

CLIPPINGS FOR FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2024

A. SEC. FTL Jr. QUOTED

MANILA STANDARD

DA implements three-year sustainability program

DA digitizes registry of farmers, fisherfolk

Agriculture boosted December employment, added 715,000 jobs

‘Farmers key to record agri output’

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

MAV suspension could lead to higher pork prices – importers

REIN in inflation!

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT

Harmonizing of rules to ease regulatory burden in agri

BUSINESS MIRROR

‘Agri accounted for 1 in every 4 jobs in PHL’

PEOPLE’S JOURNAL

Historic rice production

B. DA FAMILY

MANILA STANDARD

PLDT, Smart, DA further empower farmer groups’ digital transformation with...

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

Farmers ask NIA: What happened to billions for irrigation?

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

DA reviving new policies to avoid clashing with Arta mandate

THE MANILA TIMES

Fisheries output down 1.8% last year

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT

NIA to adjust cropping calendar

BUSINESS MIRROR

Local dairy output in 2023 declines by 4.7% - PSA data

BUSINESS WORLD

NIA considering crop calendar adjustment

Freeze on MAV seen pressuring prices of pork, corn upwards

REMATE

El Niño at La Niña tumitindi

PILIPINO STAR NGAYON

DENR, DA kakalampagin ngayon ng mga protesters

Editorial: NIA, kilos na, El Niño ratsada na

C. AGRI-RELATED STORY

MANILA STANDARD

Four ways pulses nourish soils and keep biodiversity

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Negros Occ. To aid drought-hit-farmers

In Luzon, dry spell brings hardship to coco farmers

BUSINESS MIRROR

'House will continue to fight rice smuggling, hoarding'

BUSINESS WORLD

Nonmonetary measures needed to address rice inflation as prices may...

ABANTE TONITE

News brief: Romualdez kinilala sakripisyo ng mga magsasaka

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL

Agriculture created 500k jobs in Dec.

Gov't mulls targeted subsidy to agri sector – NEDA exec

D. FOREIGN STORY

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT

Soybeans, corn weaken

BUSINESS MIRROR

FAO launches new portal for statistics on food and diet

Traders pile in to cocoa options with futures soaring to records

BUSINESS WORLD

Soybeans, corn stuck near 3-year lows on high stocks

Warm winter, droughts destroying crops in Italy

Polish farmers' protests crank up pressure on EU agriculture head

El Niño waning, La Niña to develop in H2 2024



DA implements three-year sustainability program

By Othel V. Campos

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) is banking on a three-year sustainability plan to improve production, mechanize operations and upskill farmers on the modern ways of farming.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu-Laurel said the three-year plan would focus on improving irrigation and upgrading post-harvest facilities.

"No major post-harvest facility was funded by government in the last 40 years. We need really to fund these projects. But we must build bigger. We have three designs—small, medium and large, not mini," he said.

Tiu Laurel's plan outlines a significant investment towards achieving food security in the Philippines. The focus on improved irrigation and post-harvest facilities aims to increase rice production while reducing wastage, with additional initiatives addressing vegetable losses.

While lowering rice prices to P20 per kilo remains a long-term goal, the plan highlights the challenges and ongoing efforts to ensure food security for the nation.

He said P1.2 trillion is needed to build more efficient irrigation systems and irrigate 1.2 million hectares of farmland, primarily rice fields.

Building integrated rice mill and warehouse complexes — to reduce an estimated 15 percent in losses in rice due to the lack of post-harvest facilities — will cost around P90 billion, he said.

This will help save around P10.7 billion worth of rice or an additional 23 days of rice inventory, which is equivalent to around 10 percent of rice imports based on 2023 figures.

For 2024, the government allocated P1 billion to build four cold storage facilities, primarily at the Food Terminal Inc.



Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu-Laurel Complex in Taguig City, to partly address the recurrent oversupply and wastage of vegetables in parts of Luzon alone. The 5,000-pallet position cold storage facility in FTI will take at least 12 months to complete.

Transporting vegetables from Benguet to Metro Manila, according to traders, result in 30-percent losses that are eventually passed on to consumers.

"If we try to solve the problem as soon as possible, assuming a target of 2025, I need an additional P5 billion to address the vegetable cold-storage issue of the whole nation," he said.

While acknowledging the role of local government units (LGUs) in managing agricultural issues, Tiu Laurel reiterated the DA's commitment to helping LGUs resolve these challenges.



DA digitizes registry of farmers, fisherfolk

By Othel V. Campos

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is undertaking a digital overhaul, upgrading its farmer and fisherfolk registry to optimize resource allocation and ensure targeted interventions.

Dubbed the "Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture," the update focuses on collecting accurate data for efficient project implementation, monitoring, and ultimately paving the way for a more prosperous food chain.

"We were supposed to finish this

update last year but we have so many islands to cover. We have to make a distinction between a farmer and a farmworker," said Agriculture Undersecretary for operations Roger Navarro, adding that the move would allow the department to cleanse the list for better use of resources.

The new registry seeks to segregate farmworkers from the beneficiary list. Their needs fall under different agencies like the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), ensuring targeted assistance, the DA said.

The initial list stands at 1.4 million, requiring meticulous verification and validation, composed mostly of farmers identified as the poorest sector in the country.

Mobilizing 16,000 staff across the archipelago presents a logistical challenge, but the DA is joining forces with local government units (LGUs).

The new registry's data-driven approach aligns with Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.'s vision of digitalization.

He recognizes technology as a valuable key to enhancing DA operations and maximizing returns for farmers. He also reiterated plans to reclaim the statistics monitoring capacity of the DA, previously known as the Bureau of Agricultural Statistics (BAS), a move expected to further strengthen the commitment to data-driven decision-making.

Labor statistics show that agriculture provides employment to one in every four Filipinos. From 2021 to 2022, the DA began upgrading its management information system to enhance monitoring of projects and interventions and facilitate real-time recording of agri-fishery information.



Agriculture boosted December employment, added 715,000 jobs

By Othel V. Campos

AGRICULTURE continued to support job generation in the country, accounting for one in every four jobs in December 2023 and helping drive economic growth, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said over the weekend.

The DA cited data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showing that employment in the sector is about a fourth or about 24.4 percent of the 50.5 million employed in December or around 12.3 million Filipinos.

"We could do much more in generating jobs and helping more of Filipinos in agriculture to have better lives. The Department of Agriculture is now completing a three-year strategy that will modernize agriculture, attract more investments,

and produce more to ensure food security," said Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

Data showed that while services accounted for a 57.3 percent share of the jobs in December, industry contributed 18.3-percent share.

Agriculture also generated 715,000 new jobs in December, the second highest for the month when the country's unemployment rate slipped to 3.1 percent, the lowest in 2023.

The DA maintains that the government has always been seeking new ways to increase food productivity to ensure stable supply

at reasonable prices and reduce importation.

By improving returns from agriculture, government hopes it could inspire a new generation of farmers to replace an aging population.

Tiu Laurel said the government aims to invest heavily in irrigation, machineries, post-harvest facilities and other farm inputs to boost production, lower cost, improve efficiency and raise returns for farmers.

He said the record palay output in 2023 has been one of the significant outcomes of the initial investments in agriculture.



'Farmers key to record agri output'

By Rio N. Araja

FARMERS are a key contributor in raising the combined value of the country's agriculture and fisheries sectors from P1.757-trillion in 2022 to P1.763-trillion last year, Speaker Martin Romualdez said Sunday.

In a statement, the Speaker said he is hoping President Marcos and Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. will keep supporting local farmers "to sustain this momentum."

Romualdez paid tribute to thousands of Filipino farmers for delivering more than 20 million metric tons of rice in 2023, an increase of 1.25 percent, from

their previous output.

"This exceptional achievement by our hardworking farmers is truly deserving of praise. They are undeniably the cornerstone and solution to our nation's rice scarcity," he said in a statement.

The Marcos administration recently distributed various types of assistance to several farmers and their coopera-

tives in Pampanga to enhance their production amid current challenges facing their sector, including the effects of the El Niño phenomenon.

In late August last year, Romualdez also raided some warehouses in Bulacan that were suspected of engaging in the practice of rice hoarding, which he described as a "heinous crime."

The Speaker reiterated his commitment to support ongoing government-led efforts to ensure food security for Filipino families by stabilizing rice supply and keeping them affordable.

During a meeting with representatives of the Philippine Rice Industry Stakeholders' Movement, Romualdez assured them of the unwavering commitment of

the House of Representatives to combat rice hoarders and smugglers.

This fully supports the efforts of the Marcos administration to stabilize rice prices, the Speaker said.

"If you want to be part of the solution, you are with us, we will help you, we're going to support you. But if you're part of the problem, we will root you out," he warned smugglers.

Romualdez maintained that Congress "is firmly committed to ensuring a consistent, stable, and affordable supply of essential commodities for Filipinos."

"We will exercise the chamber's mandate to safeguard the interests of the public to the fullest extent possible," he said.



MAV suspension could lead to higher pork prices – importers

By JASPER EMMANUEL
ARCALAS

Meat importers have warned that pork prices could rise if the government would not immediately resolve the issues surrounding the minimum access volume (MAV) as import arrivals could be delayed.

Meat industry groups told **The STAR** that the plan of the **Department of Agriculture (DA)** to suspend the MAV for pork could have "inflationary effects" as it could deter some importers from bringing in supplies from abroad.

Meat Importers and Traders Association (MITA) argued that President Marcos' Executive Order (EO) 50 allowed for the imports under both

in-quota, or within the MAV mechanism, and out-quota (outside the MAV) volume.

The MAV mechanism allows importers to bring in a certain volume of goods at a lower tariff rate.

Under EO 50, pork imports within the MAV are levied with 15 percent tariff while shipments outside it are slapped with 25 percent tariff until end of the year.

"So why should the DA remove the in-quota part? This is tantamount to revising EO 50," MITA president emeritus Jesus Cham said.

"EO 50 mandates a semester review. Why does DA not allow the EO to run its course and review after six months? This is violating the purpose and objective of the EO," he

said.

