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## 'PH rice supply enough to last until mid-year'

AGRICULTURE Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. has assured the public that the country's rice supply is sufficient through the first half of 2024.

"We have enough rice supply, so prices should remain stable through the first half of the year. Our priority now is market stability," Tiu Laurel said.

He cautioned, however, that prices might remain high through September due to global rice supply concerns stemming from El Niño and the resulting high international prices.

Recent imports and the upcoming harvest, peaking in March and April, will ensure stable prices for the main food staple despite El Niño concerns, he added.

In the first week of February 2024, the Philippines secured a five-year rice supply deal with Vietnam, guaranteeing 1.5 million to two million metric tons annually. India also pledged additional supply despite its import ban on non-basmati rice.

A total of 750,000 metric tons of imported rice arrived in December and January, bolstering local inventory.

"What we need to guard against now are profiteers who may attempt to exploit the situation by using El Niño as excuse to hoard rice supply to push local prices to unreasonably high levels," Tiu Laurel warned.

Othel V. Campos



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## Rice prices may stay elevated until Sept

BY JED MACAPAGAL

RICE prices may stay elevated until September, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

The DA assured rice supply is sufficient through the first half of this year, with recent imports and the upcoming harvest that peaks in March and April.

This in turn will ensure stable prices of the country's main food staple through June in spite of El Niño, the DA said.

However, DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., said prices may stay elevated through September due to concerns over El Niño's impact on global rice supply as well as the heightened demand for the commodity that pushing international prices higher.

"We have enough rice supply so prices should remain stable through the first half of the year. Our priority now is market stability," said Tiu Laurel, in a statement yesterday.

The DA said the Philippines



LAUREL

signed a five-year rice supply deal with Vietnam that ensures a source of 1.5 million to 2 million metric tons (MT) of rice a year and India for additional imported supply on non-basmati rice.

"What we need to guard against now are profiteers who may attempt to exploit the situation by using El Niño as excuse to hoard rice supply to push local prices to unreasonably high levels," Tiu Laurel said.



## Agri chief vows stable rice prices until June

By GABRIELL CHRISTEL GALANG

Despite the El Niño phenomenon, the Department of Agriculture (DA) has assured stable rice prices through June.

The nation's rice supply for the first half of the year is secure, supported by imports and the upcoming harvest season in March and April, Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. said ► **6**

on Thursday, Feb. 8.

"We have enough rice supply so prices should remain stable through the first half of the year. Our priority now is market stability," he said.

Inventory for the country's food staple was boosted with the delivery of 750,000 metric tons of imported rice from December to January.

Last week, the Philippines inked a deal with Vietnam to receive 1.5 million to two million metric tons of rice annually, while India promised to back the supply despite a recent import ban on non-basmati rice.

Despite support from foreign countries, Tiu Laurel noted that high rice prices may remain elevated through September because of the impact of El Niño on the global rice supply and the increasing grain demand—factors that affect international prices.

"What we need to guard against now are profiteers who may attempt to exploit the situation by using El Niño as an excuse to hoard rice supply to push local prices to unreasonably high levels," the DA chief said.

To mitigate possible exploitation, assistant secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa was told to coordinate with the Department of Trade and Industry as well as other law enforcement agencies to



AGRICULTURE SECRETARY  
FRANCISCO P. TIU LAUREL JR.

monitor and review the surging prices of rice in the market.

Meanwhile, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said that rice is now a major risk in the consumer price index, a measure used by the agency to identify inflation.

Dennis Mapa, the undersecretary for economic planning and national statistician suggested that the increased rate could have been avoided, stating that "inflation could have

been lower were it not for the double-digit increase in rice prices compared last year given its weight in the consumer basket.

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), rice weighed 8.87 percent in the consumer basket and this determined the headline inflation to an increased 17.87 percent share in the spending of around 30 percent of income-generating households.

"Since price base for rice between January and July last year was lower, any increase in the price of the national staple could be magnified in the inflation print," he added.

Overall, the PSA logged an ease in headline inflation, which is at 2.8 percent. This is slower compared to the inflation pace in October 2020 during the pandemic season.



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# PH rice supply sufficient for first half, says Tiu Laurel

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

**T**HE Philippines' rice supply will remain sufficient in the first of the year but prices of the staple will be elevated due to the El Niño weather pattern, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said.

Tiu Laurel assured the public on Thursday that rice supply was enough due to adequate local production and imports.

However, he said that prices may remain high until September, attributing it to the impact of El Niño, especially on global rice supply, which increased demand and international prices.

"What we need to guard against now are profiteers who may attempt to exploit the situation by using El Niño as excuse to hoard rice supply to push local prices to unreasonably high levels," Tiu Laurel said.

Citing a report from the Philippine Statistics Authority, the DA noted that rice was a major risk with regards to inflation.

National Statistician Dennis Mapa has said inflation could have been lower were it not for



**ALL RICE** Workers unload sacks of rice from a truck along Dagupan Street in Tondo, Manila, on Wednesday, Feb. 7, 2024. PNA PHOTO

the double-digit increase in rice prices compared to last year, given its weight in the consumer basket.

Mapa said that "since price base for rice between January and July last year was lower, any increase in the price of the national staple could be magnified in the inflation print."

Rice equates to 8.87 percent of the consumer basket used to determine headline inflation.

Headline inflation in January

eased to 2.8 percent, its slowest since October 2020, during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Tiu Laurel said a total of 750,000 metric tons (MT) of imported rice was expected to have arrived in the country in December 2023 and January this year.

A five-year rice trade agreement was also signed between the Philippines and Vietnam. Under the memorandum of understanding, Vietnam pledges to supply the

Philippines with 1.5 to 2 million MT of white rice annually.

India, meanwhile, also promised to provide the country with additional supply despite the import ban on non-basmati rice.

Furthermore, the Agriculture chief said that they will strengthen coordination with the Department of Trade and Industry and law enforcement agencies to closely monitor surges in the price of rice in the market.





PHILIPPINE STAR/WALTER BOLLOZOS

## Rice supply deemed sufficient through first six months — DA

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said the supply of rice will be sufficient during the first half of the year, with supply to include the dry season harvest supplemented by imports.

"We have enough rice, so prices should remain stable through the first half of the year. Our priority now is market stability," Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiw Laurel, Jr. said on Thursday.

Mr. Laurel said prices may remain elevated until September due to concerns over the impact of El Niño on the global rice supply and "heightened demand for the grain that... is keeping international prices high."

Palay or unmilled rice production rose 1.5% to 20.06 million metric tons (MT) in 2023. This translates to about 13.2 million MT of milled rice.

The DA has targeted palay production of 20 million MT of palay in 2024, which would be little changed from 2023, to account for El Niño.

The government weather service, known as PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration), has said that the effects of El Niño may last until the second quarter. An estimated 63 provinces will experience droughts or dry spells.

In a bulletin, the DA said that El Niño damage has been valued at P151.3 million, affecting palay and corn in the Western Visayas and Zamboanga Peninsula. The agency estimates that 6,618 MT have been lost, while 3,291 hectares were affected by the dry spell.

"Most of the damage and losses were incurred by rice and

corn that are in their reproductive stage," it added.

The DA has also said that rice import shipments between December and January amounted to 750,000 MT, bolstering domestic supply.

The Philippines imported 3.58 million MT of rice in 2023, according to the Bureau of Plant Industry.

Vietnam, the Philippines' major source of imported rice, recently signed a five-year agreement to ship 1.5 million to 2 million MT of rice per year through private-sector exporters.

