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Everybody's Newspaper



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DA ASSURES ENOUGH RICE FOR FIRST HALF-YEAR
AS IMPORTS ARRIVE, HARVEST NEARS



EDITORIAL

Rice supply

THE Department of Agriculture has given assurances that the rice supply in the Philippines "is sufficient" for the first six months of the year.

Reports said that a total of 750,000 metric tons of imported rice arrived in Manila in December and January, boosting the stock-piles.

And note that the upcoming rice harvest usually peaks in March and April in this impoverished nation of rice-eating people.

In the view of many, notably the poor, what is worrisome is the existence of unscrupulous traders, who might try to exploit the situation.

These "economic saboteurs" may use the El Nino phenomenon as an excuse to hoard rice to push prices to "unreasonable high levels."

And we share the view of Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. that "what we need to guard against now are (these) profiteers."


Of course, the government, through concerned offices and agencies, are out to hit hard at "profiteers and hoarders."

In fact, we believe that it is just a matter time before these heartless and erring traders are identified, arrested and charged in court.

Without doubt, creating an artificial rice shortage, particularly during hard times and emergencies, is revolting to the senses.

The authorities should be commended for ensuring that the people have access to affordable but quality rice throughout the

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FRAME



HATCHING A PLAN Vendors arrange trays of eggs at a wholesale stall in Mega Q Mart, Quezon City on Tuesday, Feb. 6. The **Department of Agriculture** has asked other agencies to convince people to consume more eggs to address an oversupply in local production, which has caused farm-gate prices to go down to as low as P4 each.—GRIG C. MONTEGRANDE



REGIONS

Luzon farmers start to feel El Niño's grip

TUMAUNINI, ISABELA—Ricefields in the Ilocos and Cagayan Valley regions have started to dry up but farmers continue to plant palay despite unfavorable conditions, hoping to recoup losses. In Isabela, there is a growing concern over the receding water level at Magat Dam, the main source of irrigation for 80,000 hectares of farmlands. But local officials said measures were in place to help mitigate the impact of the dry spell. —STORY BY INQUIRER LUZON **A7**



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Luzon farmers start to feel El Niño's grip

Rice farms relying on rains in Isabela, Pangasinan begin to dry up; agriculture, local officials firm up plans to mitigate impact of drought

By Villamor Visaya Jr.,
Yolanda Sotelo
and John Michael Mugas
@InquirerLuzon

TUMAUNINI, ISABELA—As the midday temperature peaks on Friday, Sergio Areglado, a farmer from Barangay Liwanag here, proceeded to plant rice in his farm despite the imminent drought accompanying the El Niño weather phenomenon.

With the help of six farm hands, Areglado was hoping to earn by planting palay during the off-season cropping period even with the unfavorable weather conditions.

"Our farms are not irrigated during this time, but we have a nearby river to source water for our plants," he said, noting that they plan to use water pumps for irrigation.

Areglado, 40, said another challenge would be the increasing cost of gasoline for farm equipment, as this would add to the overall production cost. He would typically spend between P80,000 and P100,000 per hectare for seeds, pesticides, fertilizers, labor and other provisions.

But Areglado said he was fortunate because he was able to sell his recently harvested palay for P25 to P27 per kilo.

"The current market for palay is still favorable. We just hope that we won't face too many difficulties during this off-season planting period," he shared.

Mark Mercado, another farmer from Gamu town, lamented that while their farmland in Mabini village is irrigated, the available water supply is insufficient.

"We'll resort to using water pumps as our irrigation canals start to run dry," he said.

Dam level

Some 80,000 hectares of farms in Isabela rely on Magat Dam for irrigation but water level in the reservoir continues to recede, raising concerns among the local farmers.

"There's hardly any water left for our farms due to the impending drought," Mercado said.

The National Irrigation Administration-Magat Dam Reservoir Division (NIA-Mariis) reported that the reservoir level had dropped to 181.92 meters above sea level on Friday, below the normal level of 191 masl and the spilling level of 193 masl.

Roldan Bermudez, head of the engineering and operations division of NIA-Mariis, said cloud seeding had been included in their contingency plan, especially

in Isabela, Quirino and parts of Nueva Vizcaya and Ifugao.

Bermudez stressed that while the water supply in the dam is expected to last until the end of the dry cropping season, the drought is likely to impact crops during the wet cropping season, starting in May.

Damaged crops

In Pangasinan province, palay planted in 34.4 ha of farms at Barangay Evangelista in Tayug town had been destroyed, data from the Department of Agriculture (DA) in the Ilocos region showed.

Vida Cacal, information officer of DA Ilocos, said the crops, which were in the booting stage (period when the panicle grows), were beyond recovery.