Cham pointed out that the country's meat inflation has been "down" and any interruptions in the country's meat trade could cause acceleration in prices, particularly for pork.

"If inflation spikes, would the DA not be blamed for exceeding its authority and tinkering with EO 50?" he said, noting that any plans to change MAV rules must not be done unilaterally by the DA.

"Why did DA not get the concurrence of the MAV Management Committee who is the final decision maker on MAV matters?" he added.

The country's meat inflation in January further slowed to -0.7 percent from 0.2 percent in December, the

lowest rate in seven months, Philippine Statistics Authority data showed.

Cham said MAV quota holders are now "hesitating" on their orders, with most of them on a "wait-and-see" approach. This, Cham claimed, would result in pork import orders being "delayed" for "several months."

The Philippine Association of Meat Processors Inc. (PAMPI) echoed MITA's sentiments that suspending the pork MAV could have an effect on prices of the meat commodity.

"Though our sector will not be severely affected in case MAV is suspended, prices of pork that is brought in for home consumption will increase, and it will have an inflationary effect," PAMPI said.

Nonetheless, PAMPI noted that it "trusts" the judgment of Agriculture Secretary **Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.** on the matter and it believes that the agriculture chief would see the "wisdom" in keeping the pork MAV "for the benefit of consumers without hurting the local hog industry."

The British Chamber of Commerce Philippines (BCCP) has earlier expressed concerns against the DA's proposal, emphasizing that it supports the argument that suspending the pork MAV would have an impact on the country's domestic pork supply and existing trade agreements.

Last week, **The STAR** broke the story that the DA is looking at curbing the country's agricultural imports by temporarily suspending the entry of imports of pork and corn within the MAV mechanism. The country's pork MAV stands at 54,210 metric tons.



REIN in inflation!

It didn't take long for Finance Secretary Ralph Recto to take full command of the economic cluster as he assumed responsibility for keeping inflation numbers low. And Ralph even coined an acronym: REIN or Reduce Emerging Inflation Now. As a politician rather than an academician, Ralph knows what to emphasize and communicate. He zeroed in on what hurts the people in their pockets.

DEMAND AND SUPPLY



BOO CHANCO

Having Ralph at the Department of Finance (DOF) is such a relief. He's a sharp contrast to Ben Diokno who washed his hands when inflation numbers were rising fast. At the time, Ben could only urge other government officials to do something to keep prices, especially of food, down. Ralph is saying, that's my problem. He is lucky that inflation in January is significantly slower than the 8.7 percent recorded in the same month last year and the 3.9 percent in December. It is also

well within the government's overall target band of two percent to four percent.

Well, Ralph has the gravitas to take decisive control of the economic cluster. In so doing, he sidelined newly appointed Presidential Adviser for Economic Affairs Deck Go who was supposed to be the new head of the economic cluster. Having been NEDA Director General, Ralph is confident he knows enough economics to deal with economic issues. His political background keeps him grounded unlike technocrats with PhDs. It is his job to keep the prices of goods and services stable.

Remember how BBM floundered when confronted with high inflation numbers early last year? Diokno didn't even brief him enough to prevent him from sounding uninformed by claiming our inflation was not really high. Diokno as economic cluster head should have also advised BBM regarding those controversial sugar import decisions and the imposition of the retail price cap on rice. The gobbledygook coming from DOF at the time made the BBM administration seem detached from real problems of real people.

Said Recto: "As I've said before, our top priority is to reduce inflation and protect the purchasing power of the Filipino people. Addressing inflation will not only further grow the economy but it will help boost our revenue collection and improve the quality of life of Filipinos." Exactly, Sec. Ralph!

Sec. Ralph has good numbers to start with. Food inflation eased to 3.3 percent from a high of 11.2 percent in the same period a year ago and the 5.5 percent rate in December 2023. Compared to the previous month, the drop in food inflation was due mainly to the lower prices of vegetables and meat.

But rice is still a problem. Rice inflation increased compared to last month. Again, Recto has the good fortune of having a competent secretary of agriculture who knows

how to deal with the rice problem. Recto and Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr give us the confidence we didn't have last year when inflation and food supply problems arose. Good coordination between Recto who holds the money and Laurel who needs the money to implement his programs should help make the government look competent.

Recto said DOF would oversee the vigorous implementation of strategies under its REIN plan. This involves closely monitoring financial assistance programs or *ayuda* aimed at supporting vulnerable sectors and prioritizing the expeditious execution of the 2024 national budget to enable the timely implementation of measures aimed at enhancing agricultural production, especially during the peak of the El Niño which is forecasted in March.

The finance chief is also taking a special interest in enhancing the efficiency of beneficiary identification.

They also plan to accelerate the implementation of the El Niño Mitigation and Adaptation Plan.

Most importantly, the government will be able to ensure timely and sufficient imports of key commodities based on more frequent analysis of demand and supply conditions while combating anti-competitive practices.

In his first week in office, Secretary Laurel launched a diplomatic campaign to convince India to exempt us from their rice export ban. As a result, the Philippines secured the largest share of its rice importation agreement with India, securing 295,000 metric tons (MT) to augment the country's rice supply out of the 1.03 million MT total rice exports to be distributed among seven countries.

Then recently, BBM was able to sign a five-year Rice Trade Cooperation deal with Vietnam, to access 1.5 million to two million MT of rice annually at a competitive and affordable price. This agreement will help ensure a steady supply of rice in the near term.

To help mitigate oil inflation over the medium term, Recto said the government will issue guidelines for the voluntary increase of ethanol blend for gasoline, which could help decrease the cost of gasoline. This is where Sec Ralph is badly misinformed.

If Sec Ralph wants to decrease the retail price of gasoline, the government must suspend the requirement to blend ethanol with gasoline. Ethanol is more expensive than gasoline and domestic ethanol is more expensive than imported ethanol. It is likely that some independent gasoline retailers are able to significantly cut their retail prices because they don't add ethanol to the gasoline they sell.

Nevertheless, Recto promised that fuel subsidies will be released to drivers and operators in a timely manner. Guidelines will also be issued to exempt trucks bringing agricultural products from increases in toll rates.

It is a welcome change to have cabinet members addressing issues that matter to us. And it helps that they are also able to communicate better than most technocrats who are appointed to high level government positions. We can be hopeful for a good year ahead unless some demented soul from Davao continues to create new anxieties with his reckless talk.

Boo Chanco's email address is bchanco@gmail.com. Follow him on X or Twitter @boochanco



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Harmonization of rules to ease regulatory burden in agri

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has issued the guidelines on the conduct of regulatory impact assessment on proposed regulations in the agency.

The DA said the guidelines will ensure harmonization of all of its regulations.

DA Administrative Order No. 1, series of 2024 signed by Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. on February 5 is also in compliance with the Ease of Doing Business Act of 2018 that seeks to prevent adding “undue regulatory burden and cost to affected sectors of the economy.”

The DA order said all draft regulatory policies and proposed

guidelines proposed for issuance will now be subjected to policy review under a regulatory clearing-house system. A policy research service will conduct an initial policy review of a proposed regulation.

The AO said after the initial review, proposed policies will be endorsed to the assistant secretary for policy, research and development for assessment on the consistency with other regulations before submission to the DA secretary for final approval and legal review.

The DA cited data from the Philippine Statistics Authority which showed 24.4 percent of the 50.5 million employed in December 2023 were in the agriculture

See HARMONIZATION > Page A2

HARMONIZATION

sector, or around 12.3 million Filipinos.

The agency said the agriculture sector generated 715,000 new jobs in December, the second most for the month when the country's unemployment rate slipped to 3.1 percent, the lowest in 2023.

“We could do much more in

generating jobs and helping more of Filipinos in agriculture to have better lives... The DA is now completing a three-year strategy that will modernize agriculture, attract more investments, and produce more to ensure food security,” said Tiu Laurel, in a separate statement.

Tiu Laurel emphasized the DA aims to increase food productivity to ensure stable supply at reasonable prices and reduce importation as well as improve farmers' income to attract a new generation of farmers and replace an already aging population.

He added the government tar-

gets to invest heavily in irrigation, machineries, post-harvest facilities and other farm inputs to boost production, lower cost, improve efficiency and raise returns for farmers especially since after booking a record high palay harvest of 20.06 million MT last year.



'Agri accounted for 1 in every 4 jobs in PHL'

THE government has vowed to invest heavily in the country's agriculture sector, which accounted for one in every four jobs in December, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Citing data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), the DA said 24.4 percent of the 50.5 million employed in December were in the agriculture sector, or around 12.3 million Filipinos.

Services accounted for a 57.3

percent share of the jobs in December while industry had an 18.3-percent share.

Agriculture also generated 715,000 new jobs in December, the second most for the month when the country's unemployment rate

slipped to 3.1 percent, the lowest in 2023.

"We could do much more in generating jobs and helping more of Filipinos in agriculture to have better lives," Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. said in a statement.

"The Department of Agriculture is now completing a three-year strategy that will modernize agriculture, attract more investments, and produce more to ensure food security."

The government is seeking to increase food productivity to ensure stable supply at reasonable prices and reduce importation. By improving returns from

agriculture, government hopes it could inspire a new generation of farmers to replace an already aging population.

Laurel said the government aims to invest heavily in irrigation, machineries, post-harvest facilities and other farm inputs to boost production, lower cost, improve efficiency and raise returns for farmers.

Initial investments have resulted in record high harvest of 20.06 million metric tons of rice last year, helping reduce imports.

Based on the results of the latest Labor Force Survey, the PSA said the country's unemployment rate averaged 3.1 percent in December

2023 and 4.3 percent in 2023. The 3.1 percent rate in December is a new record low in the series that began in 2005.

Given this, the country's employment rate averaged 96.9 percent in December 2023 and 95.7 percent in 2023. The PSA said the rate in December is also the highest since 2005.

An expert from the Asian Development Bank said in October 2020 that returning migrant Filipino workers can turn to agriculture if the government is able to put in place targeted policies and programs that will develop the sector.