In October, India also gave the Philippines a quota of 295,000 MT of non-basmati white rice, after imposing restrictions on exporting the grain to assure domestic supply is adequate.

The Philippines is projected to remain the world's top importer of rice, with shipments projected at 3.8 million MT in 2024, according to the US Department of Agriculture.

"What we need to guard against now are profiteers who may attempt to exploit the situation by using El Niño as excuse to hoard rice to push prices to unreasonably high levels," Mr. Laurel said.

He added that the DA will work with the Department of Trade and Industry and law enforcement agencies to monitor surges in the market price of rice.

The national average price of well-milled rice was P54.42 per kilogram in late January, while regular-milled rice was P49.9 per kilo, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority. — **Adrian H. Halili**





## E-wallets tapped in distribution of P22.9-B farmer subsidies

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has allowed the use of e-wallets in the distribution of P22.9 billion in subsidies to farmers.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. issued Memorandum Order No. 8 on the implementing rules on how to utilize the P22.903-billion financial assistance intended for hybrid seeds, inorganic fertilizer, biofertilizer, ameliorants and use of drone technology in agriculture through discount vouchers and e-wallets such as interventions monitoring card or IMC.

Peasant group Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) welcomed the move, saying beneficiaries now have an option in buying inputs.

"They are trying to integrate the distribution system for various support programs like seeds and

fertilizer that are being carried out by different agencies and there is a move away from physical distribution and towards vouchers and e-wallets which farmers can use to directly buy inputs from accredited dealers," FFF national manager Raul Montemayor told **The STAR**.

Montemayor said that farmers would be given electronic cash credits, which they can use to buy inputs of their choice.

"I believe this is the right direction. Eventually, less prone to corruption, less burdensome on the DA, easier for farmers to avail and it will force dealers to provide better service in order to convince farmers to buy from them," Montemayor said.

He said there is a need to update Registry System for Basic Sectors in

Agriculture (RSBSA) so that the DA will have a complete list of farmers and will be able to track what types of support each farmer can get and has been able to get.

Under MO 8, only farmers registered under the RSBSA will be eligible to receive support for up to 10 hectares, while farmers in non-clustered areas may receive up to five hectares only.

Laurel said hybrid seed varieties must have undergone field trials technology demonstration and produced a yield of at least five metric tons per hectare or at least one hectare higher than inbred seeds.

"A bag of 15 kilograms to 18 kilograms per hectare shall be procured and distributed to farmer-beneficiaries," Laurel added.

— Bella Cariaso





## High rice prices to persist until September – DA

By **JASPER EMMANUEL ARCALAS**

Despite sufficient rice stocks in the first half of the year, elevated rice prices may persist until September due to high international prices caused by the El Niño phenomenon, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Recent imports and the upcoming dry season harvest that would peak in March and April would help maintain rice stocks until June, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said yesterday.

Retail prices of rice would then remain stable through June despite the adverse effects of El Niño on local farms, he added.

Prices might stay elevated until September, driven by high international prices due to global supply concerns amid El Niño, coupled with a "heightened" demand for rice, he noted.

"What we need to guard against now are profiteers who may attempt to exploit the situation by using El Niño as an excuse to hoard rice supply to push local prices to unreason-

ably high levels," he said.

Laurel instructed Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa to strengthen coordination with the Department of Trade and Industry and other law enforcement agencies to "closely monitor" possible price surges of rice in the market.

The Philippines recently signed a five-year rice supply deal with Vietnam, ensuring a supply of 1.5 to two million metric tons annually.

"A total 750,000 MT of imported rice have arrived in December and January, buttressing local inventory," the DA recalled.

### 'Eat more eggs'

Filipinos should eat more eggs as retail prices declined due to oversupply, according to the DA.

De Mesa said they are coordinating with the Department of Social Welfare and Development and the National Nutrition Council to promote and include eggs in their respective programs.

"Eggs are the cheapest source of protein. We want more Filipinos to eat eggs," he added.

Producers lauded the move to promote egg consumption.

United Broiler Raisers Association (UBRA) and Philippine Egg Board chair Gregorio San Diego noted that producers are reeling from low demand amid the slump in the farmgate price.

"The DA should fix the retail prices of eggs so that more consumers will be encouraged to buy as the retail prices are high compared to the farmgate price," he told **The STAR**.

Medium-sized eggs in farms ranged between P5 and P6 per piece and small-sized eggs, between P4 and P6 per piece, he added.

Egg producers spend at least P4.75 daily for feeds for every chicken layer, he noted.

Based on the DA's monitoring, the retail prices of medium-sized eggs ranged between P6.50 and P8.60 per piece.

The retail price of whole chicken ranged between P150 and P220 per kilo.

Based on UBRA's monitoring, the farmgate price of chicken was P105 per kilo.

— With Bella Cariaso





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**Mga rice hoarder  
pinabantayan  
ngayong El Niño**

Inalerto ng Department of Agriculture (DA) ang mga awtoridad sa posibleng pagsamantala ng mga hoarder ng bigas upang sumipa ang presyo nito sa merkado ngayong may El Niño sa bansa.

Ayon kay Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., sapat ang supply ng bigas sa bansa hanggang sa kalagitnaan ng 2024 dahil sa pagpasok ng mga imported at sa paparating na anihan sa Marso at Abril.

"We have enough rice supply so prices should remain stable through the first half of the year. Our priority now is market stability," sabi ni Laurel.

Ang kailangang bantayan, ani Laurel, ay ang mga nais kumita na maaaring gamiting dahil ang El Niño upang magtago ng bigas para sumipa ang presyo nito sa mga palengke.

Kaya inatasan niya si Agriculture Assistant Secretary at Spokesperson Arnel de Mesa na makipag-ugnayan sa Department of Trade and Industry at sa iba pang law enforcement agency upang bantayan ang presyo ng bigas sa mga palengke.



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## PLDT, Smart launch FarmTech to train agri workers on digital technology

PLDT Inc. and Smart Communications teamed up with the Agricultural Training Institute to launch FarmTech to bridge the digital divide and empower farmers.

The tech-driven training kit equips farmer groups and cooperatives, even in remote areas, to educate their members on the benefits of technology in agriculture.

Receiving the very first FarmTech packages were two affiliate farm groups, Myriad Farms of Guimba, Nueva Ecija and Samahan ng mga Pangulo ng Magsasaka of Morong, Rizal.

Each FarmTech package includes a tablet, 10 smartphones, a Smart Bro Pocket Wifi with Smart Prepaid load cards, an outdoor projector and projector screen, a rechargeable portable sound system, a flash drive containing multimedia learning resources and apps and DA-ATI learning materials.

"There are a lot of apps and digital solutions we can tap and integrate into the DFP. With the help of PLDT and Smart, these can now reach the farthest corners of the Philippines," said DA-ATI director Remelyn Recoter, adding that she is hopeful that FarmTech would play a key role in encouraging farmers to use technology in their livelihood.

Enabling the digitalization of farmers is PLDT and Smart's integrated fixed and wireless networks across the country. **Darwin G. Amojelar**



## El Niño damages breach P150 million

By Rio N. Araja, Othel V. Campos, and Maricel V. Cruz

**T**HE local agriculture sector has sustained P151.3 million worth of damage and losses on the back of the ongoing El Niño, even as the country has yet to experience the peak of the dry spell.

The latest estimate released by the Department of Agriculture (DA) compares with the P109.4 million in losses at the end of January, covering 6,618 metric tons of palay (unhusked rice) and corn over 3,291 hectares.