At least 30 farmers cultivating the affected land have requested corn seeds as replacement for their lost palay.

Cacal said affected areas in Pangasinan were just a fraction of the over 68,539 ha of rice farms and 6,000 ha of corn farms identified as vulnerable to El Niño across the Ilocos region, primarily due to their reliance on rainwater.

Pangasinan bears the brunt of vulnerability to El Niño, with 35,300 ha identified as at risk.

The DA Ilocos has been allocated P1.6 billion for El Niño mitigation efforts, of which P870.3 million is readily available.

To mitigate El Niño's impact, the agency has implemented various programs, including strengthening disaster response task forces, mapping drought-vulnerable areas, providing water pumps to farmers and distributing drought-resistant vegetable seeds, such as mongo and peanuts.

Local farmers were also encouraged to grow sweet potato and purple yam, which require less water.

In Ilocos Norte province, residents in the towns of Vintar, Marcos, Sarrat, Piddig, Bacarra and Dingras were asked to prepare for the impact of El Niño, according to the Ilocos Norte agriculture office.

A water scheduling scheme has been implemented by farmers in Sarrat to ensure the sufficiency of supply. Some wells in Sarrat and Pasuquin have also started drying up, residents said.

The provincial environment and natural resources office said measures were in place to control forest fires, particularly in the mountainous areas straddling Dingras, Solsona and Nueva Era. **INQ**



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El Niño damage hits P151M – DA

AGRICULTURAL damage caused by El Niño has risen to P151.3 million, with most of the losses occurring in regions where rice is cultivated, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said.

In its third and latest El Niño bulletin, the DA said the weather pattern had so far affected 3,291 hectares of rice fields, mostly in the Western Visayas and Zamboanga Peninsula.

Volume losses totaled 6,618 metric tons (MT) and some 3,923 farmers were said to have been affected.

"Most of the damage and losses were incurred on rice and corn that are on (sic) their reproductive stage," the DA said.

In particular, 6,079 MT of rice were affected, while for corn it was 539 MT.

Interventions worth some P1 million are in the pipeline, the Agriculture department said.

These include cloud seeding operations, pest control management and the promotion of wider use of drought-resistant crop varieties.

► P151M B2

■ P151M FROM B1

El Niño

The Central Luzon region, which produces most of the country's rice supply, has been experiencing below normal rainfall conditions, the department said.

This could lead to "reduced crop yields, pests and disease infestations, increased production costs and market fluctuations," it added.

The provinces of Nueva Ecija and Tarlac in Central Luzon have also reported infestation of armyworms.

The department assured that market conditions for agricultural commodities in the region remained stable except for onions.

In the Cagayan Valley region, meanwhile, water levels in the Cagayan River have dropped, potentially affecting corn and rice output.

The Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon) region has also been experiencing "insufficient rainfall" since January 16.

The Agriculture department said the region needed supplementary irrigation systems to alleviate the possible effects of drought.

Some regions, meanwhile, are experiencing sufficient rainfall, including Bicol, Central and Eastern Visayas, Northern Mindanao and Caraga.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



AMID EL NIÑO LOSSES

Phl to import more rice – USDA

By JASPER EMMANUEL ARCALAS

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) hiked its rice import forecast for the Philippines to 3.9 million metric tons this year, driven by bigger purchases from Vietnam.

The USDA's latest projection is 100,000 MT higher than its 3.8 million MT rice import forecast for the country last month.

The USDA explained that it revised upward its full-year rice import estimate for the Philippines because of the country's "strong recent purchases from Vietnam."

"Total (global rice) imports are forecast virtually unchanged as an increase for Indonesia and the Philippines offset a decrease for China," the USDA said in its world grain market report released yesterday.

With the latest estimate, the USDA sees the Philippines becoming the world's largest rice importer for the second consecutive year.

Global rice imports this

year are estimated, at 53.383 million MT versus the 52.163 million MT last year, based on USDA data.

The USDA projected that the Philippines' rice requirement would rise by three percent year-on-year to record 16.5 million MT this year from 16 million MT in 2023.

"Global (rice) consumption is up with more imports for Indonesia and the Philippines," it added.

Global rice consumption is pegged at 522.898 million MT this year from 522.1 million MT last year, according to the USDA.

The Philippines has imported about 286,000 MT of rice as of Jan. 25, with more than half coming from Vietnam, latest Bureau of Plant Industry figures showed.



The Philippines is expected to import more rice amid the raging El Niño.

Federation of Free Farmers national manager Raul Montemayor said the USDA's rice import forecast is "not far from reality" since the country may have to import more due to the anticipated adverse impact of El Niño on local production.