In an Asian Development Blog, ADB agriculture economist Mat-

thias Leitner said an improved farm sector would be able to provide employment to thousands of overseas Filipino workers who have been displaced abroad due to the pandemic.

"The agriculture sector will play a crucial role in the country's [Philippines] recovery from Covid-19 impacts, albeit struggling with persistent low labor productivity," Leitner said.

"Average wages for non-agricultural workers are about 10 percent higher than the maximum daily-wage rate in agriculture. For the sector to absorb additional incoming labor, it needs to modernize and improve its competitiveness."



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

HISTORIC RICE PRODUCTION

By Jester Manalastas

SPEAKER Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez has expressed his profound admiration for Filipino farmers as they achieved a historic milestone of producing 20 million metric tons of rice in 2023, marking a significant contribution in addressing the country's rice shortage.

Likewise, Romualdez acknowledged President Ferdinand "Bongbong" R. Marcos Jr. remarkable achievement, attributing it to a 1.5 percent increase from the previous year, along with the government's commitment to providing quality seedlings and fertilizers.

He commended Marcos and Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. for their unwavering dedication to bolster agricultural modernization and enhance food production despite the challenges posed by El Niño.

This exceptional rice production significantly contributed to raising the combined val-

ue of the agriculture and fisheries sectors to P1.763 trillion in 2023, exceeding the P1.757 trillion recorded in 2022.

"This exceptional achievement by our hardworking farmers is truly deserving of praise. They are undeniably the cornerstone and solution to our nation's rice scarcity," Romualdez said.

This historic rice harvest signifies a glimmer of hope in resolving the rice shortage predicament we faced in the past year," he added.

Marcos, a first cousin of the Speaker, proudly announced the significant achievement in rice production for the Philippines last February 2.

This notable 1.5 percent increase compared to the rice production in the corresponding period of 2022 highlights the collective dedication and perseverance of all stakeholders involved.

"Our combined efforts have resulted in an impressive rice production exceeding 20 million metric tons in 2023," the President stressed.



PLDT, Smart, DA further empower farmer groups' digital transformation with FarmTech

The Philippines is largely an agricultural country, but various studies show that over the years, fewer Filipinos have been going into farming as a profession. If this situation is not addressed, there will be a critical shortage of farmers in the next coming years. Additionally, with many Filipino farmers advancing in age, most of them are unfamiliar with and are therefore unable to maximize the available technology-based innovations and online resources on agriculture. Many are already comfortable with their traditional farming practices and are reluctant to adopt digital tools and incorporate it into their farming.

To help address this challenge, PLDT and Smart Communications, in partnership with the Department of Agriculture - Agricultural Training Institute (DA-ATI) levelled up its Digital Farmers Program (DFP) with the launch of FarmTech, a tech-driven all-in-one training kit for farmer groups to aid their digital literacy training programs for their farmer members even those in remote areas.

An award-winning program both internationally and locally, DFP is PLDT and Smart's digital inclusion program in partnership with DA. Since 2019, PLDT, Smart, and DA-ATI have equipped around 10,000 farmers with digital skills through a series of digital literacy trainings as part of the FarmLearn component of the program, empowering both tech-wary farmer elders and tech-savvy youth in agriculture.

With FarmTech, DFP's tech component, farmer groups and agri-coops are now empowered and equipped to extend the digital literacy training program by training their co-farmers, helping bridge the digital gap in agriculture, even in far-flung areas.



Inclusion and assistance in one neat package

The FarmTech bundle is designed to be durable, portable, and self-sufficient. As most of its components are lightweight and rechargeable, it is perfect for facing harsh conditions out in the field where power sources and signal strength are potentially limiting factors.

Packed in a sturdy, water-resistant carrying case measuring 2 by 2 feet, the FarmTech set includes the following: a tablet, 10 smartphones, a Smart Bro Pocket Wifi router, 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. The package also includes Smart Bro prepaid load cards so that its recipients can easily go online.

Stephanie V. Orlino, Stakeholder Management Head for PLDT and Smart, explains that these packages are meant to reach and be used by farmer organizations and agri-learning centers to bring tech and digital solutions to farmers in areas where access can be difficult. "The overall thrust of PLDT and Smart has always been digital inclusion for all. With our trainings under DFP, we are helping address the digital skills gap of farmers. And now with FarmTech, we are helping address the access gap so that we are able to further make digital tools and solutions work for our farmers."



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

FarmTech in particular and DFP in general are fundamental parts of PLDT and Smart's broader vision of digital inclusion for all. Alongside these programs, PLDT and Smart also continues to invest and build on its infrastructure, strengthening their network particularly in hard to reach areas, offering more accessible and faster connectivity for all Filipinos.





LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Farmers ask NIA: What happened to billions for irrigation?

By BELLA CARIASO

Farmers' group Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) has asked the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) to explain how it spent the multibillion-peso budget for irrigation.

In a statement, KMP chairperson Danilo Ramos cited the worsening effect of the El Niño phenomenon on rice farmers and other crops.

"How did the NIA use its yearly big budget?" Ramos asked, adding that for the past decade, the irrigation budget allocated for NIA has multiplied several times.

He noted that for 2024, the NIA's budget was increased to P41.7 billion.

"Under the current administration, the agency has seen a huge increase in the number of infrastructure flagship projects, including the 27 projects in 2023, 13 of which are irrigation facilities with specific locations, while the remaining are regular annual programs of NIA for rehabilitation, repair, restoration, operation, and maintenance of existing irrigation systems," Ramos said.

He said that based on the National Irrigation Master Plan (NIMP) from 2020

to 2030, there was a 2.5 percent increase in irrigation development or 47,272 hectares per year.

"In 2021, NIA reported 65 percent of total irrigated areas from 61.4 percent in 2018 and the 49.3 percent level in 2009," Ramos added.

He noted that farmers started to feel the effects of El Niño in November 2023, adding that it is expected to worsen in the coming months, based on the projection of the state weather agency.

Ramos warned that a severe El Niño could affect 20 percent of the country's rice farms, primarily due to an expected shortage of irrigation water across Central Luzon.

"The phenomenon is now affecting 45 provinces, with 28 provinces hit by dry spells and threatening local production of rice, corn, and sugar," he said.

Ramos also contradicted the claim of NIA that the country is expected to achieve rice sufficiency in 2028.

"Under these conditions, we highly doubt NIA's claim of rice self-sufficiency," he added.

Date: FEB. 12 2024 Page: B2



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

REGULATORY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

DA REVIEWING NEW POLICIES TO AVOID CLASHING WITH ARTA MANDATE

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**
@jordeenelagare

The **Department of Agriculture (DA)** is conducting a regulatory impact assessment to streamline new regulations and ensure that such policies won't cause any undue burden or cost to the agriculture sector.

Administrative Circular No. 1 signed on Feb. 5 ordered all agencies and units under the DA to comply with the evaluation of all draft regulatory policies and guidelines as mandated by the Anti-Red Tape Authority (Arta), which was created to address excessive bureaucratic processes and regulatory uncertainties.

"There is a need to recognize the existing policies and guidelines of Arta on the im-

plementation of the [regulatory impact assessment] consistent with the mandate of Arta by virtue of [Republic Act No.] 11032 and other existing laws," the circular read.

Under the law, all government agencies are required to assess the impact of proposed regulations on affected sectors of the economy. The concerned agency may implement a pilot implementation of the proposed policy to determine its regulatory impact, as needed.

All draft policies or guidelines of the DA will be subject to policy review under the Regulatory Clearinghouse System, with the Policy Research Service carrying out the initial review.

"Upon completion of the initial policy review, the Policy

Research Service shall endorse the proposed regulations to the assistant secretary for policy research and development for review on the consistency with other policies and to the Assistant Secretary for Regulations for review on the consistency with other regulations," the DA said in its order.

After completing the assessment, all proposed issuances will be endorsed to the undersecretary for policy, planning and regulations and subsequently to the agriculture secretary or head of the regulatory agency, subject to legal review.

Based on the Arta circular, the impact assessment excludes laws passed or proposed legislation by Congress; programs, projects and activities

of the government; taxation or other measures purely for revenue-raising purposes; budget-related issuances related to national or operating budget; and exceptional circumstances such as emergencies, natural disasters and threats to national security, among others.

The proponent agency, however, is requested to inform the Arta in writing prior to the issuance of the exempt regulation.

The assistant secretary for regulations will serve as the secretariat and receive draft rules from proponent agencies while the undersecretary for policy, planning and regulations will exercise oversight functions in the formulation, amendment or revision of regulations. **INQ**



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Fisheries output down 1.8% last year

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

THE country's fisheries production volume reached 4.26 million metric tons (MT) in 2023, reflecting a 1.8 percent annual decline, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said.

The latest result was lower than the 4.34 million MT posted a year earlier. Decreases in production were noted for the commercial, marine municipal fisheries, and inland municipal fisheries sub-sectors.

Only the aquaculture subsector reported an annual increase in production, the PSA said.

During the current year, the commercial fisheries sector yielded a total of 820,300 MT, a 4.9 percent decrease compared to the prior year's output of 862,690 MT.

This sub-sector represented 19.3 percent of the overall fisheries production in 2023.

Marine municipality fisheries, meanwhile, posted an 881,250 MT

total output.

"This was 7.3 percent lower than the 2022 level of 950,910 MT," said PSA. The subsector's share of the total fisheries production last year was 20.7 percent.

On the other hand, the inland municipal fisheries produced 174,580 MT, marking a slight decrease of 0.4 percent compared to the prior year's output of 175,350 MT. This sector accounted for 4.1 percent of the overall fisheries production for the year.

Aquaculture production, meanwhile, increased by 1.5 percent to 2.38 million MT compared to the previous year's 2.35 million MT.

Aquaculture contributed the

largest portion, or 56.0 percent, to the overall fisheries production this year.