The estimates said about 3,923

farmers in Western Visayas and the Zamboanga Peninsula were affected. Further details were not immediately available from the department.

"Most of the damage and losses were incurred on rice and corn that are on their reproductive stage," the bulletin

was cited as saying in a DA statement released Wednesday.

This developed as a strong and mature El Niño is expected to continue through February, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA).

Meanwhile, the DA will distribute vegetable seeds in Western Visayas while procuring planting materials for high value crops that need less water to help thousands of farmers in the Zamboanga peninsula cope with the damage and losses caused by El Niño.

In another development, a party-list lawmaker urged the government to ramp up the construction of post-harvest facilities this year to complement the increased borrowing of farmers to finance agriculture and fisheries production.

Rep. Wilbert T. Lee of the AGRI party-list group issued the call after the state-run Land Bank of the Philippines reported that loans to agriculture and rural development hit P755.1-billion mark at the end of 2023, equivalent to a 23 percent growth compared to the third quarter of last year.





## Kalinga farmers get P44M worth of machineries

FARM machinery and equipment worth P44.5 million were turned over to 13 rice farmer organizations in Kalinga by the Department of Agriculture-Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (DA-PhilMech) during a ceremony at the provincial capitol in Tabuk City on Wednesday,

February 7.

The farmers received 20 units of farm machinery, including four-wheel-drive tractors, rice combine harvesters, 6T recirculating dryers, and a hand tractor.

Rogelio Idago, PhilMech director for extension, said that the machinery would lower the production expenses of the farmers and

potentially decrease postharvest losses by up to 14 percent.

He encouraged the beneficiaries of farmers' cooperatives and associations to use the machinery efficiently and ensure that they are well maintained for longevity.

Idago also said that the machinery must be utilized by all members of the group and not just

the officers.

"I hope that not only the chairman and the vice chairman who will use these machineries because it will defeat the purpose of the program," Idago said.

Idago added that farmers will also be trained on how to operate and maintain the machinery.

**RUTH CUPANG**



■ These farm machinery were turned over to rice farmer organizations in Kalinga by the Department of Agriculture-Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization during a ceremony at the provincial capitol in Tabuk City on Wednesday, Feb. 7, 2024. PHOTO BY RUTH CUPANG





## Sugar & spice but not so nice



### BUSINESS CORRIDOR

FIL C. SIONIL

**A**llow me to tweak a bit the old saying that goes, "sugar and spice, and everything nice," which I often hear during my growing up years. This refers to the behavioral differences between boys and girls.

Yes, Virginia, my quest for knowledge has never waned through the years. And common wisdom tells me to be more open to learning about the weather phenomenon - El Niño, a risk factor that could push inflation up and prevent the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) from loosening its monetary stance.

Amid the slowdown in inflation rate to 2.8 percent in January, the BSP remains very careful in easing up the high interest rate, citing the "impact of a relatively weak global recovery and the government measures to mitigate the effects of El Niño could ease some price pressures."

I fully agree with the "strong El Niño conditions." The warming phase of the sea surface temperatures, El Niño, can disrupt normal weather patterns and this early, I am already bracing for a hotter summer.

This I experienced after spending a weekend in Baguio City for the social-responsibility endeavor of Rotary Club Makati-Paseo de Roxas tax awareness program dedicated to micro and small enterprises. From the cool breeze of the country's summer capital, the weather was altogether different 67.1 kilometers away, down in Manaoag in Pangasinan. The temperature was at a high of 33 degrees Centigrade and humidity was an average of 70 percent.

Even the recently concluded World Economic Forum placed emphasis on the increasing global surface temperatures that could trigger the possibility of more droughts, which are becoming longer and more extreme.

We will not only have harsh summer temperatures but there'll also be price pressures on basic commodities as El Niño can affect crop production of rice, sugar, and vegetables.

This got me riled-up on the extent of this weather phenomenon on crop production. "Definitely, it will impact on the sugar production," admits a muted source, who is well-versed in sugar production.

Sugarcane is a high water requirement crop. When soil moisture is inadequate, it can stunt sugarcane growth, leading to lower productivity.

For farmers capable of irrigation, the additional irrigation requirement causes costs to shoot up and profitability to decline. For farmers with no irrigation system, El Niño results in lower productivity or crop loss. Decreased production leading to reduced sugar supply will result in higher sugar prices.

With El Niño and other weather disturbances exerting pressure on sugar production, this may lead to tightness in supply, moving forward. In addition, the milling season is almost over. As mandated by the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA), the milling season runs for 38 milling weeks, which under the current crop year will end on May 31.

This could mean production reserves maybe tapped and again lead to importation to fill the production gap, which happened in August 2022, with SRA being directed to import some 300,000 metric tons of sugar.

I concur with the BSP on the need for the government to institute measures to mitigate the effects of El Niño to ease some price pressures as well as safeguard the production not only of sugar but other crops. These may include irrigation infrastructure like water pumping stations, adoption of

micro-irrigation techniques such as drip irrigation to ensure stable water supply, access to reasonably priced farm inputs, specifically fertilizers, and access to farm equipment to augment labor limitations.

Programs to help educate farmers on climate resilient farming practices like ways to improve soil fertility, water retention and more importantly, investment in research to develop drought-resistant varieties or all weather cane varieties are of great help.

And, when push comes to shove that importation is a recourse. An industry player suggests it should be raw sugar "for added value." With the country having excess capacity for refining, the imported raw sugar could then be distributed among the refineries and allow them to sell to the market.

*talkback to me at sionil731@gmail.com*





# Addressing worsening hunger in PH

**T**here must be a grassroots public-private sector national initiative to address our worsening hunger.

Last Jan. 22, the Social Weather Stations reported that the number of Filipino families that experienced "involuntary hunger" worsened from 9.8 percent in September 2023 to 12.6 percent in December 2023. That is a 29-percent increase in hunger. This may still get worse with the coming of El Niño amid rising prices.

Hunger Free Philippines stated: "A volatile social inequality and uneven wealth distribution have contributed to the country's ongoing crisis." Private sector groups like the Management Association of the Philippines (MAP) under then president Benedicta Du-Baladad launched nutrition as a major focus during her term.

Last Feb. 4, the AgriFishes Alliance decided to address hunger by advocating a small community approach. As early as the Jan. 16 Cabinet meeting, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. delivered a three-year plan with strategic components to address the issue. Among these are: "expanding and improving available agrifishery areas to increase production, improve and ex-

## COMMENTARY

ERNESTO M. ORDOÑEZ

pand market access, and have a strong partnership with the private sector."

### Two models

The Department of Agriculture (DA) must now consider immediate grassroots action, together with the private sector, to address our worsening hunger situation. We cite two private sector initiatives here that should be considered:

The first is Kabisig ng Kalahi, led by its founder, Vicky Weineke. She is also the vice president of the Agribusiness and Countryside Development Foundation (in partnership with MAP). Though a very successful entrepreneur for 30 years, Wieneke changed course and focused on addressing hunger.

Starting with just P40,000, Kabisig has implemented a nutrition model in more than 150 barangays throughout the country. Its major partners include local governments, the Department of Social Welfare and Development and the Department of Education. Its pri-

vate sector partners include civic groups, parishes and corporations like Unilever. For its phenomenal success in addressing hunger, Kabisig has received numerous national and international rewards.

Gia Mendoza wrote that through Kabisig, mothers were happy "to get out of the house and cultivate, socialize with others, and not worry about where the next meal was coming from."

