

CLIPPINGS FOR TODAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2024

A. SEC. FTL Jr. QUOTED

THE MANILA TMES

Rice prices up 30.28% in January

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

Former BFAR director added to list of DA usecs

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL

Enough rice for first half of 2024- DA

B. DA FAMILY

BUSINESS WORLD

Drought warning raised for provinces producing close to 50% of PHL rice

MANILA BULLETIN

Flower prices to double ahead of Valentine's Day

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Outbid by rice traders, NFA loses market volume

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

Hog raisers struggle to hike production amid ASF blow

More BFAR floating assets eyed in WPS

MANILA STANDARD

Gov't to turn over Casecnan hydro complex to fresh river this month

C. AGRI-RELATED STORY

PILIPINO STAR NGAYON

Gomez integrated farm

ABANTE

Krisis sa bigas mas titindi pa

D. FOREIGN STORY

BUSINESS WORLD

Soybeans, corn hover near 3-year lows as speculators bet on lower prices

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT

Soybeans, corn decline

Indonesia seeks rice imports from Thailand

MANILA BULLETIN

Cocoa prices scale record heights



Rice prices up 30.25% in January

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

THE average price of well-milled rice increased annually by 30.25 percent in January, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said on Monday.

Latest data from the PSA showed that the selling price of well-milled rice averaged P49.86 per kilo in the first month of 2024, which is higher than the P38.28 per kilo posted in the same month last year.

On a monthly basis, the latest

average price was 1.52 percent higher from the price level of P49.11 per kilo last December.

Among the regions, in Central Visayas, the price of well-milled rice was the highest reported at P57.66 per kilo during the period, while the Ilocos Region was the lowest at P44.98 per kilo.

The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) reported the highest

increase in the average price of well-milled rice by 7.6 percent to P53.60 per kilo.

A monthly increment of 1.68 percent was also observed in the prices of regular milled rice, which averaged P46.60 per kilo during the same period. This was in comparison to the P45.83 per kilo posted last month.

The average price of premium rice also increased to P54.14 per kilo,

higher by 1.7 percent than P53.23 per kilo logged in the previous month.

Likewise, the average price of special rice went up by 1.79 percent to P55.11 per kilo from P54.14 per kilo a month earlier.

Last week, Department of Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said that prices of rice will remain elevated until September this year due to the higher prices on the international market and

the increasing demand caused by the El Niño weather pattern.

However, he added that the rice supply will remain sufficient until the first half of the year.

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



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Former BFAR director added to list of DA usecs

By **BELLA CARIASO**

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. has appointed former Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) director Asis Perez as undersecretary for policy, planning and regulations amid the ongoing major reshuffle at the department.

Laurel signed Special Order 181 formally designating Perez

after sources confirmed that he and other personalities would be included in the growing list of undersecretaries within the DA.

"In the exigency of service, Atty. Asis Perez is hereby designated as Undersecretary for Policy, Planning and Regulations. As such, he shall perform the duties and responsibilities inherent to the designation and such others as may be directed

by the Secretary," Laurel said in his special order.

Perez replaced Undersecretary Drusila Esther Bayate, who was earlier appointed to replace Undersecretary Mercedita Sombilla.

Laurel now has 11 undersecretaries, compared to the six undersecretaries when President Marcos was still the concurrent agriculture secretary.



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Enough rice for first half of 2024 -- DA

By Joel dela Torre

THE country's rice supply is sufficient through the first half of the year.

This was assured by Agriculture Secretary Francisco Laurel Jr. citing recent imports coupled with the upcoming harvest that peaks in March and April that would ensure stable price of the main food staple through June.

The DA chief however, stressed that concerns over the impact of El Nino on global rice supply may somehow make prices stay elevated through September.

This he said, is due to the heightened demand for the grain that, consequently keeping international prices high.

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

Just last week, the Phil-



ippines signed a five-year rice supply deal with Vietnam that ensures a source of 1.5 million to 2.0 million metric tons of rice a year.