Among the 20 monitored species, PSA said that 14 recorded an annual drop in production. These were primarily noted in fimbriated sardines (tunsoy) with a 33.5 percent drop; bigeye tuna (tambakol/bariles) that fell by 25.1 percent; threadfin bream (bisugo) by 21.2 percent; tiger prawn (sugpo) by 19.4 percent; skipjack (gulyasan) by 18.8 percent; frigate tuna (tulingan) by 13.3 percent; and milkfish (bangus) with 8.9 percent drop.

On the other hand, increas-

es in production were mainly reported in Indian mackerel (alumahan) with a 17.6 percent rise in production; round scad (galunggong) up by 11.2 percent; big-eyed scad (matangbaka) by 6.8 percent; yellowfin tuna (tambakol/bariles) by 6.6 percent; seaweed by 5.3 percent; and tilapia by 1.3 percent.

Last week, the **Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR)** said it aimed to increase local fisheries production and achieve 100 percent food-fish sufficiency by 2028.

BFAR, through its Strategic Plan, aims to distribute interventions such as new fiberglass reinforced

plastic (FRP) boats, fishing gears, and paraphernalia; establishment of mariculture parks; reassessment and maintenance of existing mariculture parks; and development and recommendation of supplemental guidelines for the operation and management of legislated hatcheries.

In 2022, BFAR said the Philippines' food-fish sufficiency level was 92.5 percent.

The bureau also aims to strengthen its partnership with the private sector and establish a direct linkage between fisherfolk borrowers and financing institutions to boost the local fisheries industry.



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

NIA to adjust cropping calendar

THE National Irrigation Administration (NIA) eyes the adjustment of its cropping calendar to October instead of March to ensure sufficient farm yield and minimize rice importation.

In a statement yesterday, NIA said it is looking into the implementation of two cropping periods during dry season with the first one set from October to January and the other one from February to May.

The agency said the ad-

justments would help reduce potential crop damage brought about by typhoons during the wet season.

Citing data from the Bureau of Plant Industry, NIA said rice importation stood at 3.22 million metric tons (MT) in 2023. This volume is equivalent to around 5 million MT of palay.

Eduardo Guillen, NIA administrator, said the agency fast-tracks the implementation

See NIA > Page A2

NIA

of the existing and new irrigation projects and the utilization of high-yielding hybrid varieties of palay.

Guillen added convergence efforts with the Department of Agriculture and the Department

of Public Works and Highways as well as other national government agencies, local government and

private sector in irrigation development are also being pursued.-Jed Macapagal

Date: FEB 12 2024 Page: A9



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Local dairy output in 2023 declines by 4.7%—PSA data

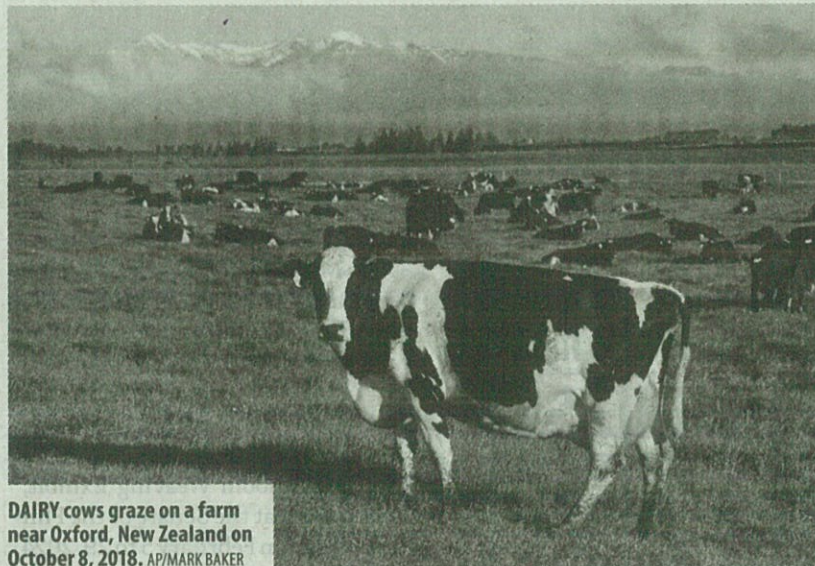
THE country's milk production declined last year despite government efforts to beef up the Philippines's dairy herd, according to the latest data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Figures from the PSA showed that dairy output last year fell to 4.7 percent to 28,858 metric tons (MT), from 30,281 MT recorded in 2022.

The performance of the dairy sector last year was affected by the drop in the output of Region 4-A (Calabarzon) and Region 3 (Central Luzon), the country's top milk producers.

PSA data indicated that the milk production of top producer Calabarzon slid to 7,792.47 MT last year, from 9,873.15 MT recorded in 2022. Central Luzon, the second largest producer, saw 2023 dairy output fall to 5,415.83 MT, from the previous year's 7,872.10 MT.

An industry update from the **National Dairy Authority (NDA)** indicated that local milk production as well as imports and exports dropped in the third quarter of 2023.



DAIRY cows graze on a farm near Oxford, New Zealand on October 8, 2018. AP/MARK BAKER

"Nevertheless, there has been an increase in the number of dairy inventory, as well as in the participation of dairy industry players," the NDA said in a statement.

Philippine milk production as of the third quarter of 2023 fell by 11 percent year-on-year, according to NDA. Despite this, the share of local milk in total supply reached 23 percent.

"Consequently, local milk production contributed to approxi-

mately one glass out of every five glasses of liquid milk supply."

Data from the NDA also indicated that imports of milk and milk products went down by 18 percent to 2,175.05 MT liquid milk equivalent (LME), from 2,636.93 MT-LME. The import payment bill fell by 16 percent to \$1.063 billion in September from the previous year's \$1.259 billion.

In a report published last year, the Foreign Agricultural Service

(FAS) of the United States Department of Agriculture in Manila said Philippine milk output will rebound in 2024.

FAS said production will rise to 29,000 MT, boosted by an increase in the dairy herd and the active implementation of the government's dairy development projects.

"Despite production improvements, the Philippines supplies only one percent of its total annual dairy requirement, with the rest imported," the report read.

It noted that production growth has been slow in recent years because of the inability to increase the dairy herd, mostly due to insufficient funding and little investment from the private sector.

FAS said the top milk-producing areas are on the island of Luzon, including Laguna, Bulacan, and Batangas. Davao and Bukidnon in southern Mindanao are also major producers.

In 2023, FSA said the PSA had estimated the country's beginning inventory of dairy cattle (female dairy animals only) at 9,730 heads, while there are 7,240 buffalo, and 14,908 goats.



NIA considering crop calendar adjustment



PHILIPPINE STAR/MICHAEL VARGAS

THE National Irrigation Administration (NIA) said on Sunday that it may adjust the timetable for providing water to reduce potential crop losses, especially for rice.

“With the goal of ensuring sufficient farm yield and minimizing rice imports, NIA is considering adjusting the cropping calendar,” it said in a statement posted on Facebook.

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

The NIA said it will work around a schedule of two cropping periods during the dry sea-

son, one from October to January, and the other from February to May.

According to NIA, doing so would minimize the impact of typhoon damage to standing crops.

NIA Administrator Eduardo G. Guillen has also accelerated the timetables of irrigation projects.

The use of high-yielding hybrid seed could potentially increase yields in NIA-irrigated sites to 8 million MT of palay or unmilled rice.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is targeting palay output of 20 million MT this year, roughly unchanged in light of the prevailing El Niño.

Mr. Guillen has said that 20% of agricultural production may be affected by El Niño.

The government weather service, known as PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration), said El Niño is projected to last until the second quarter, bringing dry spells or droughts to 63 provinces.

NIA said that it is seeking to partner with the DA, the Department of Public Works and Highways, and other national and local government agencies as well as the private sector in irrigation development. — **Adrian H. Halili**



Freeze on MAV seen pressuring prices of pork, corn upwards

By **Adrian H. Halili**
Reporter

THE suspension of the **minimum access volume (MAV)** for pork and corn will push prices higher, economists said.

"If the MAV is not followed, then the domestic prices of the imported goods will rise. Consumers will then suffer," Monetary Board member Bruce J. Tolentino said in a Viber message.

The MAV allows trading partners guaranteed market access subject to volume quotas. The MAV system is a feature of the World Trade Organization (WTO) trading system.

The Philippines has committed to admit 54,210 metric tons (MT) of pork and 216,940 MT of corn.

"The MAV system is a key aspect of the Philippines' commitments as a member of WTO. The MAV is the minimum volume of a commodity that shall be imported at a lower tariff," Mr. Tolentino said.

In December, the government extended the lowered tariff regime on pork, rice, and corn until December 2024 through Executive Order (EO) No. 50.

EO 50 had kept tariff rates for corn at 5% for shipments within the quota and 15% for those exceeding, while pork was kept at 15% for in-quota and 25% for out-of-quota

shipments. The tariff rate on rice currently stands at 35%, regardless of its country of origin.

Calixto V. Chikiamco, Foundation for Economic Freedom president, said the suspension of the MAV will have a knock-on impact on the price of chicken through rising feed prices.

"Suspending the MAV for pork and corn will increase the prices of pork but also chicken since corn prices constitute the biggest cost of livestock production," Mr. Chikiamco said in a Viber message.

"Not only will this have a negative impact on individual consumers but also the downstream industries of tourism, restaurants, meat processing, and hotels, which use chicken and pork," he added.

Mr. Chikiamco noted the suspension will add to growing food inflation.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported that food inflation for January was 3.3%, against 5.5% in December and 11.2% a year earlier. The PSA said lower prices of vegetables, tubers, cooking bananas, fish, and meat had contributed to the decrease.

He added that the proposal will need approval from the Tariff Commission and the WTO.

"The best solution is to reform the tariff structure entirely to a uniform and relatively low rate. And get rid of the MAV system entirely," Mr. Tolentino said.