Another example is Harbest Foundation led by its president, Toto Barcelona. Harbest promotes its "Family Food Garden Program in Every Household." Harbest is now in more than 40 provinces, with more than 200 mayors as partners.

Promoting both household and community gardens, Harbest features a 2,000-square-meter demo farm for different crops that anyone can grow in their own garden.

Barcelona states: "In two to three months, food on the table will have higher nutritional values to support a healthy body for each member of the family. [It is] toxic-free and readily available. Cooking lessons to prepare healthy food will uplift the family health index within one year."

There are other parts in the

Harbest holistic programs: (1) Nutrition education involves teaching nutrition and online sessions on the nutritional values of food ingredients with accompanying cooking lessons. (2) Intensive livelihood farming has hands-on training on crops production using simple and easily available technologies, resulting in increased productivity, better quality produce, and improved incomes. (3) Local government and state university and college-initiated training centers are needed because highly perishable vegetables and fruits must be produced within a province, near urban centers or island provinces.

There are other successful antihunger programs initiated by the private sector.

The DA must now look into these and consider catalyzing a national grassroots public-private initiative. Backed by strong political will, our hunger situation may yet improve. **INO**



The author is Agriwatch chair, former secretary of presidential flagship programs and projects, and former undersecretary of the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Trade and Industry. Contact is [agriwatch\\_phil@yahoo.com](mailto:agriwatch_phil@yahoo.com)





# 'Strong, mature' El Niño to persist—Pagasa

By Russel Loreto  
@RusselLoretoINQ

The Philippines will continue to face a "strong and mature" El Niño for the rest of February, according to the state weather bureau's latest El Niño advisory.

The climate phenomenon that results in the Pacific Ocean becoming warmer than usual and affects the weather around the world may last until May, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) said.

But the advisory signed by Pagasa administrator Nathaniel Servando clarified that a peaking El Niño would not necessarily lead to more adverse effects.

"While stronger El Niño events increase the likelihood

of El Niño-related climate anomalies, it does not necessarily equate to strong impacts, and these effects may not occur everywhere," it said.

## Dry spells

Pagasa said El Niño may bring below normal rainfall, dry spells and droughts in some areas of the country, especially in the first quarter of the year.

These impacts may harm water resources, agriculture, energy, health, public safety and other key sectors of the country, it said.

Low rainfall has already caused water levels in Luzon's nine dams to go down and these may continue to recede in the coming days.

Pagasa also reported that in January, most parts of Luzon, the Visayas and Northern Mindanao had way below to

below normal rainfall, while some provinces in Pampanga, Tarlac, Bicol region and the rest of Mindanao had near to above normal rainfall.

Based on the rainfall data, 14 provinces in Luzon had drought, or at least five months of very low rainfall; 10 provinces had dry spells, or three months of low rainfall; and 17 provinces had dry conditions, indicating two months of low rainfall.

## Rice crop damage

According to state weather bureau, some "climatic indicators" of El Niño include delayed onset of the rainy season, early termination of the rainy season, weak monsoon activity and fewer tropical cyclones entering the Philippine area of responsibility.

On Wednesday, the Depart-

ment of Agriculture (DA) reported that El Niño had caused P151.3 million worth of damage to rice crops in Western Visayas and Zamboanga Peninsula, an increase from last week's P109.4 million in previously reported losses.

## Rainfall data

According to the DA, 3,923 farmers and 3,291 hectares of rice and cornfields have been affected by the dry spell in the two regions. The drought has destroyed 6,618 metric tons of rice and corn, mostly at the reproductive stages.

In its advisory, Pagasa also noted that the mean temperatures across the country were near average to warmer than average, except in some areas where slightly cooler to cooler than average temperatures were recorded.

San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, recorded a new extreme temperature of 36 degrees Celsius on Jan. 7, breaking its previous record of 35.5 C on Jan. 11, 1990.

For February, Pagasa said the weather systems expected to affect the country were the northeast monsoon, locally known as "amihan," thunderstorms, shear line, easterlies, low pressure areas and the possible entry of a tropical cyclone, along with the influence of other climate modes like El Niño.

## 'Amihan' still here

The agency forecast that way below to below normal rainfall was likely to prevail over most parts of the country, with some exceptions of near normal rainfall over Bukidnon, Davao region and Caraga.

The agency also said that

there was a 45 percent to 50 percent chance of having below normal rainfall in most parts of the country.

By the end of February, two provinces in Luzon and one province in Visayas had potential for drought, 17 provinces for dry spell and 10 provinces for dry conditions.

Pagasa said cold temperatures may still occur due to the northeast monsoon.

"[The amihan] only weakened. It hasn't left yet," Lanie Aquino, Pagasa public relations officer, told reporters.

The forecast temperature ranges are: 18.5 C to 35 C in Metro Manila; 9.5 C to 27 C in the mountains of Luzon; 13 C to 36.5 C for the rest of Luzon; 19 C to 36 C in the Visayas; 12 C to 35 C in the mountains of Mindanao and 18 C to 37 C over the rest of Mindanao. INQ





## UK chamber of commerce raises concerns on reported plan to suspend MAV for pork imports

THE British Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines (BCCP) said on Thursday that it is concerned about the plan to suspend the minimum access volume (MAV) for pork, saying that such a move would affect domestic supply and run counter to existing trade agreements.

"The BCCP has been a consistent advocate of the lowered tariffs on meat and has supported the last two consecutive extensions as this will further assist in augmenting the pork supply," the chamber said in a statement.

"We are concerned about the Department of Agriculture's (DA) reported plan on the suspension of MAV for pork and we support the reported comments of MAV Advisory Council (MAC) on the impact on domestic supply and existing trade agreements," it added.

The MAV is a feature of the global trading system, by which a participating country agrees to open its market to shipments from overseas producers of selected commodities, up to a designated limit.

Citing the *Philippine Star*, the BCCP said that the suspension could impact the domestic supply of meat and risk trade agreements, including bilateral ones.

"We reiterate our support for Executive Order (EO) No. 50 and its full implementation to manage inflation and food supply," the BCCP said.

"We hereby acknowledge the role of agriculture in Philippine economic growth, and we look forward to the Bicameral Conference and therefore, the passage of the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act," it added.

In December, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. signed the EO 50 which extended a lower tariff regime on pork, rice, corn and coal.

Tariff rates were kept at 15% (within the MAV quota) and 25% (for shipments exceeding the quota) for pork, 5% (within the quota) and 15% (for shipments exceeding the quota) for corn, and 35% (all shipments) for rice until Dec. 31 to help manage down prices.

"The British Chamber maintains its commitment to ensuring food security and helping with the challenge of inflation by introducing quality British meat and establishing long-term relations with the importers to support the Philippine market," it said.

BCCP Executive Director Chris Nelson has said that total trade in goods and services be-

tween the UK and the Philippines grew to 2.9 billion pounds last year, with UK exports to the Philippines accounting for 1.3 billion pounds.

The top exports of the UK to the Philippines include meat and meat preparations. The Philippines is also UK's second top pork export destination in Asia, next to China.

Asked to comment, DA Undersecretary for Operations Roger V. Navarro said that a meeting regarding the issue is yet to be held.

"However, the committee already has a position which Secretary Kiko (Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr.) will present to the MAV Advisory Council," Mr. Navarro told *BusinessWorld* via a Viber message.

The Philippine MAV for pork currently stands at 54,210 metric tons. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**



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## TO ARREST FALLING SUGAR PRICES

# Traders, importers to buy local raw sugar at premium

By JASPER EMMANUEL ARCALAS

Sugar traders are keen on purchasing 300,000 metric tons of local raw sugar at a premium price in exchange for getting a priority allocation in future import programs of the government.