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

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

"What we need to guard against now are profiteers who may attempt to ex-

ploit the situation by using El Nino as excuse to hoard rice supply to push local prices to unreasonably high levels," the agriculture chief said.

Secretary Tiu Laurel instructed DA assistant secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa to coordinate with the Department of Trade and Industry and law enforcement agencies to closely monitor surges in the price of rice in the market.

The Philippine Statistics Authority identified rice as a major risk in the

consumer price index, which is used to measure inflation.

Economic Planning Undersecretary and National Statistician Dennis Mapa suggested that inflation could have been lower were it not for the double-digit increase in rice prices compared last year given its weight in the consumer basket.

Mapa said since price base for rice between January and July last year was lower, any increase in the price of the national staple could be magnified in the inflation print. Headline inflation in January eased to 2.8 percent, its slowest pace since October 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rice has a weight of 8.87 percent in the consumer basket used to determine headline inflation and an even higher at 17.87 percent share in the spending of the bottom 30 percent of income households.



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Drought warning raised for provinces producing close to 50% of PHL rice

DROUGHT induced by El Niño is expected to hit five major rice-growing provinces that accounted for nearly half of the country's rice output in 2023, the government weather service said.

In a report, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said the affected provinces are Nueva Ecija, Isabela, Pangasinan, Cagayan, and Negros Occidental, with drought conditions expected to prevail until the end of February.

PAGASA defines drought as three consecutive months of way below normal rainfall conditions or greater than 60% reduction from average rainfall.

PAGASA has said that the effects of El Niño may run until the second quarter. An estimated 63 provinces will experience droughts or dry spells.

In 2023, the Philippines reported output of 20.06 million metric tons (MT) of palay or unmilled rice, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority.

This exceeded the 20 million MT target set by the Department of Agriculture (DA) and was 1.53% higher than the prior year.

The five provinces represent 49.52%, or 9.93 million MT, of

palay production in 2023.

The DA's target was unchanged in 2023, with the impact of El Niño likely offsetting any productivity gains in the rice industry.

Iloilo, another top rice-producing province, is set to experience dry spells during the period. The province produced 1.07 million MT last year, or 5.33%.

PAGASA defines dry spells as "below normal" rainfall conditions for three consecutive months, or a 21-60% reduction from the area's average rainfall.

Other top rice-producing provinces are expected to be unaffected by the ongoing El Niño until the end of February. They are Camarines Sur, Maguindanao, Tarlac, Bukidnon, and Cotabato.

The provinces made up 19.64% of palay production in 2023.

Initial reports put rice damage and losses from El Niño at P151.3 million, according to the DA's third El Niño bulletin.

PAGASA said the strong and mature El Niño currently prevailing is projected to continue through February. A transition to a state known as ENSO-neutral (El Niño-Southern Oscillation) is then expected in the second quarter. — **Adrian H. Halili**



Flower prices to double ahead of Valentine's Day

By GABRIELL CHRISTEL GALANG

Despite the increase in flower prices ahead of Valentine's Day, the Municipal Agricultural and Fishery Council (MAFC) in La Trinidad and Benguet has assured the public of an ample supply of cut flowers for the season.

MAFC chairman Andy Colte said on Monday, Feb. 12, that more trucks have been delivering cut flowers every morning to vendors and arrangers in Dimasalang, or the so-called Dangwa, in Manila.

Expecting the heavy demand during the special occasion, Colte told Manila Bulletin that "around seven to 10 or more 16-wheel trucks will be sent out [from our region] to Metro Manila."

Since there has been no recent weather inconvenience that could affect the cut flower industry, farmers in Benguet and La Trinidad can still

► 8

Flower prices to double ahead of Valentine's Day 1◀

supply their products beyond Luzon.

"There's no storm or rainfall yet, not even wilted flowers, so there's still a large supply [to be delivered] even outside of Metro Manila. This includes Palawan or Mindanao through roll-on, roll-off cargo ships [ROROs]."

In addition, the MAFC expects prices to double this week due to a higher demand for fresh floral arrangements in the market.