REMATE

ANG DIARYO NG MASA

Date: 12 FEB 2024 Page: 5



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

EL NIÑO AT LA NIÑA TUMITINDI

INAASAHANG mas lalo pang lalala ang tama ng El Niño sa ilang bahagi ng mundo kabilang na ang 'Pinas kung saan pinaniniwalaang aabot pa hanggang Abril ang mararanasang tagtuyot at maalinsangang panahon, ayon sa National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center, isang Weather Forecaster sa US.

Bagaman mas maikling panahon daw ngayon ang tag-init kung ihahalintulad sa nakalipas na mga taon kung saan umaabot ito hanggang Hunyo subalit malaki na ang pinsala nito lalo na sa pagkasira ng mga pananim at kawalan ng suplay ng tubig sa mga lugar na tinamaan nito.

Batay sa talaan ng Department of Agriculture, umabot na sa halos P151 milyon ang nasirang Agri-products bunsod ng matinding tagtuyo sa Pilipinas pa lang kung saan kakulangan ng suplay ng tubig ng mga magsasaka ang dahilan kaya kaliwa't kanang irrigation facilities ngayon ang ipinapagawa ng gobyerno upang maibsan ang epekto nito.

Hindi lamang tayong mga Pinoy ang nakararanas ng grabeng tama ng El Niño.

Alam n'yo bang binawasan ng India, ang itinuturing na pinakamalaking exporter ng bigas sa buong mundo, ang pagbebenta nito sa labas ng bansa nila dahil sa kakulang ng produksyon dulot ng matinding tagtuyot at kakarampot na ulan?

Ibig sabihin, damang-dama na ngayon ng sanlibutan ang epekto ng El Niño na ayon sa mga siyentipiko ay dulot ng Climate Change o pagbabago ng panahon ang madalas na nakararanas ng krisis ay katulad ng bansa natin na sadyang matagal makababangon ang ekonomiya.

At hindi lang 'yan. Pinaniniwalaang papasok naman ang La Niña o malalakas na pagbuhos ng ulan na magiging sanhi ng malawakang pagbaha, sa darating na Hunyo na magiging sanhi naman

nang pagkalubog ng mga pananim.

Susmaryosep! wala na tayong itulak at kabigin hinggil sa malalang tama ng pagbabago ng panahon kung saan apektado ang ekonomiya't sambayanan dahil malaki ang nawawala sa kaban ng bayan para tugunan ang iniwang kasi-raan ng mga kalamidad na ito.

Tanging kahandaan at mabilis na pag-responde ang kayang gawin ng pamahalaan ngayon upang maibsan ang pagkawasak ng mga ari-arian dulot ng malalakas na kalamidad na sukdulang dahilan nang pagkabangkarote ng pobreng mamamayan.

oOo

Anomang puna o reaksiyon itex sa
09999388537/email normanlaurio17@
gmail.com



REMATE OPINION
**PUNTO
DE VISTA**
NI NORMAN LAURIO

Date: 12 FEB 2024 Page: 8



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

DENR, DA kakalampagin ngayon ng mga protesters

Dahil sa matinding delubyo ng landslide na kumitil ng 37 buhay sa Davao de Oro at matinding inflation sa presyo ng bigas, nakatakdang magdaos ngayong Pebrero 12 ng kilos protesta ang militanteng grupo sa pangunguna ng Gabriela sa tanggapan ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) at Department of Agriculture (DA) sa Quezon City.

Ayon sa Gabriela, dakong alas-9 ng umaga ang kanilang itinakdang rally sa nasabing mga tanggapan upang kalampagin ang DENR sa matinding delubyo ng landslide sa Brgy. Masara, Maco, Davao de Oro.

Sinabi ng Gabriela na dahil umano sa pagmimina ng Apex Mining Company ay naningil na ang kalikasan sa mga residente ng Brgy. Masara, Maco ng lalawigan.

Bukod sa Gabriela, kabilang pa sa mga makikisa sa kilos-protesta ay ang grupo BAI Indigenous Women's Network at Amihan National Federation of Peasant Women.

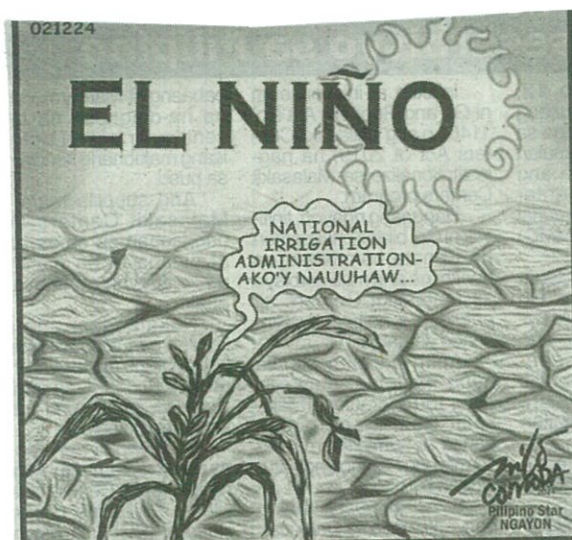
Samantalang ang grupo ay magmamartsa rin sa harapan ng tanggapan ng DA bilang protesta sa mataas na presyo ng bigas sa bansa.

Ayon sa Gabriela, ang Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) na mismo ang nagulat sa pagsirit ng presyo ng bigas nitong Enero na pinakamataas na inflation rate ng nagdaang buwan.

Inihayag ng Gabriela na kung hindi pinayagan ng DENR ang pagmimina sa komunidad ng Brgy. Masara ay hindi magkakaroon ng landslide sa lugar kung saan ilang kabahayan, mga bus at mga taong nalibing ng buhay ang naging biktima sa trahedya.

Idinagdag pa ng grupo na masyadong mataas pa rin ang presyo ng bigas at hindi pa abot ang pangako ng administrasyon na P20 kada kilo sa hapag kainan ng mga pamilyang Pinoy. (Joy Cantos)

Date: 12 FEB 2024 Page: 4



Editorial

NIA, kilos na, El Niño ratsada na

ABRIL pa ang sinasabing pagtama ng El Niño sa bansa, ayon sa weather experts pero mukhang mali ang pagtataya sapagkat ngayon pa lamang ay nadarama na ang bangis ng weather phenomenon. Marami nang lupang sakahan ang natutuyo at hindi na puwedeng pakinabangan ang mga nakatanim na palay. Bitak-bitak na ang lupa dahil sa tindi ng init.

Ayon sa Department of Agriculture (DA), umabot na sa P151.3 milyon ang pinsala sa agrikultura sa Western Visayas at Zamboanga Peninsula. Apektado ang kabuhayan ng 3,923 magsasaka sa mga nasabing lugar. Hindi malaman ng mga magsasaka kung paano malalampasan ang dinulot ng El Niño.

Inireport naman ng Office of Civil Defense (OCD) na walong probinsiya sa Luzon ang nakararanas ng tagtuyot dahil sa kawalan ng ulan. Nagkakabitak-bitak na umano ang lupa sa mga palayan. Ayon kay OCD Administrator Ariel Nepomuceno, ang mga probinsiya na nakararanas ng tagtuyot ay ang Apayao, Bataan, Cagayan, Cavite, Ilocos Norte, Kalinga at Zambales. Pati sa Palawan ay nararamdaman na umano ang bangis ng El Niño.

Habang marami na ang mga palayang natutuyo, patuloy naman ang pagbaba ng water level ng mga dam sa Luzon. Halos araw-araw ay nababawasan ang tubig sa siyam na dams: Angat at Ipo sa Bulacan; Ambuklao at Binga sa Benguet; Pantabangan sa Nueva Ecija; Magat sa Isabela; San Roque sa Pangasinan; La Mesa sa Quezon City at Caliraya sa Laguna.

Noong nakaraang taon, nagbabala ang National Water Resources Board (NWRB) sa mamamayan na magtipid sa paggamit ng tubig dahil sa kakaharaping tagtuyot dulot ng El Niño. Payo ni National NWRB Executive Director Sevilla David sa mamamayan na huwag mag-aksaya at i-recycle ang tubig. Dapat tumulong ang publiko o consumers sa water management.

Hinikayat naman ng MWSS ang Metro Manila Mayors na magpasa ng ordinance na naghihigpit sa paggamit ng tubig sa golf courses, car wash at swimming pools. Kailangang limitahan ang mga negosyong gumagamit nang maraming tubig.

Habang marami ang gumagawa ng paghahanda, kataka-taka namang walang nakikitang pagkilos sa National Irrigation Administration (NIA) na dapat manguna sa paghanap ng solusyong kung paano matutubigan at maisalba sa pagkatuyo ang mga palayan.

Ayon sa mga magsasakang apektado ng tagtuyot, walang inilalagay na mga bomba ng tubig sa palayan ang NIA. Kailan daw kaya mag-install ng mga bomba na hihigop ng tubig para matubigan ang mga nauuhaw na palayan at iba pang taniman. Hihintayin pa raw ba ang rurok ng El Niño bago maglagay ng mga bomba para sa patubig.



Four ways pulses nourish soils and keep biodiversity

First of 2 series

THEY are the dried edible seeds of legumes both cultivated for food and feed. They are pulses, and if you didn't know already, they have the potential to transform our agri-food systems.

Colorful and flavorful, small yet powerful, pulses include the well-known beans, lentils, chickpeas and peas but there are also the lesser-known kinds like tarwi beans and adzuki beans.



Pulses provide and mobilize nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorous and micronutrients for soils, helping to contribute to larger crop yields. **FAO photo**

Pulses not only boost our food security and nutrition, but they also nourish our soils and benefit the environment.

On World Pulses Day, on Feb. 10, the Food and Agriculture of the United Nations (FAO) is highlighting the potential that these small and powerful seeds have to improve everything from soil health to healthy diets.

Here are four ways in which pulses nourish soils and soils nourish us:

1. Pulses make essential nutrients available to soils.

It is widely known that healthy soils contribute to growing healthy and nutritious foods. But did you know that pulses also improve soil health by providing and mobilizing nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorous and micronutrients?