The industry intervention seeks to lift the prevailing mill-site prices of raw sugar that have fallen and remained below favorable levels for sugarcane planters, according to a draft Sugar Order (SO) obtained by **The STAR**.

The draft SO is currently being studied by the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) board in consultation with industry stakeholders, sources familiar with the matter said.

The document stipulated that sugar traders and importers have "manifested" their intention to buy a "limited" volume of locally produced raw sugar "at a premium."

The SRA, based on the document, deemed it "necessary" to implement "responsive" and "pre-emptive" measures to arrest falling raw sugar prices.

This measure, it noted, involves traders and importers purchasing raw sugar at a higher prevailing price in order "to qualify for a possible preference in the availment of allocation in the event of an importation program."

"The intention of this Limited Volume Purchase of locally produced sugar is to uplift the farmgate prices of locally produced sugar to a better and stable level, while ensuring optimal retail prices," the draft document read.

Sugar traders and importers that will participate in the procurement program "shall be given priority" in the next import program if the government decides to open one based on prevailing market conditions.

"The SRA categorically states that there is presently no program for sugar importation. As such, privileges that may be afforded to eligible participants under this Order shall apply to future import programs, if and when the need to import sugar arises," the draft order read.

Reacting to the import provision of the draft SO, the Sugar Council urged the SRA to "declare" that it will not open an

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### Traders From B1

import program for the entire 2024.

"While the section says in part, 'if and when the need for sugar importation arises...' the question is begged - why even mention it if there is no intention to import?" the group said.

The group also inquired on the status of the P5 billion sugar procurement program that SRA plans to implement together with the Philippine International Trading Corp.

The Sugar Council argued that the government should just stick and hasten its procurement plan and "reconsider" and "abandon" the

program proposed under the draft SO.

"If any delay is being caused, it is being caused by the SRA which already has P5 billion to start the project. Where is the P5 billion, and where are the implementing guidelines?" it said.

SRA Administrator Pablo Luis Azcona told **The STAR** that the government's own raw sugar procurement program is still on the table with the guidelines still being drafted.

Azcona said that sugar industry stakeholders were informed in a January meeting, which was attended by members of the Sugar Council, of the two procurement programs proposed by SRA.





## The importance of LGU support in agriculture: A fable

**S**pend enough time around people and one begins to hear stories about the circles they run in. This can be neither good nor bad, especially when treated as information that can help one make sense of why things are the way they are.

I heard a story recently that helped me understand part of why the Philippines, supposedly an agricultural nation, continues to languish in the field it is supposedly very proud to be part of. Let's call it a fable. Because it is a fable, it will be told in the most specific, but also the vaguest terms possible, including references to gender.

There once was a farmer who made a modest income from their livestock business, enough to encourage them to heavily invest in infrastructure. They had also spent a considerable number of years running the business, at least a decade, enough to

consider them a veteran, or at the very least, not a newbie.

But it was with great remorse that they had to shut down their business, not because they were losing money (though money had been tight lately, what with the rising costs of feed and whatnot), but because the local government of the area their farm was in (which, at that point, was mostly agricultural) had decided that agriculture businesses were passe and were looking to turn the area into an industrial park. One can only guess as to the reason behind this sudden change of heart, when the area, for decades, credited a lot of its prosperity to the many successful farms that operated in it. Perhaps it was an assurance that some other industry would bring



**AVANT GARDENER**

YVETTE TAN

in more revenue. Perhaps decision makers decided that farms were uncool. Whatever the reason, they would not be swayed, and all the livestock farms were told to pack up and move out, leaving our hypothetical farmer with the task of dismantling a multi-million peso operation in a short time span, or else be charged with going against the law.

But fate is fickle, and for whatever reason, the negotiations for the industrial park took longer than expected, long enough that the area's income began to suffer. The farmers, the same farmers who were told to leave, were invited to set up their farms once again. But our farmer had already spent a lot of money dismantling their operations. They were rightly scared that if they spent money to build their farm once again, they would be at the mercy of decision makers who could tell them to shut down their business on a whim, even if they owned their land.

Given this purely hypothetical story that in no way happened in real life and that I didn't hear firsthand, it's no wonder that it's not just marginalized farmers who, if they had a choice, don't want to have anything to do with the industry. Even well-off businesspeople are being driven to leave, not by dwindling profits, but by difficult, even hostile, business environments perpetuated

by decision makers blinded by the idea of generating more profit or the glamor of their area being associated with mechanical industry, not understanding that farming, when supported the right way, can be both.

Of course, there are LGUs that are highly supportive of the agricultural businesses within them, but they are not enough. The Philippines needs to bolster its agriculture industry not just so it can contribute to the GDP, but also because it needs to fortify its food security. We have to be prepared for a (hopefully hypothetical) time when countries will not sell us food, so we will have to be reliant on our own. We've already seen from countries such as India curbing its rice exports, so this conjecture isn't as fanciful as it sounds.

The Department of Agriculture seems to be setting down a model that will hopefully revitalize the industry, but even the best laid plans won't work without the cooperation of the actual people who can help implement them, which in this case, would be LGUs.

Let's hope that the scenario above, again, totally did not happen and wasn't told to me at all, becomes a thing of the past and that more LGUs realize the importance of food production, not just for a town's bottom line, but for the good of the Filipino people.



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## DBP grants Nueva Ecija farm ₱116-million loan

By LEE C. CHIPONGIAN

Government-owned Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP) released a loan worth ₱116 million for the expansion of iPigs Agricultural Farm in Laur, Nueva Ecija.

The term loan will be used to construct a bio-secured swine farm project in Nueva Ecija under DBP's Swine Repopulation, Rehabilitation, and Recovery (SWINE R3) Credit Program, according to DBP president and CEO Michael O. de Jesus.

DBP will be financing the construction of seven duplex-type, wean-to-finish piggery buildings located in a 12.6-hectare property in Laur.

De Jesus is hoping the project will promote a competitive and sustainable agriculture sector "as a means to achieve poverty reduction and inclusive growth, as well as in ensuring sufficient food supply in the country."

iPigs Agricultural Farm, which started in 2021, currently operates a swine contract growing agreement with Charoen Pokphand Foods

Philippines Corporation (CP-FPC), the local subsidiary of the Thailand-based conglomerate with investments and partnerships in 17 countries worldwide, said DBP.

The loan was one of the first granted under DBP's SWINE R3 facility. It is a lending program "aimed to boost government efforts to repopulate the local swine industry through the financing of medium and largescale swine projects."

De Jesus said that as of October 2023, the SWINE R3 facility have released a total ₱2.6-billion loans for 16 accounts. He also said DBP "is ready to fund more projects to ensure the continued availability of pork and pork products in the market."

DBP is the country's eighth largest bank and the second largest state-controlled financial institution. It is mandated to extend credit support to four strategic sectors of the economy: infrastructure and logistics; micro, small and medium enterprises; the environment; and social services and community development.





## The bamboo, a fascinating grass

**N**ot all the economic dilemmas we encounter today are the unwanted offspring of the COVID-19 pandemic, or a consequence of the Russia-Ukraine war. Partly influenced by historical experience, we have been culturized to attribute or blame others except ourselves for our sufferings. At the same time, it has become a national habit for us to run to a “big brother” or a “good neighbor” for rescue or sympathy every time a crisis occurs. We are not ashamed to beg.