"Flower prices increasing during Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, or All Soul's Day is normal," he said. "Roses will be the one heavily affected by the hike, while other flowers will also increase a little."

The latest price range for three pieces of red roses in Dangwa is sold at ₱400, while a dozen is at ₱1,000.

To further debunk the scarcity myth during special occasions, the MAFC chairman explained that as demand grows for flowers, additional operational costs also rise due to more truck deliveries.

"Usually the industry provides six to seven trucks of flowers every early morning to Dimasalang, but since it's almost Valentine's Day, it will be up to 10 trucks [which is already a lot]."

Aside from just delivering flowers to Metro Manila and other areas of the Philippines like Bicol, he added that the cut flower industry has been sharing their cargo space with vegetables to make sure that both agricultural products are carried out to markets on time.

Flower growers are seeking government aid to further support the cut flower industry and hope that the Department of Agriculture [DA] would allocate more budget the same way they have provided for the rice, corn, and vegetable sectors.

Free ₱100 lotto tickets for couples

Meanwhile, the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office (PCSO) announced on Monday its Valentine's Day treat for couples who will try their luck in lotto.

In a social media post, the PCSO said the first 100 couples will receive free ₱100 major draw tickets at its main office in Mandaluyong City on Valentine's Day, Feb. 14.

"Be among the first 100 couples/pairs and get ₱100 worth of jackpot bearing game tickets," the PCSO said.

In addition, the agency emphasized the special draw for the upcoming Valentine's Day, called "4D Love of the Game," in which couples can participate by purchasing a 4D Lotto entry.

"There's a mini raffle with special prizes to be given away for couples who will join," PCSO said in a mix of English and Filipino.

"Simply buy 4D Lotto tickets worth ₱20, and you're in! It's that easy," it added.

The PCSO invites the public to visit its main office as the promo is only available at the said location. (With a report from Sonny Daanoy)



Outbid by rice traders, NFA loses market volume

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**
@jordeenelagare

The **National Food Authority (NFA)** was able to sell only 18.34 percent of its targeted volume of rice in the fourth quarter of 2023 as higher farm-gate prices offered by traders weakened its stockpiling.

In its accomplishment report, the NFA said it had procured 858,604 bags, or 42,930.2 metric tons (MT) of palay or unhusked rice, in the fourth quarter, sliding by 63.19 percent from 2.3 million bags (116,641.25 MT) in the same period a year ago.

The buying volume was equivalent to just 8.34 percent of the food agency's target volume of around 10.3 million bags (514,916.5 MT) for the three-month period.

In December alone, the NFA was able to buy only 43,643 bags of palay, down 86.7 percent from 327,302 bags in the same month last year.

"The low procurement can be attributed to the active participation of traders offering higher farm-gate price that is above the government support/buying price," the NFA said in the report.

It noted that the farm-gate price of palay in December had averaged P25.44 per kilogram for clean and dry stocks and P21.86 per kg for wet/fresh variety. These prices were higher than the NFA's buying price of P19 to P23 per kg for dry palay and P16 to P19 for wet palay as announced in September last year purportedly to improve farmers' income and ensure

ample supply of the staple food. Farmers expectedly chose to deal with traders who were willing to pay better prices.

Limited distribution

The low turnout came despite an increase in the government support or buying price amid buffer stocking incentives and "aggressive procurement strategies" of the NFA.

During the reference period, the NFA distributed 408,344 bags of rice (20,417.2 MT), down by 66.44 percent from 1.2 million bags (60,834.7 MT) a year prior. This was less than a fifth of the NFA's distribution target of 2,227,020 bags (111,351 MT).

"Sales of NFA rice [were] limited only to disaster/calamity response of LGUs (local government units) and other

government relief agencies [that] did not require substantial volume considering the fair weather condition in the country," it added.

The NFA was also forced to unload old or aging stocks to monetize these stocks before their quality deteriorates. It had accumulated aging rice due to low distribution rates.

The food agency is mandated by the Rice Tariffication Law to maintain the optimal level of rice inventory and dispose of it in case of emergencies and calamities. It can source palay only directly from palay producers.

