percent higher than the country's rice production in the same period in 2022.

In his speech during the ceremonial palay harvesting and distribution of various assistance in Candaba, Pampanga, the rice production in 2023 registered a 1.5 percent or 300,000-MT increase from

the 19.76 million MT of palay produced in 2022.

He said this came from the 0.23 percent increase in area harvested and 1.3 percent improvement in yield.

"Because of our joint hard work, we were able to record a production of more than 20 million metric tons of rice last 2023," the President said.

Marcos said the record-high volume of rice production last year contributed

to the overall value of production in the agriculture and fisheries sectors, which is recorded at P1.763 trillion in 2023, higher than the P1.757 trillion level in 2022.

He attributed the increase in last year's rice production to the government's efforts to provide and distribute high-quality seedlings and fertilizers to farmers.

The President led the ceremonial harvesting of palay in Barangay Mandili in

➤ **RiceA2**



■ RICE FROM A1

PH registers record-high

Candaba, where he also distributed various assistance to farmers, including hauling trucks, seeds and financial assistance, among others, to more than 12,000 beneficiaries and 10 farmers' cooperatives and associations.

The Department of Agriculture (DA), which the President previously held, also provided fertilizer discount vouchers worth P99.8 million in the province.

It also distributed P5 million in grants for working capital and hauling vehicles to 150 farmers and the construction of agricultural infrastructure.

But the President vowed to provide more government support programs for increased rice production in 2024.

He said the government was eyeing more solar-powered irrigation projects to provide water supply to about 180,000 hectares of agricultural land nationwide.

"The key is irrigation, so we are looking at the system that is being developed, and I think we will try solar-powered irrigation," the President said.

"That is our plan to improve our situation in the agricultural sector. We will continue to strengthen and increase the assistance for the affected areas and citizens," he added.

The President said using solar energy was economically viable and cost-effective as it would help farmers irrigate their lands free from the burden of spending money on expensive diesel pumps.

He said solar-power irrigation projects are seen as a solution to address the challenges hounding the agriculture sector, including the adverse impacts of typhoons and the El Niño phenomenon.

"We will install solar power to operate the pumps. We are looking at it; it will help immediately because we import maybe 3.5 million metric tons of rice every year," Marcos said.

The DA National Program has

allocated P31 billion for various projects, P17 billion for the Philippine Solar-Irrigation Project, and P1.2 billion for the construction and improvement of small-scale irrigation projects.

The agency also funded the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund with P10 billion. This will enhance the competitiveness of the rice industry through various interventions, such as rice seed development, provision of farm equipment and credit and extension services.

Marcos said the government was also focused on developing new varieties of palay that would be resilient amid the changing weather conditions in the country.

"Some of the steps we are currently undertaking is the development of seeds that can adapt to the changing climate, as well as the conduct of climate risk assessments for the affected communities," Marcos said.

"You farmers can really feel what we call climate change, so we need to study carefully if there is a variety that could be used during the stormy season when the rain is too heavy," he added.

No hungry Filipino

Meanwhile, Marcos promised no Filipino would be left hungry under his administration's "Bagong Pilipinas" (New Philippines).

"Our cooperation to develop our agricultural sector is just one of the main steps towards building a New Philippines where no one goes hungry, and everyone works hard for a more prosperous future," Marcos said.

To realize this vision and ensure sustainable harvest, Marcos assured farmers of government support in all of their endeavors, such as through distributing high-quality seeds.

He likewise commended the farmers for their hard work and dedication, which led to an increase in rice production in the Philippines in 2023.

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VOL. XXXVIII NO. 192 • SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2024 • 3 SECTIONS, 22 PAGES P25 MM

THE PHILIPPINE
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TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

BBM pushes solar-powered irrigation program

By HELEN FLORES

The government will undertake a nationwide solar-powered irrigation program to help achieve its goal of rice self-sufficiency, President Marcos announced yesterday.

During the ceremonial palay harvesting and distribution of various assistance to farmers in Barangay Mandili, Candaba, Pampanga, Marcos said the project is expected to add

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President Marcos operates a rice harvester during a ceremonial harvesting and assistance distribution event in Barangay Mandili, Candaba, Pampanga yesterday.

KRIZJOHN ROSALES

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about 180,000 hectares of irrigable land or about 1.2 million metric tons (MT) in rice production.