Some of these habits were self-inflicted and could have been avoided if our development planners had more foresight and set aside more time to explore our own territory, and try to move forward with what we have. But we prefer leap-frogging from the *bahay kubo* concept to the mansions of the rich and famous, which seems to have become the guiding lifestyle now. How we’ve sunk to the level of importing 93 percent of our salt needs, while six million Filipino families remain homeless. The leap-frogging policy also explains why the thriving businesses are online gambling, lotto, and casinos.

To illustrate this folly, let me go back to the subject of this piece. It is refreshing to note that environmentalists are resurrecting the bamboo as an important plant. Like other endemic and natural potential sources of livelihood, the bamboo has been taken for granted. Its numerous uses are looked down on as insignificant so it never gained government support. Of course you cannot

build skyscrapers or subways with it nor increase the country’s GDP, but it is a life-giving and sustainable source for ordinary people who cannot afford to live in classic condominiums or skyscrapers. Still, with a little help from science and technology and the private sector, the humble bamboo can go places in the construction industry.

My own fascination with bamboo began when a storm hit our flowering mango trees and blew away the expected fruit buds. Disheartened, I studied the direction of the winds. Then I bought some bamboo planting materials from the Kawayan Farm in Pililla, Rizal. I planted the bamboo as wind breakers to protect our mango trees. Alas, storm winds have become fickle because of climate change. But the bamboo exhibited a higher value when the poultry houses were built. It provided the flooring material and later came in handy for repairs. Bamboo slats are easy to clean and “airy,” a boon to ventilation for the chickens.

I found other uses for the bamboo, and a few are worth mentioning: The only furniture in the long balcony of our farmhouse are the cool bamboo “*papag*” (native beds) that give us the pleasure of dozing off and breathing unpolluted mountain breeze. Big parties with

a hundred guests? No problem. Bamboo plates (*bilao*) lined with banana leaves are great. No breakages and no washing, and you can use the *bilao* several times. The most popular and enjoyable use of bamboo is its culinary role in almost all Asian restaurants. Among Filipinos, who can resist the *atsara dinandeng na saluyot at labong* with sizzling broiled tilapia dipped into the sauce? Happy slurping!

But this humble bamboo is not the centerpiece of the story. I only want to bring home the point that we can move ahead as a people by working with what we have: an agri-friendly country surrounded by seas teeming with marine wealth. Such treasures also hark back to Thomas Gray’s reminder: “Full many a gem of purest ray serene, the dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear; Full many a flower is burn to blush unseen, and waste its sweetness in the desert air.”

It is hoped that the new dispensation will include in its development plan the upgrading of the bamboo into significant use in the construction industry. It could help solve our housing shortage and reduce our dependence on cement and steel, which are a diminishing resource.

Eva Maggay-Inciong taught history and political science during her younger years. She once headed the Philippine Association of University Women, whose early founders were pioneer educators who led and won the fight for suffrage for Filipino women.





## 'CUSTOMER-CENTRIC' EXPANSION

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**  
@jordeenelagare

# CARGILL RAMPS UP POULTRY VENTURE WITH JOLLIBEE

Poultry grower Cargill Joy Poultry Meats Production Inc. (C-Joy) is all geared up to drive its business forward while doubling down on commitment to sustainability.

And C-Joy—the joint venture between Cargill Philippines, a local subsidiary of the global food and agribusiness leader, and fast food giant Jollibee Foods Corp. (JFC)—found the right person, its first female country director, Mija Darlene Cachapero, to lead the charge.

“We are aspiring to grow more with our customers and we will try to grow more with our responsibility of nourishing the Filipinos in a safe, sustainable and responsible way. So that means we will continue to espouse our values on safety and that’s deeply rooted in our people-first value as Cargill,” Cachapero tells the Inquirer in an interview.

The first order of business for Cachapero, an alumna of the

Ateneo de Manila University and the Yale School of Management in Connecticut, is to adhere to the highest quality and best practices in cultivating chickens at its poultry processing facility in Batangas, to help the Philippines ensure food security.

“Customer centricity is something that we’d like to push further, so that means leveraging our insights and innovation capabilities. When I say insight, it’s more like listening to the consumers, listening to the customers. What are their needs? What kind of challenges they are trying to solve? And we cocreate solutions with them,” Cachapero says.

Likewise, C-Joy aims to build a “robust portfolio” through the Tip-Top Chicken brand and enter new territories across and outside the metropolis.

“At first, we were only doing some breast chicken and for you to be known as a poultry brand, you have to have the entire suite of chicken products,” she says.



**GROWTH MODE** C-Joy's production facility in Sto. Tomas, Batangas —**PHOTO FROM CARGILL PHILIPPINES**

From chicken nuggets to patties, to *tocino* and roast chicken, the company wants to bring them all to the market.

### Distribution channels

C-Joy wants to expand its presence in the retail space as small grocery stores are popping up across the nation. Erstwhile heavily concentrated in Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon) because it has a processing plant in Sto. Tomas, Batangas, it is now penetrating

Metro Manila and adjacent provinces, including Bulacan.

At present, Tip-Top Chicken offers around 15 poultry products, such as marinated and processed chicken, to both wholesale and retail markets.

C-Joy is working to boost its supply chain by strengthening the farms and partnerships with farmers while optimizing plant operations.

Its poultry processing facility in Batangas has a production capacity of 50 million birds annu-

ally. This plant supplies affiliate brands such as Jollibee and Mang Inasal.

“There’s still room to expand that and there are many ways to do it,” Cachapero says, without disclosing details.

Raising production capacity is in line with the projected growth of the poultry sector, pegged at 4 to 5 percent, amid the ongoing fight against bird flu.

Meanwhile, C-Joy also plans to tap more farm partners in the Visayas and Mindanao. Currently, the company has 100 farm partners mainly located in Central Luzon and Calabarzon.

Despite its aggressive expansion, Cachapero says C-Joy, as a young company, intends to be more prudent on its expansion plans.

### Sustainability

C-Joy’s parent firm Cargill Philippines is investing \$2.6 million to support various farm projects aimed at advancing the

agriculture sector and protecting the environment.

Its Adopt-a-River for Tigiro River program aims to rehabilitate the river adjacent to its processing plant. For smallholder corn and coconut farmers, it also holds training on sustainable agricultural practices, improving productivity and market access.

It also covers the Agri-Sagana Project to boost the output of some 7,000 corn farming families and 10 cooperatives in Isabela and Cagayan. Another project is RISE Coco (Recovery Intervention for SEverely Affected Coconut Farming Communities of Bohol by ST Odette), which aims to replace damaged coconut trees.

“We have been already in the business of nourishing the world for 75 years and we’ve always said that our mission is to nourish the world in a safe, responsible and sustainable way,” Cachapero says.

Ensuring animal welfare by adopting best practices while protecting the environment is likewise part of its sustainability road map, she says. **INQ**





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## Metrobank keeps 4.3% inflation forecast

THE Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) is expected to fall short of achieving its inflation target of 2.0 to 4.0 percent this year due to significant upward pressure on inflation.

In its latest commentary, Metrobank Research retained its inflation forecast at 4.3 percent for this year, despite the consensus expectation of a sustained downward trend due to the current data.

"There continues to be strong upward inflation pressure for the year due to the impending effects of El Niño on food items, emerging geopolitical risks, and rising rice prices," it said.

Rice inflation surged to a 14-year high of 22.6 percent from December's 19.6 percent, which National Statistician Claire Dennis Mapa said was due to currently high global market prices.

The base effects that allowed for lower overall inflation had the opposite effect for rice, with Mapa noting that price growth for the staple was much lower a year ago.