Specifically, the NFA is tasked to "manage efficiently and effectively the acquisition, quality maintenance and disposition of the buffer stock during emergencies and calamities." INQ

Date: FEB 13 2024 Page: B1 & B3



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Hog raisers struggle to hike production amid ASF blow

By JASPER EMMANUEL ARCALAS

Hog production continued its recovery last year, but still at a rate slower than what industry players and government officials hoped for as threats posed by African swine fever (ASF) deter repopulation efforts.

Hog output last year grew by 3.27 percent to 1.793 million metric tons – the highest in three years – from 1.737 million MT, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

The volume rose for the second consecutive year since production plunged to 1.696 million MT in 2021 after ASF decimated the country's pig population.

Despite the increase, hog production last year was nowhere near the 2.25 million MT average output from 2016 to 2019, before local farms suffered from ASF.

Agriculture Undersecretary Deogracias Victor Savellano told **The STAR** that the government is struggling to ramp up its hog repopulation efforts due to the absence of an ASF vaccine and weak biosecurity of farms against the disease.

"We need the cooperation of the local government units to strengthen our efforts. This is not just a fight of the DA but of the whole government; our approach should be like what we did against COVID-19 because we are talking

about our food security here," Savellano said.

He said the Department of Agriculture (DA) is spending at least P1 billion for its hog repopulation program this year.

In addition, the DA will bankroll a new program that will tap some 7,000 barangay officers to boost the department's manpower in monitoring ASF cases and educating farmers regarding the disease.

Nonetheless, Savellano said that he sees total hog production this year touching the 1.8-million MT mark.

National Federation of Hog Farmers Inc. president Chester

Turn to B3

Hog From B1

Warren Tan said the threat of ASF is the main culprit for the slow production recovery by the hog industry.

"ASF continues to infect both repopulated backyard and commercial farms whose biosecurity defenses are inadequate. Even big integrated farms have unreported cases of ASF infections," Tan told **The STAR**.

"The government's [repopulation] program was unsuccessful in some regions due to poor implementation as some grant recipients were not swine farmers who are not familiar with biosecurity and thus were hit with ASF after repopulation," he added.

Tan pointed out that the extended imposition of lower pork tariffs have also discouraged local farms to restart operations "due to stiff competition from cheap import prices."

Tan also noted that farmers are also wary of increasing

their output as demand for pork remains tepid because of "lower disposable income" by consumers.

"As a result, liveweight prices remain steady and backyard farmers experience low margins if not breakeven most of the time and may not be worth the higher risk of raising pigs due to high feed cost and ASF infection," he said.

The ASF, a transboundary animal disease that does not transfer to humans, was first confirmed in the Philippines in 2019.

Since then, local hog farms have been struggling to produce, with the total pig population as of Jan. 1 falling to 9.6 million heads from over 12.5 million heads pre-ASF.

Bureau of Animal Industry monitoring showed that there are 80 barangays nationwide with active ASF cases as of Jan. 19. Since

2019, the BAI has confirmed ASF outbreaks in 5,187 barangays across 73 provinces and 17 regions.



FEB. 13, 2024

PAGE: 1 of 4

More BFAR floating assets eyed in WPS

By BELLA CARIASO

To ensure the presence of the **Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources** in the West Philippine Sea, the government has allocated P2.5 billion for the procurement of new floating assets for BFAR.

During the Bagong Pilipinas briefing yesterday, BFAR spokesman

Nazario Briguera said the funding would be used to acquire monitoring control and surveillance patrol vessels and food boats that would be used to assist Filipino fisherfolk amid the continued harassment by the Chinese coast guard and militia.

"The government allotted P2.5 billion for the

Turn to Page 4

More From Page 1

procurement of these new floating assets so (we) can assist our fishermen and they can see (our) presence in the West Philippine Sea. We need to increase our floating assets in the WPS," Briguera said.

He added that BFAR has provided at least 13 tons of diesel to the fisherfolk after the successful resupply mission in Rozul Reef on Feb. 5.