Pulses get over 60 percent of their nitrogen from the air. This nitrogen is then fed into the soil and allows these legumes to share this nitrogen with nearby crops, essentially reducing the need for chemical fertilizers. This unique ability is called biological nitrogen fixation—where they convert atmospheric nitrogen gas into ammonia (a plant-useable form of nitrogen).

Phosphorous is another much needed but often lacking nutrient in soils, crucial for converting the sun's energy and helping plants grow. However, phosphorous is often only present in small amounts and even then, may be in chemically unavailable forms. As a result, farmers add mineral fertilizers to offset this loss. *(To be continued)*

FAO News



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Negros Occ. to aid drought-hit farmers

Provincial gov't eyes P2,500 cash assistance to each rice planter; reports show P12M worth of crops already lost to impact of El Niño

By Carla Gomez
@carlagomezINQ

BACOLOD CITY—The Negros Occidental provincial government is preparing to give financial assistance to farmers who will be affected by the long dry spell caused by the El Niño phenomenon that may last until May. Gov. Eugenio Jose Lacson said he directed provincial agriculturist Dina Genzola to come up with the list of affected farmers who would get cash aid from the province.

"They are now doing the survey and hopefully we will have an idea how many are they. We are contemplating on giving them financial assistance that they can use for their next crop," he said.

Negros Occidental, including Bacolod City, may experience a



Eugenio Jose Lacson
—RICHARD MALIHAN

drought starting the end of February up to May, said the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) in the Visayas.

The provincial government, he said, may be able to give only up to P2,500 per affected farmer.

"I don't think (the amount) is really enough but I hope somehow that can mitigate their financial needs," Lacson said.

Most of the farmers affected are those who depend on rain for their crops.

"In fact, they were not insured last year because they were already told not to plant this crop year because of the expected El Niño," he said.

Costly drought

The dry spell has so far damaged P12,811,097 in rice crops and affected 374 farmers in seven local governments in Negros Occidental, namely, the towns of Isabela, Binalbagan, Moises Padilla, Cauayan and Hinoba-an and Sipalay City.

Lacson said the provincial government is also considering cloud seeding to induce rains

over affected agricultural lands.

According to Pagasa, drought happens during three consecutive months of way below normal rainfall condition or 60 percent reduction from average rainfall.

A drought could adversely affect different climate-sensitive sectors, including water resources, agriculture, energy, health and public safety.

The bulk of the rice produced by Negros Occidental is on irrigated land.

"For as long as our irrigated land can produce the same volume of rice, even if there will be a drop in the overall rice production, I'd like to think that we will be okay because there's always importation also," Lacson said.

"The national government can always turn to importation of rice," he added. INQ



GOVERNMENT HELP NEEDED

IN LUZON, DRY SPELL BRINGS HARDSHIP TO COCO FARMERS

By Delfin T. Mallari Jr.
@dtmallarijrq

LUCENA CITY—A national peasant group on Sunday appealed to the government to help the country's coconut farmers who are expected to suffer more amid the El Niño dry spell.

"Coconut farmers expect reduced yield because of the expected prolonged heat from El Niño. This will further weaken their already low income due to the low price of copra," Danny Carranza, secretary general of Kilusan Para sa Tunay na Repormang Agraryo at Katarungang Panlipunan (Katarungan) said in a statement.

Carranza asked the government to take the present situation of coconut farmers seriously and make the necessary intervention for farmers to bear the impact of El Niño.

"The low income due to the low price of copra has been there for years and this has caused untold misery for ordinary coconut farmers. This situation will not change due to global market conditions," he stressed.

El Niño is a cyclical yet natural weather phenomenon occurring every two to seven years and characterized by the warming of the ocean's surface waters, thereby affecting wind patterns.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration predicted that the strong El Niño may last until the end of February. However, the regular El Niño phenomenon will persist until May.

During El Niño in the Phil-

ippines, reduced rainfall and fewer cyclones adversely affected the agriculture sector, causing significant declines in crop production.

In the past, the dry spell particularly stressed coconut trees, diminishing their fruit-bearing capacity.

To assist farmers, Carranza reiterated their appeal to the government to fast-track the implementation of programs and services under the Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund Act or Republic Act No. 11524.

"There are more than enough funds in the coconut levy that can be used to promote the welfare of coconut farmers, especially in this time of El Niño," he emphasized.

In an earlier interview, Carranza lamented that more than two years after the passage of RA 11524, small coconut farmers have yet to feel the benefits from the multibillion-peso coconut levy fund. RA 11524, which was meant to pave the way for efficient use of the more than P100 billion coco levy fund and reform the coconut sector, was signed by former President Rodrigo Duterte on Feb. 26, 2021.

On June 2, 2022, Duterte issued Executive Order No. 172, or the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan, and tasked the Philippine Coconut Authority to manage and utilize the fund through various programs and projects.

"The coconut farmers continue to wait for the benefit from the recovered coconut levy fund. The fund is hoped and seen as a life game changer for them," Carranza said. INQ



COPRA MAKING A coconut farmer works in his copra making shack in Unisan, Quezon, in this 2016 photo. —DELFIN T. MALLARI JR.

Date: FEB 12, 2024 Page: A9



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

'House will continue to fight rice smuggling, hoarding'

By JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ

[X@joveemarie](#)

THE leadership of the House of Representatives on Sunday reiterated its commitment to combating rice hoarders and smugglers as farmers achieved a historic milestone of producing 20.06 million metric tons (MMT) of rice in 2023.

Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez, in a statement, expressed his deep admiration for Filipino farmers, saying their accomplishments are seen as a significant contribution to addressing the country's rice shortage.

Romualdez reiterated that the House "is firmly committed to ensuring a consistent, stable, and affordable supply of essential commodities for Filipinos."

"We will exercise the chamber's mandate to safeguard the interests of farmers and the public to the fullest extent possible," he said.

Earlier, the Palace lauded the Filipino farmers for their hard work and perseverance after the Philippines registered a record-high production volume of 20.06 MMT of palay in 2023, which is 1.5 percent higher than the 19.76 MMT produced in 2022.

Romualdez said this excep-

tional rice production significantly contributed to raising the combined value of the agriculture and fisheries sectors to P1.763 trillion in 2023, exceeding the P1.757 trillion recorded in 2022.

"This exceptional achievement by our hardworking farmers is truly deserving of praise. They are undeniably the cornerstone and solution to our nation's rice scarcity," he said.

"This historic rice harvest signifies a glimmer of hope for resolving the rice shortage predicament we faced in the past year."

Earlier, President Marcos assured Filipino farmers of the government's support to ensure

the development of Philippine agriculture amid the challenges brought about by both man-made and natural disasters, including the El Niño phenomenon.

Marcos underscored that some parts of the Philippines are now experiencing the effects of the El Niño phenomenon, which is expected to last until June this year amid all the developments in the agriculture sector.

He said his administration has already laid out several programs to mitigate the effects of the El Niño phenomenon and to support the affected farmers to ensure that their harvest will not be affected.

Date: 12 FEB 2024

Page: 51/1 of 51/3

Nonmonetary measures needed to address rice inflation as prices may continue to climb

THE AGGRESSIVE rate hikes of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) over the past two years have helped stabilize inflation, but non-monetary measures are still needed, especially as rice prices remain high.

Rice prices continue to be a "serious concern" as this could cause headline inflation to breach the 2-4% target anew in the second quarter, Monetary Board member V. Bruce J. Tolentino said.

"The Philippines produced a record level of rice in the past season. But work on pushing productivity must continue, because there is significant unmet demand for rice, and many are hungry," he told *BusinessWorld* in a text message.

Rice production and agricultural productivity must grow

faster and surpass the expansion in the population and per capita consumption, he said.

"Increasing productivity is a medium- to long-term effort that requires consistent and faithful effort," Mr. Tolentino said, adding that the government should invest in scientific research and development for the long term.

Latest data from the Philippine Statistics Authority showed headline inflation eased to 2.8% in January from 3.9% in December and 8.7% in the same month in 2023.

This was the slowest inflation point since the 2.3% seen in October 2020 and was below the 3.1% median estimate in a *BusinessWorld* poll.

January also marked the second straight month that the consumer price index (CPI) was within the BSP's 2-4% annual goal following 20 consecutive months of above-target inflation.

The central bank sees headline inflation averaging 3.7% this year, slower than the 6% print in 2023, and easing further to 3.2% in 2025.

Meanwhile, the central bank's risk-adjusted forecasts show that inflation could settle at 4.2% this year, above the 2-4% target, and could slow to 3.4% in 2025.

The BSP has kept its policy rate unchanged at a 16-year high of 6.5% for two straight meetings since November. This was after it hiked benchmark borrowing costs by a cumulative 450 basis points

(bps) from May 2022 to October 2023 to help bring down the CPI.

"I am happy that the monetary policy decisions made over the last year have helped to manage and bring down inflation," Mr. Tolentino said.

"(But) rice prices continue to be high due to the dynamics of reduced global supplies due to India's ban on rice exports, plus the emerging impact of fertilizer supply constraints arising from the war in Ukraine," he added.

In January, rice inflation quickened to 22.6% in January from 19.6% in December. This is the highest rice inflation in nearly 15 years or since 22.9% in March 2009.

Rice, SI/3

Rice,
from SI/1

Rice was also the biggest contributor to January inflation, adding 1.3 percentage points to the 2.8% headline print. The commodity has the biggest weight in the overall CPI basket at 8.87%.

National Statistician Claire Dennis S. Mapa earlier said the higher rice inflation was due to an increase in prices in the global market and a low base, noting that annual rice inflation may hover at around 20% or even higher until July.

"A key factor in the continuing increases in rice prices is tight domestic stocks, which were not fully replenished because import permits were drastically constrained in 2022 up to mid-2023," Mr. Tolentino said.

China Banking Corp. Chief Economist Domini S. Velasquez also noted that a large part of January inflation was driven by favorable base effects from last year's peak.

"Persistent double-digit rice inflation has pushed up our inflation forecast for the year from 3.5% to 3.8%. Rice prices remain on an uptrend and will likely continue to drive inflation in the coming months," she said.