Rice inflation is expected to continue accelerating as dry spells brought by El Niño affect farm output.

Inflation has comfortably settled within the target in January at 2.8 percent, having slowed from 3.9 percent

in December to near the bottom end of the BSP's target.

The latest figures, the lowest since October 2020's 2.3 percent, have sparked optimism that the central bank might reduce interest rates.

Currently, rates are at a 16-year high due to increased inflation, prompting a two-year-long tightening cycle.

However, as the economy has expanded better than expected at 5.6 percent last year, analysts believed that this might give the central bank enough room for further tightening.

The BSP acknowledged the anticipated slowdown in January but cautioned that inflation could pick up again in the second quarter. It emphasized that policy settings will stay stringent until price growth firmly aligns with the target.

Metrobank echoed this, saying that the BSP is further expected to stay "relatively more hawkish, likely to lag the Fed's (US Federal Reserve) first cut by up to a full quarter, as domestic price pressures remain stickier vs in the US."

"The recent inflation print provides the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas with an impetus to hold its policy rates steady at its first Monetary Board meeting on February 15," it said.

NIÑA MYKA PAULINE ARCEO



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## Is an independent Mindanao economically viable?

IN the heat of the recent political exchanges between President

FINER  
POINTSFERMIN  
ADRIANO

Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and his predecessor, former president Rodrigo Duterte, the latter threatened that he would move for the separation of Mindanao from the Philippines. There is nothing new to this because there were other attempts in the past to sever Mindanao from the Philippine Republic.

The earliest was during American colonial rule when big American corporations lobbied the US Congress to declare Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan as a separate territory. This was to purportedly protect its predominantly Muslim population and allow foreign investors to develop its rich agricultural lands. The move (i.e., the Bacon Bill) was successfully thwarted by Filipino politicians.

It took another 40 years for the Mindanao independence call to again erupt, in the aftermath of the infamous Jabidah Massacre of 1968 that saw scores of young Muslim soldiers murdered.

Datu Udtog Matalam, former governor of

► Finer B2

### ■ FINER FROM B1

## Is an independent

Cotabato province, established the "Muslim Independence Movement" with the goal of ensuring that his fellow Muslims would not suffer discrimination from the island's dominant Christian population. He later renamed it the "Mindanao Independence Movement" to secure wider sympathy.

The banner of establishing an independent Mindanao was later carried on by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) under Nur Misuari. In the early 1970s, a wholesale rebellion led by the MNLF broke out. The rebels demanded a separate state for Muslims so that they could exercise their customs, beliefs and religion, free from discrimination and oppression by the Christian government holding office in Luzon.

Misuari eventually signed a peace deal with the government in 1996 but the rebellion continued, this time led by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front led by Hashim Salamat and later by Murad Ebrahim.

Ebrahim also signed a peace pact with the Aquino administration in 2014 but it was during the presidency of Duterte that the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) was established. The BARMM enjoys autonomy as it has its own parliamentary system, whose members are mostly Muslims, to govern the region.

But why does the idea of independence or separation from the Philippines continue to re-echo in Mindanao leaders' rhetoric whenever they are disgruntled over policies enunciated in Metro Manila? Foremost is the fact that their island has long been treated as a mere appendage by "Imperial Manila." A cursory examination of Mindanao's history will reveal that its development classically followed the colonial pattern.

Mindanao was treated as a supplier of food and raw materials to the industries and inhabitants of Luzon. Roads were built to access plantation, mining or forestry enclaves and which led to the nearest ports where ships were waiting to transport food and raw materials elsewhere. Inter- and intra-regional was hardly promoted as there was no connectivity within Mindanao

to speak of.

The budgets allocated to Mindanao, for the bulk of its history, never reached the size of its contribution in terms of land area, population, poverty, potential for growth, and contribution to the national economy. Underinvestment for Mindanao development is the rule rather than the exception.

Mindanao covers a third of the Philippines' land area. It is home to a quarter of the country's people. It produces around 60 percent of total corn output, another 60 percent of total coconut yield, a quarter of total rice harvest, has 60 percent of our total mineral resources, and is the leading producer of rubber and palm oil. The BARMM, in particular, is the second-biggest contributor to total fish catch, is the main producer of banana and pineapple for exports, and contributes nearly 40 percent to the Philippine food supply.

On the downside, it is also in Mindanao where poverty is the worst. The long history of conflict in the island and the presence of private armed groups undeniably contributed.

Then there are policies formulated in "Imperial Manila"





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that have adversely affected the development potentials of Mindanao. For instance, there is the Cabotage Law, which stipulates that only domestic shippers can bring goods from one local port to another. This prevents foreign vessels docking in Manila from picking up cargo destined for Mindanao, which results in higher shipping costs for Mindanao producers and entrepreneurs. This explains why agricultural products from Mindanao, like corn and vegetables, are much more expensive compared to those sourced from Thailand, China or the US.

There is also the issue of agrarian reform, which originally was meant to address the insurgency problem in Luzon. It was later applied nationally but the belief of indigenous communities (including Muslims) in Mindanao is quite the reverse. They subscribe to communal land ownership instead of individual ownership, as they treat themselves as mere "trustees" of the land, which is owned by their Supreme Being.

I could go on and on citing examples such as policies prohibiting the export of corn, which benefits feed millers mostly located in

Luzon, to having to secure various types of permits from offices in Manila just to convert small waterfalls into energy sources and develop coastal areas for mariculture, etc.

I lived in Davao for almost five years during the Ramos administration. There was a time when we met a group of investors who were curious that there was no electric fan factory in Mindanao despite the tropical weather. When they asked how much an electric fan cost, they were amazed at the exorbitant price. They immediately offered to produce it for half the price, by establishing a factory in Mindanao and allowing lower tariffs on certain parts. Unfortunately, it could not happen because the policy was to protect industries in Luzon. (There was practically no heavy industry in Mindanao to protect.)

This led us to think: "Why is such a policy being applied to Mindanao when it is obvious that it is inimical to the island's development interest?" Someone from the group gave a simple answer: "Imperial Manila!"

(fdadriano88@gmail.com)



## *14 provinces reeling from El Niño*

By **ROMINA CABRERA**

Drought-hit provinces climbed to 14 as the strong El Niño phenomenon continues to dry up parts of the country, according to the state weather bureau.

By the end of February, there could be 24 drought-hit provinces.

The provinces of Benguet, Ifugao, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Mountain Province, Nueva Ecija, Nueva Vizcaya and Pangasinan are experiencing drought as of the end of January.

Drought was earlier declared in the provinces of Apayao, Bataan, Cagayan, Cavite, Ilocos Norte, Kalinga and Palawan.

Most global climate models predict that El Niño will persist through the March-May season, according to state seismologists.

Drought conditions are characterized by below normal rainfall conditions (21 to 60 percent reduction from average) for five consecutive months, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical

Services Administration (PAGASA).

Meanwhile, dry spells are occurring in 10 provinces in Luzon and the Visayas, including Abra, Aurora, Bataan, Isabela, Metro Manila, Occidental Mindoro, Quirino, Rizal and Zambales.

Dry spells are below normal rainfall conditions for three consecutive months.

Dry conditions were recorded in 17 provinces – Batangas, Laguna, Masbate and Oriental Mindoro in Luzon; Antique, Biliran, Capiz, Cebu, Eastern Samar, Guimaras, Iloilo, Leyte, Negros Oriental and Samar in the Visayas and Lanao del Norte, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi in Mindanao.