Briguera also said that BFAR would soon launch the livelihood activities to enhance fisheries yield and economic gains or LAYAG program in the WPS.

"This is one of the projects of the government. The government will provide livelihood intervention and expand the opportunities for livelihood to all the fishermen in (the WPS), including the fisherfolk in provinces (nearby)," he said, noting that at least 385,300 Filipino fisherfolk make their living there.

Included in the LAYAG program are the National Capital Region, Mimaropa and Regions 1 and 3, he added. Meanwhile, Philippine Coast Guard-WPS spokesman Commodore Jay Tarriela said the PCG would continue to exercise "maximum tolerance" despite the reported aggressive behavior displayed by Chinese vessels in the WPS.

In an interview over dzBB yesterday, Tarriela said the PCG has no intention of being the cause of the escalation of tension in the WPS even when it is at the receiving end of China's aggression that include the alleged pointing of military-grade laser, firing of water cannon and doing dangerous, close or blocking maneuvers.

"We have been compliant with the guidance of the President that we should not be the reason to escalate the tension. Whatever they would do to us, we would not react negatively that would result in escalation," he pointed out.

Tarriela noted that during these maritime incidents, the PCG only responded with radio challenges and documented the instances to inform the Filipino people and the international community of what is taking place in the WPS and let them see who the violators are.

Tarriela stressed the PCG is exercising maximum tolerance because of its awareness that Filipino fishermen would be the ones to suffer if they retaliate and the situation worsens.

"That (maximum tolerance) is the primary guidance of our commandant, Admiral Ronnie Gil Gavan. Our objective here is to protect our Filipino fishermen and support them in their fishing activities," said Tarriela.

Asked what the PCG would do if China will conduct other forms of harassment, he explained the Asian neighbor also "exercised restraint, calibrated (response) without en-

gaging in military action."

"China is very calculated in its every move. When it took the Mischief Reef in 1995, during the standoff in 2012, and from 2013 to 2016 they reclaimed so many islands in the South China Sea, not just the West Philippine Sea. They keep on changing the status quo without actually firing a single shot," Tarriela said.

"If the question is, are they going to go that far, to go beyond their great tactic that is short of war, I think there are a lot of scholars who would say otherwise. So, from our point of view, we are on the right track. Our approach is not to escalate the tension but to tell the international community that it is China who chose to violate the international law," Tarriela added.

From Feb. 1 to 9, the BRP *Teresa Magbanua* conducted maritime patrol at Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal and distributed food packs to more than 100 fishermen in the area. During that time, it spotted four China Coast Guard (CCG) vessels and four Chinese maritime militia vessels.

Then on Feb. 11, Tarriela continued, these "CCG vessels shadowed the PCG vessel on more than 40 occasions, with the closest distance being 176 meters from its side. The CCG vessels performed dangerous and blocking maneuvers at sea against BRP *Teresa Magbanua* four times, with the CCG vessels crossing the bow of the PCG vessel twice, recklessly."

Tarriela reiterated that the Philippines has sovereignty over Panatag Shoal and its territorial sea, and sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the surrounding waters falling within the Philippine exclusive economic zone as measured from the archipelagic baselines, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the 2016 Arbitral Award.

Given the incidents, National Security Council assistant director general Jonathan Malaya said more countries are now signifying the desire to have a military alliance with the Philippines, similar to what the country has with the US and Australia under the visiting forces agreement or VFA.

"We have a VFA with Australia, then we're signing more VFAs with other countries... I could not reveal the details yet but they (other countries) want a VFA/RAA (Reciprocal Access Agreement)/status of forces agreement with the Philippines," he told a press briefing of the National Task Force on the WPS in La Union yesterday.

Malaya said the negotiations are happening as the Philippines inches closer toward signing an RAA with Japan and with the joint sail activities of the Philippines and the US Indo-Pacific Command in the WPS.

— With Evelyn Macairan, Michael Punongbayan



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Gov't to turn over Casecnan hydro complex to Fresh River this month

THE government is preparing for the ceremonial turnover of the 165-megawatt Casecnan hydroelectric power plant (CHEPP) to Fresh River Lakes Corp. (FLRC) this month.