"Looking ahead, El Niño, which is expected to persist until the second quarter of 2024, could drive up prices. Inward-looking policies of rice exporter nations have also exacerbated global rice prices," Ms. Velasquez added.

She noted that the government's rice supply deal with Vietnam could help ensure stable supply of rice. Under a memorandum of understanding signed during President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.'s two-day state visit to Vietnam in January, Hanoi committed to supply 1.5 million to 2 million metric tons of white rice to the Philippines "at a competitive and affordable price" for five years.

Union Bank of the Philippines, Inc. Chief Economist Ruben Carlo O. Asuncion said average inflation may hit 4.1% this year amid high food prices, before easing to 3.8% in 2025.

"As fading base effects meet the impact of the drought in the second quarter, headline inflation is expected to peak in the range of 5% year on year in June-July before tapering off to a low of 3.5% in September," he said in an e-mail. — **Keisha B. Ta-asan**



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

NEWS BRIEF

Romualdez kinilala sakripisyo ng mga magsasaka

KINILALA ni Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez ang mga magsasakang Pilipino na nakalikha ng 20 milyong metriko tonelada ng bigas noong 2023, isang all-time high record ng bansa.

Ayon kay Romualdez ang pagtaas ng produksyon ng bigas ay nakadagdag sa pagtaas ng kabuuang halaga ng agriculture at fisheries sector na naitala sa P1.763 trilyon noong 2023 mula sa P1.757 trilyon noong 2022.

"This exceptional achievement by our hard-working farmers is truly deserving of praise. They are undeniably the cornerstone and solution to our nation's rice scarcity," sabi ni Romualdez.

"This historic rice harvest signifies a glimmer of hope in resolving the rice shortage predicament we faced in the past year," dagdag pa nito.

Sinabi ni Romualdez nananatili ang pangako ng Kamara na tutulong upang matiyak na mayroong sapat at maaasahang suplay ng pagkain para sa mga Pilipino. **(Billy Begas)**



Agriculture created 500K jobs in Dec.

THE agriculture sector generated more than 500,000 jobs as the country recorded increased labor participation based on December employment rate data.

In a news forum in Quezon City on Saturday, Socioeconomic planning Undersecretary Rosemarie Edillon said labor force participation went up in

the country as shown in the December 2023 data.

"Iyong pinakamalaking job creation ay sa industry—almost 900,000 po iyong sa industry; followed by agriculture mga lampas 500,000 iyon; and then iyong sa services mga 100,000," said Edillon of the National Economic and Development Au-

thority (NEDA).

"So, this is exactly the kind of profile na we want na mas marami talaga iyong manggagalingsa industry," she pointed out.

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) December 2023 Labor Force Survey, the agriculture and industry

sectors accounted for 24.4 percent and 18.3 percent of the employed persons, respectively.

Agriculture and forestry are at the top five sub-sectors in terms of annual increase in the number of employed persons in December 2023, accounting 715,000 employment.

PCO

Date: 12 FEB 2024 Page: 5



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Gov't mulls targeted subsidy to agri sector – NEDA exec

AN official of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) on Saturday said the government is looking into providing targeted subsidy to the agricultural sector.

Undersecretary Rosemarie Edillon said that for now, NEDA is planning financial assistance to farmers as it cannot provide subsidy across the board yet.

"Ito nga po iyong inaano namin na kailangang mayroon tayong targeted din na subsidy -- puwedeng targeted subsidy sa mga farmers. Kaya ang naging subsidy natin is in terms of iyong sa production nila, iyong fuel subsidy kasi doon talaga sila tinamaan dito eh, sa fuel, sa fertilizer. Tapos iyon ding assistance para sa mechanization (We really need a subsidy targeted at farmers. This subsidy is meant for their production, like fuel subsidy because that is where they need it most, for fuel and fertilizer)," she said at the Saturday News Forum in Quezon City.

Aside from farmers, she said the

government is considering targeting consumers in the lower income classes through food stamps from the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

"Pero iyon nga, dapat targeted kasi hindi naman natin kakayanin na, you know, subsidized na kumbaga across the board, ganito lang kababa dapat iyong presyo (But providing food subsidy will only be targeted because we cannot give subsidy across the board)," Edillon said.

She also noted the decrease in unemployment, which went down to 3.1 percent in December 2023 compared to 4.3 percent in the same month in 2022.

"And another good result is that the biggest job creation was in the industry sector -- almost 900,000 jobs in the industry sector, followed by agriculture at 500,000, and then services at 100,000. So, this is exactly the kind of profile that we want, that many will be coming from the industry sector," she said. PNA

Malaya Business Insight

Date: FEB. 12, 2021 Page: A10



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Soybeans, corn weaken

CHICAGO- US corn and soybean futures hovered near three-year lows on Friday as South American crop weather improved and forecasts called for plentiful supplies, but losses were limited by short covering ahead of the weekend.

Both markets posted weekly declines, with soybeans notching an eighth straight drop and corn down for the eighth time in nine weeks.

Wheat futures were higher on bargain buying and short covering, and as the US dollar softened. But the market was lower in the week for the fifth time in six weeks.

Corn and soybean markets remained focused on supply and demand estimates released by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Brazil's Conab a day earlier.

Both reduced projections of Brazilian soybean and corn output in the light of recent drought. Consultancy Safras& Mercado also cut its Brazil-

ian soy crop estimate on Friday.

The USDA trimmed its global corn stocks outlook in Thursday's monthly report, but raised its world soybean stocks view to an all-time high and cut its US soybean export forecast.

"The (USDA) report yesterday didn't feed the bear in corn, whereas the US and world stocks for soybeans went above the high trade estimates," said Mike Zuzolo, president of Global Commodity Analytics.

Rain forecast in Brazil and Argentina, which has endured a heat wave in the past week, has also tempered worries about stress to corn and soy crops.

Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) March soybeans were down 10 cents at \$11.83-1/2 per bushel, just above this week's low of \$11.79-1/4, the weakest for a most-active contract since December 2020. - Reuters



FAO launches new portal for statistics on food and diet

TO help close data gaps and contribute to better guidance for nutrition-sensitive agrifood systems policies, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has created a new domain in the FAOSTAT portal.

The domain presents harmonized food and nutrient statistics from different types and sources of dietary data. It reports statistics on the availability, apparent consumption, and dietary intake of foods, energy and 17 main nutrients thus capturing different dimensions across the food supply chain, from supply through to individual-level consumption.

Statistics are available from 2010 for 186 countries in the section on food and nutrient availability, as they are based on the long-standing work done by FAO on food balance sheets—supply utilization accounts.

Apparent food and nutrient intake is derived from data collected in household consumption and expenditure surveys that, so far, are available only in some of the countries. Information on food and nutrient intake is also presented coming from nationally representative individual intake surveys.

The new domain provides critical information about nutrients—going well beyond calories alone. FAO hopes that this will help in setting agrifood system priorities and that it will motivate countries to invest in making data from surveys more readily available.

“Diets are the link between food systems and many nutrition and health outcomes. Robust statistics on food and nutrient availability, and household and individual level food and nutrient consumption are needed to help understand the local situation to be able to develop policies and programs that enable healthy diets for all,” FAO Food and Nutrition Director Lynnette Neufeld said in a statement.

“The new domain responds to a critical need to improve the

availability of data to inform the transformation of agrifood systems towards one that produces the nutritious and healthy food needed to achieve healthy diets for all. To achieve this, we needed to harmonize food and nutrient statistics that are publicly available, as highlighted during the Committee on World Food Security's High-Level Panel of Experts in 2023,” said José Rosero Moncayo, FAO Chief Statistician and Director of Statistics Division.

The Food and Diet Domain has four sub-domains, the result of a collaboration between FAO's Food and Nutrition, Statistics, and Fisheries and Aquaculture Divisions.

Availability, based on supply utilization accounts, offers statistics on food, energy and nutrient supply for 186 countries from 2010.

In a major addition, figures are now available not only for energy, protein and fat but also for carbohydrates, fiber, calcium, iron, magnesium, zinc, phosphorous, potassium, thiamin, riboflavin, vitamin C, vitamin A and other important nutrients that come from aquatic foods.

Statistics on apparent intake currently offer information on food and nutrients for 30 countries, based on Household Consumption and Expenditure Surveys.

Statistics from five nationally representative individual quantitative dietary intake surveys from four countries provide information on nutrient intake for some population sub-groups while statistics based on the minimum dietary diversity for women indicator are sourced from ten individual qualitative dietary surveys in nine countries.

The available household and individual level information is disaggregated into income groups, by sex and age, and by rural and urban populations where possible, making the data robust for identifying groups that may be most in need of interventions.



Traders pile in to cocoa options with futures soaring to records

TRADERS piled in to buy cocoa options this week as futures surged to record highs on concern global supplies will be tight after drought and disease ravaged crops in top West African producers.

Implied volatility—a key measure of options costs—doubled since mid-January, with an especially high premium being paid for calls protecting against higher prices over the next couple of months. Soaring raw-material costs already are weighing on chocolate makers and may force Hershey Co. to raise prices, the company's CEO said Thursday.

Poor weather conditions have been a drag on output from Ivory Coast and Ghana, the world's largest producers. Even if conditions improve in the next season, supply is unlikely to make a quick recovery: new trees take years to bear beans and West African farmers still need higher incomes to invest

in their fields.

Some large speculators may have missed out on the last leg of the rally. Money managers cut net-long positions in futures and options to the lowest level in 17 weeks in the seven days ending Tuesday, Commodity Futures Trading Commission data showed. Futures rose 9.6 percent since then.

Cocoa prices are climbing fast, and chocolate makers like Hershey Co. may continue raising prices to keep up.

Prices for the all-important ingredient are reaching "historic" levels, Chief Executive Officer Michele Buck said in the company's earnings statement last Thursday. While the company says its marketing plans, innovation and productivity efforts will help soften the blow, the higher costs are "expected to limit earnings growth this year," she said.