"Because if we are talking about rice, irrigation is really an important factor so that all areas will have three cropping (cycles in a year)," he said, noting that the Philippines imports about 3.5 million MT of rice every year.

Marcos explained a solar-powered irrigation unit would be able to irrigate 20 hectares of farmland.

"We're planning to install thousands of these and we're thinking where to get it from our budget," he said.

To increase rice production this year, the Department of Agriculture (DA) has allotted P17 billion for the Philippine Solar Irrigation Project and P1.2 billion for the construction and improvement of small-scale irrigation projects, according to a statement released by the Presidential Communications Office (PCO) yesterday.

Under the DA's National Rice Program, a total of P31 billion was also allocated this year for various interventions, the PCO said.

The DA earmarked P10 billion under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund, which aims to enhance the competitiveness of the rice industry through rice seed development and the provision of farm equipment, credit and extension services.

Marcos emphasized the secret to a bountiful rice harvest is irrigation.

"We're just getting started. But that's really the answer to our problems. Not only during

typhoons, not only during El Niños, but also in the transportation of our crops," the Chief Executive added.

Marcos said Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. visited farmlands in Vietnam to learn from the country's agriculture system ahead of his state visit on Jan. 29 to 30. Vietnam supplies around 90 percent of the Philippines' rice imports.

A five-year rice deal was sealed during Marcos' visit that guarantees a steady supply of affordable rice to the Philippines.

Marcos reassured the public that the government has readied assistance to areas that will be severely affected by the prevailing El Niño phenomenon.

Apart from improving the country's irrigation system, Marcos said the country continues to develop drought-resistant crops as response to climate change.

Meanwhile, the DA has partnered with the Department of Trade and Industry and the National Irrigation Administration to promote the Integrated Rice Supply Chain Development Program which will boost an efficient rice supply chain that will decrease costs and make rice affordable to the public.

The program also aims to foster alternative market access for both buyers and sellers that will help enhance farmers' income through cooperation between different agencies in the production, classification, marketing and distribution of domestic rice.

Amid the challenges in the country's agriculture sector, the Philippines was able to register a record-high rice production in 2023, according to Marcos.

— With Romina Cabrera



EDITORIAL

Another animal pestilence

Even as the hog industry is still grappling with African swine fever, another threat to livestock is on the horizon. Lumpy skin disease, a viral infection affecting cattle, is spreading in several countries, prompting the **Department of Agriculture** to ban imports of cows, buffalo, their meat and by-products including milk from Libya, Russia, South Korea and Thailand.

The disease, first reported in Africa a century ago, has spread to the Middle East, Turkey, the Balkans and parts of Asia. While the virus is not always fatal to the animal, the infection can spread quickly and the disease, with the characteristic unsightly skin eruptions or nodules, reduced milk yield and emaciation, can lower the commercial value of cattle.

Attenuated virus vaccines are available against lumpy skin disease, along with antibiotics against secondary infection. Veterinary experts, however, have warned that containing the disease and caring for infected cattle can be difficult with large herds.

In the case of ASF, players in the local hog industry have complained that lax measures at the ports allowed the entry of tainted pork and pork products from abroad. They also lamented the weakness of farm containment measures as well as the lack of or limited indemnification for affected

hog raisers, which discouraged reporting of ASF cases and contributed to the spread of the disease nationwide.

Since the first case of ASF was detected in the Philippines in 2019, thousands of hogs have been culled. At the end of 2023, the Department of Agriculture reported that ASF had been recorded in 64 of the country's 83 provinces.

While ASF does not jump to humans and the meat of infected hogs can still be edible, the commercial value of the pork is reduced. ASF can also quickly spread and decimate the hogs in an entire farm. Local hog raisers have complained that they have suffered from the double whammy of ASF and too much importation of pork and pork products that have pulled down farm gate prices while retail prices remain high.

Vietnam has developed a vaccine for ASF together with US researchers, but the vaccine is not yet available for widespread dissemination in the Philippines. In the case of lumpy skin disease, vaccines are available. Apart from better monitoring at all ports of entry, efforts must be made to ensure that vaccines will be on hand in case the LSD virus is detected in the Philippines. The country has seen the consequences of a virus going out of control in the case of ASF. It should not be repeated with lumpy skin disease.