This followed the Philippine Competition Commission's (PCC) approval of the sale by state-run Power Sector Assets and Liabilities Management Corp. (PSALM) and the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) to FLRC, a subsidiary of Lopez-led First Gen Corp. on Jan. 25, 2024.

The PCC cleared Fresh River's takeover of the CHEPP, seeing that the transaction would not result in substantial lessening of competition in the relevant markets.

PSALM issued its certificate of effectivity to FLRC on Jan. 31, 2024, following PCC's clearance, which marked the CHEPP final transaction documents effective and binding among the parties composed of PSALM, NIA and FLRC.

"The parties are now preparing for the ceremonial turnover of the CHEPP on Feb. 26, 2024," PSALM said.

PSALM declared FLRC as the highest bidder on May 16, 2023, with its offer of \$526 million during the public bidding.

PSALM plans to use proceeds from the privatization of the CHEPP to partially settle its debt. **Alena Mae S. Flores**

Ngayong araw na ito ay ibabahagi ko sa inyo ang isa sa nata-tanging farm na aking napuntahan. Ito ay ang Gomez Integrated Farm sa Mabalacat City sa Pampanga.

Kumpleto ang farm na ito dahil mayroon silang gulayan at iba't ibang uri ng alagang hayop at fishpond.

Mahigit sa dalawang ektarya ang taniman ng gulay sa Gomez Inte-

Integrated farm dahil ang kanilang kinakain ay mga gulay.

Ang dumi o manure naman ng mga baka, kalabaw at baboy ay pinapatuyo at ginagamit na pataba sa mga halaman.

Ang tubig ay mula sa fishpond na ginagamit na pandilig sa mga halaman.

Sa bawat "farndon" at boundary ng Gomez Integrated farm



hayop ay pumupunta rin sa amin," ani Renly.

Sa kakaibang style of farming sa Gomez Integrated Farm ay napapaliit ang gastos at napapalaki ang kita.

Para kay Renly,

to sa pagtatanim ng iba't ibang uri ng halaman sa pamamagitan ng organikong pamamaraan ay maaari po kayong manood at makinig ng aking TV at Radio program na Masaganang Buhay

GOMEZ INTEGRATED FARM

Gulayan at alagang hayop...

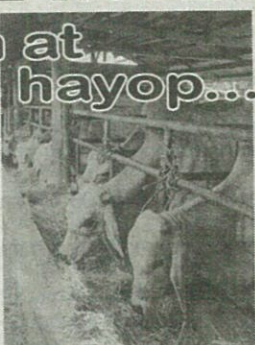
grated Farm at organic farming ang kanilang pamamaraan.

Use, re-use at recycle o papaikot ang estilo ng pagtatanim at pag-aalaga ng hayop sa Gomez Integrated farm.

Mga high value green leafy vegetables ang mga itinatanim sa Gomez Integrated farm tulad ng spinach, kale, lettuce, spring onion, chinese/upland kangkong, pechay, mustasa at herbs na sweet basil.

Mayroong 30-alagang baka sa Gomez Integrated farm, ang 15 ay fattener at ang 15 ay inahin. Mayroon silang mga alagang kalabaw. Maraming alaga na native pigs, mga manok na panabong at iba pang hayop.

Hindi problema ang pagkain ng mga hayop na afaga sa Gomez Integrated farm dahil sa kanilang bukid lang kinukuha tulad ng



ay napapalibutan ng mga tanim na prutas, tulad ng papaya, sagging, mangga, bayabas, apple, ubas, strawberry at iba pa.

Ayon kay Renly Gomez, owner ng Gomez Integrated farm, hindi nila problema kung



Ilan sa mga tanim sa mahigit na dalawang ektaryang farm ng pamilyang Gomez. Bukod pa ang 30 alagang fattener at inahing bakanila rito.

"Farming is enjoyable and profitable, kumikita kana nag-e-enjoy kapa."

Hinihikayat ni Renly at kanyang ama na si Cornelio Gomez ang publiko na magtanim na rin at mag-alaga ng sariling pagkain.