New York cocoa futures hit a record Thursday morning, after a year that saw prices double as West African growers got hit with extreme weather.

The Reese's maker said its fourth-quarter confectionery sales in North America increased 2.1 percent, with prices up but volumes down. It expects net sales to grow 2 percent to 3 percent in 2024, mostly driven by higher prices the company has already planned. And prices could go up still more.

Commodities are seeing low-double-digit percentage inflation, Chief Financial Officer Steve Voskuil said on the call with analysts, with cocoa and sugar as the most inflationary. Noncommodity inflation, he said, is much lower, at mid-single digits, putting the average inflation rate for the company at high single digits.

"We can't talk about future pricing," Buck said, but added, "given where cocoa

prices are, we will be using every tool in our toolbox, including pricing, as a way to manage the business." If prices do go up, the company will see that benefit in the second half of 2024 and into 2025, she said.

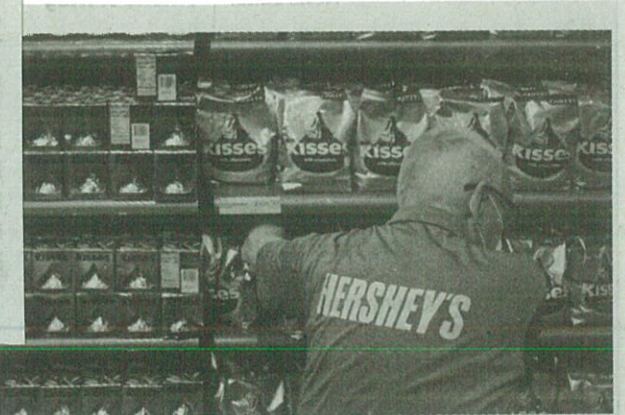
Hershey shares rose as much as 5.5 percent in New York trading, the most since July 2020. The stock is up 4.2 percent this year through Wednesday, outpacing the 2.7 percent gain of the S&P 500 consumer-staples index.

Corn ethanol

A CORN ethanol boom that reshaped Brazil's biofuel industry is nearing an end, according to São Martinho SA, one of the country's largest producers of the fuel.

Weakness in prices is making it harder for companies to keep investing in new ethanol plants, São Martinho Chief Financial Officer Felipe Vicchiato told investors Friday.

HERSHEY Kisses candy at Hershey's Chocolate World. BLOOMBERG NEWS



The company makes ethanol from sugar cane and recently started up a new corn plant, but the executive said plans for expanding into corn are no longer economical.

"The bill just doesn't add up," Vicchiato said. He added that corn ethanol production will still grow by about 2.5 billion liters in the coming years as some of the recently announced investments start to ramp up.

The pessimistic outlook is a big shift for Brazil, a country that saw an explosion of

corn ethanol plants recently take over an industry that was traditionally dominated by sugar cane. That has hurt financial results of cane mills, which then shifted to produce increasingly more sugar.

Profitability of corn ethanol mills is also being hurt by lower prices of DDGS, a byproduct of corn ethanol used in animal feed. Recent declines in soybean costs helped push down the price of such products, Vicchiato added. **Bloomberg News**



Soybeans, corn stuck near 3-year lows on high stocks

CHICAGO — US corn and soybean futures hovered near three-year lows on Friday as South American crop weather improved and forecasts called for plentiful supplies, but losses were limited by short covering ahead of the weekend.

Both markets posted weekly declines, with soybeans notching an eighth straight drop and corn down for the eighth time in nine weeks.

Wheat futures were higher on bargain buying and short covering, and as the US dollar softened. But the market was lower in the week for the fifth time in six weeks.

Corn and soybean markets remained focused on supply and demand estimates re-

leased by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Brazil's Conab a day earlier.

Both reduced projections of Brazilian soybean and corn output in the light of recent drought. Consultancy Safras & Mercado also cut its Brazilian soy crop estimate on Friday.

The USDA trimmed its global corn stocks outlook in Thursday's monthly report, but raised its world soybean stocks view to an all-time high and cut its US soybean export forecast.

"The (USDA) report yesterday didn't feed the bear in corn, whereas the US and world stocks for soybeans went above the high trade

estimates," said Mike Zuzolo, president of Global Commodity Analytics.

Rain forecast in Brazil and Argentina, which has endured a heat wave in the past week, has also tempered worries about stress to corn and soy crops.

Chicago Board of Trade March soybeans were down 10 cents at \$11.83-1/2 per bushel, just above this week's low of \$11.79-1/4, the weakest for a most-active contract Sv1 since December 2020.

March corn was down 4-1/4 cents at \$4.29 a bushel after hitting a contract low of \$4.28-1/4. It was the lowest for a most-active contract since December 2020. — **Reuters**



Warm winter, droughts destroying crops in Italy

ROME — Unusually mild weather and droughts in Italy are destroying crops and threatening livelihoods this winter, Italy's main farming lobby Coldiretti said.

The world has just experienced its hottest January on record, continuing a run of exceptional heat fuelled by climate change, according to data published by the European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service.

"A boiling winter is causing nature to crash," Coldiretti said in a statement, adding that some plants are blossoming too early and will be exposed to harm from any drop in temperatures.

The dry spell is also threatening to disrupt the sowing of cereals, legumes and vegetables, with effects on animal feed too, the lobby group said.

"Italy's agriculture is the part of the economy that, more than any other, experiences the consequences of climate change on a daily basis," Coldiretti said. The farming lobby wants help for farmers forced to try to respond to the changing weather and its effects on crop cycles, water management and the land.

It called for the "commitment of the institutions to support innovation, from agriculture 5.0 with drones, robots and satellites to GMO-free green genetics."

Climate concerns, alongside low prices for produce, rising costs and cheap imports have led Italian farmers to join colleagues across Europe in organizing mass protests to demand action by authorities.

As well as harming agriculture, a mild winter has left ski resorts in central Italy idle because of a lack of snow. Winter has been exceptionally mild in other parts of southern Europe, with Spain seeing its warmest January on record, worsening a long-running drought in the regions of Catalonia and Andalusia. —

Reuters



Polish farmers' protests crank up pressure on EU agriculture head

WARSAW — Polish politicians called on the European Union (EU) Commissioner for Agriculture to quit as farmers blocked roads across his home country Poland and at border crossings with Ukraine, kicking off a month-long general strike to protest against EU policies.

Farmers in France, Belgium, Portugal, Greece, Spain and Germany have also been protesting against constraints placed on them by EU measures to tackle climate change, as well as rising costs and what they say is unfair competition from abroad.

Polish farmers are angry about the impact of cheap food imports from neighboring Ukraine and what they say is the "passivity" of their government.

EU Agriculture Commissioner Janusz Wojciechowski came under fire from all sides. "There is a man in Europe who united all European and Polish farmers against the reform he proposed. This is Janusz Wojciechowski. Resign!" said Deputy Prime Minister Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz.

Mr. Wojciechowski was also criticized by the leader of the former ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party that proposed him for the position. Jarosław Kaczyński said he would call the commissioner to ask him to quit.

Mr. Wojciechowski told private broadcaster Polsat News that he had not answered or looked at his telephone, adding that he would make a statement on his future in a few days.

He defended his record, saying that he was the only commission-



ALEXANDRE LALLEMAND-UNSPASH

er to have opposed imports from Ukraine. About 100 farmers and 50 cars blocked the approach to Medyka border crossing, blocking traffic for all vehicles, Ukrainian border service spokesman Andriy Demchenko said on television.

The Ukrainian border service also said that traffic flow had been disrupted at two other crossings.

Elsewhere in central Europe, a farmers' protest was taking place at the Zahony crossing on the border between Hungary and Ukraine.

In a comment to the Ukrainian Pravda outlet, Mr. Demchenko said there was no disruption for trucks during the day.

Polish media said there were over 250 blockades across the country. Images showed convoys of tractors clogging roads and banners such as "Without us, you will be hungry, naked and sober."

"Today the whole of Europe is on fire. The Green Deal has arrived, which has destroyed our thinking about agriculture," one of the protesters, Wiesław Gryn, told private broadcaster TVN24 at the Hrubieszów border crossing.

"We are not against pro-ecological solutions, but they must be agreed with farmers."

Poland's agriculture minister said he understood the challenges farmers were facing but he hoped the protests could be organized in a way to be "the least burdensome for citizens."

"Farmers have legitimate concerns, expectations and demands to limit the excessive inflow of goods from Ukraine, as well as from other non-European markets to the EU, especially to Poland," Czesław Siekierski told public radio. — **Reuters**



FREEPIK

El Niño waning, La Niña to develop in H2 2024

THE La Niña weather pattern characterized by unusually cold temperatures in the Pacific Ocean could emerge in the second half of 2024, following a strong El Niño year, a US government weather forecaster said.

The pattern typically brings higher precipitation to Australia, Southeast Asia and India and drier weather to grain and oilseed producing regions of the Americas.

"Even though forecasts made through the spring season tend to be less reliable, there is a historical tendency for La Niña to follow strong El Niño events," the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center (CPC) said.

The current El Niño weather pattern, which caused hot and dry weather in Asia and heavier than usual rains in parts of the Americas, is likely to give way to the neutral conditions during April-June 2024, the CPC said.

CPC said in its monthly forecast there is a 55% chance that La

Niña conditions develop between June and August.

"La Niña is likely to affect the production of wheat and corn in the US, and soybean and corn in Latin America including Brazil," Sabrin Chowdhury, head of commodities at BMI said.

Last year India, the world's biggest rice supplier, restricted exports of the staple following a poor monsoon, while wheat output in No. 2 exporter Australia took a hit.

Palm oil plantations and rice farms in Southeast Asia received less than normal rains. "The development of La Niña is beneficial for the Indian monsoon. Typically, the monsoon delivers abundant rainfall during La Niña years," said an official with India Meteorological Department.

The June-September monsoon, which is vital for India's \$3-trillion economy, brings nearly 70% of the rain the country needs to water crops and replenish reservoirs and aquifers.

— Reuters