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No Filipino will go hungry – Marcos



PRESIDENTIAL TOUCH — President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. (left) tries his hand at operating a rice harvester during a ceremonial harvesting and assistance distribution event for farmers in Barangay Mandili, Candaba, Pampanga on Saturday, Feb. 3, 2024. (PCO FB)

Revitalized agriculture, sufficient gov't support vowed

By ARGYLL CYRUS GEDUCOS

President Marcos said that no Filipino would experience hunger under the recently launched “Bagong Pilipinas” (New Philippines) as he promised a revitalized agriculture sector wherein farmers are equipped with modern agricultural knowledge and sufficient support from the government.

Marcos said this when he led the ceremonial palay harvesting in Barangay Mandili, Candaba, Pampanga, where he also distributed various assistance such as hauling trucks, seeds, and financial assistance, among others, to more than 12,000 farmers and 10 farmers’ cooperatives and associations.

A good indicator that supports President Marcos’ vow is the rice output last year that hit a new record-high of 20 million metric tons.

Collective effort is vital

“Dahil sa ating sama-samang pagsisikap, nagtamo tayo ng tala ng ani noong 2023 na umabot sa mahigit 20 milyong metric ► **3**



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No Filipino will go hungry – Marcos 1◀

ton ng palay (Because of our joint hard work, we were able to record a production of more than 20 million metric ton of rice in 2023),” he said in his speech.

This production is a 1.5 percent, or 300,000 metric tons, increase from the 19.76 million metric tons of palay produced in 2022.

The increase came from the 0.23 percent increase in area harvested and 1.3 percent improvement in yield.

In his speech on Saturday morning, Feb. 3, Marcos asked the public to cooperate as this will lead to a better Philippines where no one is left behind.

“Ang ating pagtutulungan na mapaulad ang ating sektor ng agrikultura ay isa lamang sa mga pangunahing hakbang tungo sa pagbuo ng isang Bagong Pilipinas—ung saan walang nagugutom (Our collective effort in improving our agriculture sector is one way of forming a New Philippines where no one will go hungry),” he said.

To realize this vision and to ensure sustainable harvest, President Marcos assured farmers of government support—such as the distribution of high-

quality seeds—in all of their endeavors.

He likewise commended the farmers for their hard work and dedication, which led to an increase in rice production in the Philippines in 2023.

“Ang inyong dedikasyon, sakripisyo at sipag ay tunay na nagsisilbing inspirasyon sa ating lahat (Your dedication, sacrifice, and hard work inspire us all),” Marcos said. “Ang inyong mga kamay—na masigasig na nagbubungkal ng lupang inyong sinasaka—ang siyang nagbibigay ng buhay at sigla sa ating sambayanan (Your hands that meticulously toil the lands give life to our country).”

The record-high volume of rice production in 2023 contributed to the overall value of production in the agriculture and fisheries sectors, which is recorded at ₱1.763 trillion in 2023, higher than the ₱1.757-trillion level in 2022.

Marcos attributed the increase in last year’s rice production to the government’s efforts of providing and distributing high-quality seedlings and fertilizers to farmers.

DA support

During the event, the Department of Agriculture (DA), which the President previously led, also provided fertilizer discount vouchers worth ₱99.8 million in the province.

It also distributed ₱5 million in grants as working capital and hauling vehicles to 150 farmers, as well as construction of agricultural infrastructure.

The Marcos administration vowed to provide more government support programs for increased rice production in 2024.

The DA National Program already allocated ₱31 billion for various projects, ₱17 billion for the Philippine Solar-Irrigation Project, and ₱1.2 billion for the construction and improvement of small-scale irrigation projects.

The agency also funded the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund with ₱10 billion to enhance the competitiveness of the rice industry through various interventions, such as rice seed development, provision of farm equipment, and credit and extension services. (With a report from Raymund Antonio)

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Aktibong lumahok si Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. sa pag-operate ng rice harvester sa ceremonial palay harvesting kung saan namahagi rin ito ng mga ayuda sa mga magsasaka sa Brgy. Mandili, Candaba, Pampanga kahapon. (KJ Rosales)

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Farmgate price ng maliliit na itlog bumaba sa P4

Bumaba ang farmgate price ng maliliit na itlog nang hanggang P4 kada piraso dulot ng pagbaba ng demand dito ng mga mamimili sa kabila na maraming suplay ng naturang produkto.

Ayon sa Philippine Egg Board Association (PEBA), ang kasalukuyang farmgate price ng medium na itlog ay P5 hanggang P6, samantalang ang small size ay nasa P4-P5 depende sa lugar ng farm.