"We do not expect an increase in production this year due to weather disturbances. We will have to import the deficit – the reduction in production," Montemayor said.

Earlier estimates by the DA indicated that the country's

rice output in the first half could decline by about 100,000 MT to as much as 185,000 MT due to El Niño.

The USDA is also projecting that the Philippines' rice output could decline to 12.5 million MT this year from 12.625 million MT last year due to dry weather.

The Philippines imported almost 3.6 million MT of rice last year, down from the record-high 3.82 million MT in 2022.

Turn to B4

Phl From B1

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. earlier said the country would have sufficient rice stocks until June due to recent imports and the upcoming dry season harvest. However, Laurel cautioned

that rice prices could remain stable until September due to high prevailing international prices.

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



El Niño agri damage reaches P151.3 M

Damage to agriculture due to El Niño in Western Visayas and Zamboanga peninsula has reached P151.3 million, with 3,291 hectares of agricultural land affected, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Latest data showed that 3,923 farmers were affected.

Losses amounting to P141.2 million covered 2,971 hectares of rice fields.

Negros Occidental Gov. Eugenio Jose Lacson said the provincial government would provide financial assistance of P2,500 each to farmers affected by the drought.

The Office of the Provincial Agriculturist said damage due to the dry spell in Negros Occidental has increased to P12.8 million.

Meanwhile, the water lev-

els in nine dams in Luzon continue to recede.

Binga Dam in Benguet recorded the biggest drop in water elevation at 571.33 meters yesterday, or 3.67 meters below its normal high level of 575 meters.

In Angat Dam, the water level dropped by .21 meters compared to its previous level of 209.76 meters, or 2.45 meters below its normal high of 212 meters.

The water elevations in Ipo Dam in Bulacan, La Mesa Dam in Quezon City, Ambuklao Dam in Benguet, San Roque Dam in Pangasinan, Pantabangan Dam in Nueva Ecija, Magat Dam in Isabela and Caliraya Dam in Laguna were also below their normal high levels.

— Bella Cariaso, Gilbert Bayoran



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El Niño humahagupit, nalugi sa agri P150M na

PUMALO na sa mahigit P150 milyon ang kabuuang danyos ng El Niño sa sektor ng agrikultura lalo na sa mga palayan at taniman ng mais, ayon sa ulat ng Department of Agriculture (DA).

Base sa ikatlong El Niño Bulletin na inilabas ng DA nitong Biyernes, Pebrero 9, nasa 4,000 mga magsasaka na mula sa Western Visayas at Zamboanga Peninsula ang apektado ng El Niño.

Kabilang naman sa mga probinsya na nakapagtala ng pagkalugi sa kanilang mga pananim na palay at mais sa Iloilo, Antique, Negros Occidental, at Zamboanga del Norte.

Ayon pa sa ulat, nasa 3,291 ektarya na ang apektado ng tagtuyot dahil sa El Niño.

Subalit sinabi ni DA Spokesperson at Assistant Secretary Arnel De Mesa na sa kabuuan ay hindi pa masyadong malaki ang naitala na pagkalugi sa tagtuyot.

Hindi rin aniya masyadong apektado nito ang kabuuang suplay ng bigas sa bansa lalo pa at may mga ginagawa naman na kaukulang mga hakbang upang maibsan ang epekto ng El Niño.



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DA: Agri losses in El Niño-affected areas reach P150M

By Joel dela Torre

THE El Niño phenomenon is most felt in Western Visayas and the Zamboanga Peninsula where the damage and losses to farms reached P151.3 million, with 3,923 farmers affected.

According to the Department of Agriculture, vegetable seeds were immediately distributed in Western Visayas while planting materials for high value crops that need less water were procured for Zamboanga Peninsula to help the farmers cope with the losses.

These actions are on top of DA's cloud seeding operations, pest control management, and promotion of wider use of drought-resistance crop varieties to help regions experiencing water shortage.

The latest El Niño bulletin on possible production losses are at 6,618 metric tons of palay and corn while 3,291 hectares are affected by the dry spell.

"Most of the damage and losses were incurred on rice and corn that are on their reproductive stage," the latest El Niño Bulletin said.

The DA has adopted an alternate wetting-and-drying system that reduced water consumption in rice fields while checking use of the much-needed solar-powered irrigation systems to bring water to farms.

Not only that, the DA said it is also studying areas for the feasibility of using shallow tube wells in rain-fed areas.



The agency also plans to endorse affected farmers to the Department of Social Welfare and Development, and Department of Labor and Employment for other forms of assistance, including financial support.