Dry conditions are below normal rainfall conditions for two consecutive months.

The northeast monsoon and the easterlies are expected to affect parts of the country, bringing light and scattered rains.

Flash floods and landslides during moderate and heavy rains are possible, PAGASA warned.





## DBP lends P116 M for swine farm expansion

By **JASPER EMMANUEL ARCALAS**

State-owned Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP) said it extended a P116-million loan for the expansion of a swine farm project in Nueva Ecija to boost the government's hog repopulation efforts.

DBP president and CEO Michael de Jesus said the loan was granted under its Swine Repopulation, Rehabilitation, and Recovery (SWINE R3) Credit Program for the expansion of iPigs Agricultural Farm in Laur, Nueva Ecija.

"DBP is excited to fund this initiative aligned with the vision of President Marcos of promoting a competitive

and sustainable agriculture sector as a means to achieve poverty reduction and inclusive growth, as well as in ensuring sufficient food supply in the country," De Jesus said.

The loan will be used for the construction of seven duplex-type, wean-to-finish piggery buildings of iPigs Agricultural Farm in its 12.6-hectare property in Laur, Nueva Ecija, he said.

The DBP said the iPigs Agricultural Farm began operations in 2021 and has an existing swine contract growing agreement with Charoen Pokphand Foods Philippines Corp. (CPFPC).

CPFPC is the local subsidiary of the Thailand-based conglomerate Charoen

Pokphand Foods that has investments and partnerships in 17 countries worldwide, the DBP added.

"The loan was one of the first granted under SWINE R3 facility, a lending program aimed to boost government efforts to repopulate the local swine industry through the financing of medium and large-scale swine projects," De Jesus said.

The DBP has approved a total amount of loan of P2.6 billion under its SWINE R3 Credit Program covering 16 accounts as of October 2023.

"DBP is ready to fund more projects to ensure the continued availability of pork and pork products in the market," De Jesus said.





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## NEWS BRIEF

### 50% parte ng 'Pinas apektado sa El Niño

Makakaranas ng tagtuyot ang nasa 35% hanggang 50% bahagi ng bansa dahil sa peak ng El Niño phenomenon.

Ayon sa Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa), tumindi ang dry spell sa unang quarter ng taon dahil sa mababang tag-ulan dahilan para mas marami pang lugar sa bansa ang makakaranas ng tagtuyot.

"By the end of February, twenty-four (24) provinces in Luzon and one (1) province in Visayas are potential for meteorological drought conditions; seventeen (17) provinces for dry spell, while, ten (10) provinces will be potential for dry conditions," ayon sa Pagasa.

Ito umano ay mas matindi pa sa kanilang naging assessment ngayong taon.

Kabilang sa nakaranas ng tatlong magkakasunod na buwan ng below-normal na pag-ulan o mas mataas sa 80% na bawas mula sa average rainfall ay ang Abra, Apayao, Aurora, Bataan, Benguet, Cagayan, Cavite, Ifugao, Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Isabela, Kalinga, La Union, Metro Manila, Mountain Province, Nueva Ecija, Nueva Vizcaya, Occidental Mindoro, Palawan, Pangasinan, Quirino, Rizal, at Zambales sa Luzon, habang Negros Occidental naman sa Visayas.

Nakaranas naman ng dry spell o tatlong magkakasunod na buwan ng below normal rainfall condition o 21-60% na reduction ng average rainfall ay ang Batangas, Laguna, Masbate, at Oriental Mindoro sa Luzon, Antique, Biliran, Capiz, Cebu, Eastern Samar, Guimaras, Iloilo, Leyte, Negros Oriental, at Samar sa Visayas, at Lanao del Norte, Sulu, at Tawi-Tawi naman sa Mindanao. (Natalia Antonio)



# REMATE

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Date: 09 FEB 2024

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## Bamboo industry, isusulong sa Senado: \$3.5B kikitain ng PH economy

**ISINUSULONG** ng isang mambabatas ang pagpapalunlad ng bamboo industry sa Pilipinas na inaasahang kikitain ng \$3.5 bilyon kada taon sa ekonomiya ng bansa.

Inihayag ito ni Senador Mark Villar sa pagsusulong ng Senate Bill (SB) 2513 o ang Institutionalization of the Bamboo Industry Development in the Philippines o Kawayan Act.

"Through the Kawayan Act, we can look forward to a Philippine economy that stands as mighty and grows as rapidly as bamboo does. Similarly, the development of our bamboo industry mirrors the persisting Filipino resilience amid various challenges. No matter what hinders us, no matter what sways and bends us, we will continue to push forward towards progress and development," ayon kay

Villar.

Binanggit ng senador ang research and development programs na isinusulong ng Departments of Science and Technology, trade, environment, at agriculture sa tangkang "tugunan ang kawalan ng impormasyon at data resources."

"Yet, these initiatives are fragmented and this is worsened by the perception of the private sector for a lack of a functional governmental body overseeing the development of the industry, which thus hinders its optimization," ani ng senador.

Inihayag pa ng mambabatas na upang matugunan ang naturang pangangailangan, layunin ng Kawayan Act na patatagin ang Philippine Bamboo Industry Development Council, na binuo ng Executive Order 879, na magsisilbing central body sa

direksiyon ng pangkalahatang patakaran at program sa lahat ng bamboo stakeholders.

Inaatasan ang Council na lumikha at ipatupad ang Philippine Bamboo Industry Development Roadmap.

Ipinaliwanag pa ni Villar sa panukalang batas na: "SB 2513 also seeks to further provide a comprehensive approach to the development of the bamboo industry as its provisions mandate the departments of environment, trade, science and technology, tourism, and education and their attached agencies to use bamboo in government programs and to scale up the use, investment promotions, research, and development of bamboo."

"The Philippine Bamboo Industry Development Roadmap will be guided with actionable,

time-bound, and realistic objectives that are aligned with the Philippine Development Plan, in which the former will include substantial and attractive incentives to encourage investments in the bamboo industry," aniya.

Binanggit ng senador na maraming potensiyal na pang-ekonomiya at kahalagahan sa kapaligiran ang bamboo industry kabilang ang trade value, na inaasahang aabot USD88.43 billion sa 2030.

Idinagdag pa niya na bukod sa USD3.5 billion, inaasahan sa industriya na makatulong sa ekonomiya, mahusay na pollution control capacity ang kawayan na naglalabas ng 38 percent na mas maraming oxygen kaysa puno at humihigop ng 12 tonelada hanggang 12 toneladang carbon dioxide kada hektarya.

**ERNIE REYES**





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## Soybeans, wheat drop

SINGAPORE- Chicago soybeans lost more ground on Thursday, while corn prices traded close to a three-year low hit in the previous session, as improved weather in Argentina and Brazil boosted expectations of abundant supplies.

Wheat fell for the first time in three sessions.

"There are forecasts of more favorable weather in South America, mainly in Argentina, which have raised hopes of even bigger crops," said one Sydney-based grains trader.

The most-active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) fell 0.1 percent to \$11.88-1/4 a bushel,

while corn was down 0.1 percent at \$4.33-3/4 a bushel, after dropping to its weakest since December 2020 at \$4.33 on Wednesday.

Wheat fell 0.5 percent to \$5.99 a bushel.

Argentina's main farmland will receive significant rainfall over the next few days, the Buenos Aires Grains Exchange said on Wednesday, adding this should boost the country's current soybean and corn crops.

In recent weeks, Argentina's top agricultural areas have experienced mostly dry conditions and high temperatures during the Southern Hemisphere summer. -Reuters