Sinabi ni PEBA Chairman Gregorio San Diego, sa ngayon ay oversup-

ply ang itlog dahil hindi gaanong binibili ng mga consumers.

Sa price monitoring ng Department of Agriculture sa mga palengke sa Metro Manila, ang retail prices ng medium-sized eggs ay pumapalo sa P6.80 hanggang P8.50.

Ayon sa mga wholesalers ng itlog, may P20 na bawas ang presyo ng bawat tray ng itlog samantalang ang medium sized eggs ay nabebenta ngayon ng P160 per tray, ang large size ay P180 at ang extra large ay P210 per tray. (Angie dela Cruz)



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Bangus ligtas kainin - BFAR

Inihayag ng Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) na ligtas pa ring kainin ang bangus bagamat ang ilang sample nito ay nakitaan ng bakas ng 'microplastics' sa Mindanao.

Sinabi ng BFAR na wala pang konkretong ebidensiya sa mga negatibong epekto na maaaring mangyari sa pag-ingest ng microplastic na matatagpuan sa bangus kaya ligtas itong kainin sa kondisyon na ang mga ito ay sariwa at maayos na naproseso o naluto.

Ayon sa BFAR, walang mga health

advisories sa bansa na nakataas tungkol sa pagkonsumo ng bangus na nagpositibo sa microplastics.

Gayunman, patuloy umano ang Department of Agriculture (DA)-BFAR na makikipagtulungan sa Department of Science and Technology (DOST) patungkol sa mga pag-aaral na may kinalaman sa microplastics.

Ginawa ng BFAR ang pahayag kasunod ng pag-aaral ng DOST na nakatuklas ng microplastics sa bangus samples mula sa Mindanao.

(Dolly Cabreza)



5K baboy todas sa ASF

Mahigit sa 5,000 na mga baboy ang namatay at pinatay sa Romblon matapos tumama ang African Swine Fever (ASF) sa lugar mula noong huling mga buwan ng 2023.

Sa ulat ng Office of the Provincial Veterinarian (ProVet), nasa 3,798 bilang dito ay naitalang namatay na mga baboy sa mga apokatadong barangay ng Alcantara, Cajidiocan,

Looc, Odiongan, San Fernando at Sta. Fe.

Nasa 1,367 mga baboy naman ang pinatay alinsunod sa isinagawang depopulation ng Department of Agriculture (DA).

Sinabi naman ng ProVet na kontrolado na ang ASF sa bayan ng San Fernando matapos magpatupad ng istrik-tong quarantine protocols sa lugar.

Wala naman nang

naitatalang bagong kaso ng ASF sa bayan ng Sta. Fe, Odiongan, at Looc.

Sa ngayon ay binabantayan naman ang bayan ng Cajidiocan dahil sa pagkalat ng virus sa halos lahat ng barangay.

Nabatid na nasa 1,084 na hog raisers na ang naapektuhan ng virus sa buong lalawigan. (Vincent Pagaduan)

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DA, DTI ink MOU on integrated rice supply chain

By Joel dela Torre

THE National Irrigation Administration (NIA) said that the efficient rice supply chain and development of a business-to-business (B2B) online market platform (for rice) are now more feasible with its partnership with Department of Agriculture (DA) and Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) on the Integrated Rice Supply Chain Development Program (IRSCD) was signed Friday between DTI Secretary Alfredo Pascual, DA Chief of Staff Alvin Jon Balagbag and NIA Acting Administrator Eduardo Guillen at the (NIA) Central Office.

According to NIA, the MOU aims to create alternative market access for rice buyers and sellers in line with the realization of food sufficiency thrust of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and the

Three-Year-Food Logistics Action Agenda of the government.

At the same time, it targets to enhance the income of rice farmers through more efficient market and supply chain arrangement to promote proper rice bonding and classification.

Not only that, NIA said it also facilitates cooperation in production, marketing, sales and domestic rice distribution in the market.

Under the Understanding, DA, NIA and DTI commit to share resources such as but not limited to data sharing, research, technical expertise and access to respective networks and stakeholders.

The three government offices will actively engage and collaborate with rice farmers, cooperatives, LGUs and other stakeholders to ensure the effective and widespread adoption of the project.

Serving as witnesses in the MOU ceremonial signing were Digital Philippines Undersecretary Mary Jean Pacheco and NIA Senior Deputy Administrator Robert Suguitan. NIA Deputy Administrator for Administrative and Finance Sector Robert Victor Seares, Jr., NCIA President Remy Albano, Department and Division Managers, and Irrigation employees.



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Where's our rice? public school teachers ask

By Arlene Rivera

A TEACHERS group expressed disappointment at the failure of public school teachers to receive the one-time rice assistance for government employees intended for fiscal year 2022.

Last December 16, 2022, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. signed Administrative Order (AO) No. 2, authorizing the grant of a 25-kilos one-time rice assistance to all state workers.

"As small as it may seem, but we are grateful that the government provided its employees with this one-time rice assistance at least the gesture. But we felt dismayed when January and February of 2023 came to an end and we still hadn't received the promised rice," said Teachers Dignity Coalition (TDC)

spokesperson Noel Galvez Jr.

Some teachers, though, reported receiving theirs in June of last year after waiting through March, April, and May.

The National Food Administration (NFA), according to the AO, shall issue the necessary guidelines within 10 days to implement the order, including an efficient and effective mechanism for the distribution of the rice assistance.

In October 2023, the group formally asked the NFA for the status of said incentive, but they have not received a reply. Then the year 2023 ended, and they haven't received a reply.

"It is imperative that benefits and incentives be made readily available to teachers in order to foster a sense of worth and recognition of their dignity," the group added.



PH expects good harvest, adequate supply of onions in 2024

By Joel dela Torre

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has expressed confidence that the country will have good harvests and adequate supply of onion this year despite the presence of "harabas" or fall army worm that affects a number of farms.

According to Asst. Secretary Arnel de Mesa, the pest's impact on onion production has been minimized by the pro-active efforts of the national and local government.

He said that measures have already been taken to address the problem while the government is taking steps to improve the quality of the farm products.

This includes partnering with local government units in undertaking information awareness and training programs.

Reports from the Provincial Agriculture Office noted that only eight percent of the total production area was affected.

"With the pro-active efforts of the national and local government, the effect is considered negligible," De Mesa said.

De Mesa led other DA officials recently conducted surprise visits to production areas in Bongabon and Rizal in Nueva Ecija to observe the ongoing harvest and at the same time discuss ways to assist onion farmers.

"We're expecting positive production for the year," he

stressed.

The DA officials cited the importance of regular monitoring of onion farms to immediately address any production challenges that may affect the quality and volume of harvest.

"Let us practice early reporting and monitoring of unusual events in the farms," they said during a meeting with onion growers and members of the Provincial and Municipal Agriculture Office.

Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) Director Glenn Pangniban said that the DA will provide a technical support program to onion farmers and agricultural extension workers to equip industry stakeholders with effective tools and knowl-

edge in managing the production areas.

"We will also assist onion growers of Nueva Ecija in securing a Philippine Good Agricultural Practices (PhilGAP) certificate to enable them to access more markets," Pangniban added.

DA said it is also committed to establish more storage facilities not only for onion but for other high value crops as well.

The Province of Nueva Ecija, a major grower of onions in Central Luzon, has more than 10,500 hectares planted to the white bulb. Nationwide, volume of production for 2024 is projected at more than 300,000 metric tons.



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Onion prices normalize after House exposes agri cartel

By ELLSON QUISMORIO

Rarely does one of these dragging, protracted hearings in aid of legislation ever result in a tangible benefit to the common Filipino.

But that's exactly what happened after the House of Representatives sought to get to the bottom of overpriced local onions in February 2023. Upon the order of House Speaker Martin Romualdez, the Committee on Agriculture ► 8

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spent the next four months digging through tips and piecing together evidence on the problem of agricultural hoarding in the country.

It all began in late 2022, when prices of onions suddenly surged to an absurd ₱700 per kilo. At this point, onions cost more than some meat products. "This is economic sabotage...People are still trying to recover

from the pandemic. The last thing we need is an unreasonable rise in food prices," Romualdez said.

By the final quarter of 2023, local onion prices had normalized to ₱160 per kilo, as the series of House hearings had clearly established the artificial nature of the price spike, no thanks to certain enterprising personalities.

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Panawagan sa gobyerno...
Kabuhayan ng tobacco farmers
depensahan sa WHO conference

Hiniling ng mga tobacco farmer sa pamahalaan na tulungan silang mapalawak ang produksyon gayundin maiangat ang 'less harmful alternative' sa sigarilyo para maitaguyod ang kanilang kabuhayan sa paparating na kumperensya ng World Health Organization global tobacco control.

Maghaharap ang mga delegado ng iba't ibang bansa sa Panama sa Pebrero 5-10, 2023 para sa 10th Conference of the Parties (COP) sa WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).

Ang global treaty ay mayroong malaking ginagampanan para umukit ng global tobacco policies, subalit nababahala ang farmer groups sa magiging epekto o resulta ng pulong sa kanilang pamumuhay.

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

Umasa si Montemayor na ang anumang resulta ng pulong ay magkaroon naman ng tiyansa na gumanda ang kanilang pamumuhay lalo na ang kondisyon ng tobacco farmer.

Sinabi naman ni Saturnino Distor, pangulo ng Philippine Tobacco Growers Association, ang delegasyon ng Pilipinas ay mabisang makakapagtaguyod para sa mga magsasaka sa pamamagitan ng paghahanay sa roadmap ng Department of Agriculture, ang Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program (STEP).

Ang STEP ay isang estratehikong hakbangin tungo sa pagpapalakas ng katutubong pagtatanim ng tabako partikular na sa Mindanao.

Sinabi ni Distor na nakikita niya ang magandang kinabukasan sa tobacco farming sa bansa sa pamamagitan ng STEP lalo na sa ilalim ng regulasyon ng mas ligtas na alternatibo sa paninigarilyo gaya ng VAPES at e-cigarettes.



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BBM hindi kabado sa epekto ng El Nino

AABOT pa hanggang Hunyo ang epekto ng El Niño pero tiniyak ni Pangulong Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. na hindi ito dapat katakutan.

“Tinatayang aabot po ng hanggang Hunyo nitong taon at patuloy na magdudulot ng malaking banta sa sektor ng agrikultura sa nalalabing buwan ng 2024. Gayunpaman, hindi tayo natatakot. Sa halip, buong loob at lakas at sama-sama nating haharapin ang El Niño,” wika ni Marcos sa isang talumpati nitong Sabado.

Pinangunahan ng pangulo ang ceremonial palay harvesting at distribusyon ng ibat ibang assistance sa mga magsasaka at kooperatiba sa Mandili National High School, Brgy. Mandili, Candaba, Pampanga.

Sa kanyang talumpati, sinabi ni Marcos na sinisipat ngayon ng gobyerno ang pagtatayo ng libo-libong solar-powered irrigation units upang matulungan ang mga magsasaka na mapataas ang kanilang ani.

“Ngayong taon, palalawakin din natin ang patubig para sa mga sakahan sa pamamagitan ng Philippine Solar Irrigation Project na mga small-scale irrigation projects upang mapataas ang produksyon at kita ng ating mga magsasaka,” sabi ni Marcos.

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Walang magugutom sa 'Bagong Pilipinas' – PBBM

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. vowed on Saturday that no Filipino will be left hungry under a "Bagong Pilipinas" with a revitalized agriculture sector where farmers are equipped with modern agricultural knowledge and sufficient support from the government.

In his speech during the ceremonial palay harvesting and distribution of various assistance in Candaba, Pampanga, President Marcos said the cooperation of every citizen will lead to a better Philippines where no one is left behind.

"Ang ating pagtutulungan na mapaunlad ang ating sektor ng agrikultura ay isa lamang sa mga pangunahing hakbang tung-

go sa pagbuo ng isang Bagong Pilipinas— kung saan walang nagugutom at ang lahat ay masigabong kumikilos para sa mas masaganang kinabukasan," President Marcos said.

To ensure sustainable harvest, President Marcos assured farmers of the government support in all of their endeavors, saying that every seed they plant will serve as the foundation of a strong and bountiful future.

President Marcos led on Saturday the ceremonial palay harvesting in Barangay Mandili in Candaba where he also distributed various assistance such as hauling trucks, seeds, financial assistance, among others to more than 12,000 farmers and ten farm-

ers' cooperatives and associations.

The President lauded the farmers' hard work and dedication, which led to an increase of rice production in the Philippines in 2023 also attributed to the government's distribution of high quality seeds and the sufficient support.

"Sa ating mga minamahal na nagsasaka, ang inyong dedikasyon, sakripisyo at sipag ay tunay na nagsisilbing inspirasyon sa ating lahat. Ang inyong mga kamay – na masigasig na nagbubungkal ng lupang inyong sinasaka – ang siyang nagbibigay ng buhay at sigla sa ating sambayanan," President Marcos said. PCO