Sa mga gustong bumisita sa Gomez Integrated Farm at nais matuto ng pamamaraan ng mag-amang Renly at Cornelio ay puntahan lamang po ninyo sila barangay Camachile, Mabalacat City, Pampanga.

Puwede po ninyong i-follow at mag-send ng mensahe sa FB profile ni Rhen Gomez.

Sabihin lang po ninyo na nabasa ninyo sa kolum ng Magsasakang Reporter ang tungkol sa kanilang farm.

Sa darating na Linggo, February 18, 2024, alas-7:00 ng umaga ay mapapanood ninyo si Renly Gomez sa panayam ng Magsasakang Reporter sa kanyang TV at Radio Show na Masaganang Buhay.

Samantala, para sa iba pang tips at sikre-

tuwing Linggo, alas-7:00 hanggang alas-8:00 ng umaga sa OnePH Cignal TV, Channel 1 ng TV-5. Mapapakinggan din po sa Radyo Singko 92.3 News FM.

Maaari rin kayong manood at mag-subscribe at mag-follow sa aking Youtube Channel na ANG MAGSASAKANG REPORTER at Facebook profile na Mer Layson at Facebook page na Ang Magsasakang Reporter, TV host Vlogger, Tiktok na Magsasakang Reporter para sa iba pang kaalaman at impormasyon sa pagtatanim ng iba't ibang uri ng halaman sa pamamagitan ng organikong pamamaraan.

Tuwing araw ng Martes ay regular ninyong mababasa ang aking kolum dito sa **Pilipino Star Ngayon (PSN)** ng Star Group of Publications.

Sa mga tanong at komento ay maaari ninyo akong i-text, huwag po tawag, sa 09178675197. STAY SAFE, HAPPY FARMING, GOD BLESS US ALL.



Ang Magsasakang Reporter at Renly Gomez, owner ng Gomez Integrated Farm.

sadyang pagpapatubo ng damo na pagkain ng mga baka at kalabaw dayami ng palay at mga gulay na may konting sira ay pakain naman sa mga baboy.

Nakakatuwang pagmasdan ang mga alagang tilapia sa Gomez

saan ibebenta ang kanilang mga ani dahil pinupuntahan sila ng mga buyer.

"Every other day po ay may buyer na kumukuha o bumibili ng aming mga harvest sa farm, maging ang mga buyer sa aming alagang



KRISIS SA BIGAS MAS TITINDI PA

MAS titindi pa ang krisis sa bigas ngayong taon kumpara noong 2023, ayon sa Federation of Free Farmers Cooperatives, Inc.

Ayon kay Raul Montemayor, lider ng nasabing grupo, hindi sapat ang produksyon ng bigas sa bansa dahil halos 1 milyong tonelada ang kinokonsumo kada buwan.

Maaaring magkaroon din ng problema sa importasyon dahil sa sobrang mahal ng bigas sa abroad.

"Wala tayong sapat na production, kailangan nating angkatin iyan, so pagdating ng Marso aani tayo pero

habang umaani tayo, kumakain tayo ng halos 1 million tons every month. Pagdating ng July, August, September lalo na kung walang pumasok na imports dahil mahal, mas matindi pa 'yung problema natin kaysa last year," wika ni Montemayor sa isang radio interview.

"Ngayon 'yong pag-aangkat hindi rin tayo makakasiguro don eh dahil mataas ang presyo, eh baka wala ring gustong umangkat sa mga pribadong sektor. Dahil pinagbawal ng rice tariffication law ang gobyerno na umangkat so nakasalalay

sa pribadong sektor kung papayag ba silang umangkat kahit mahal ang presyo," dugtong pa niya.

Panawagan niya sa publiko, magtipid at huwag sasayangin ang bigas. Malaki umano sa mga nasasayang na bigas ay mula sa mga restaurant.

"Dapat every small way na makatipid tayo o makadagdag tayo sa production gawin na natin dahil 'yong tubig ulan wala tayong magagawa doon kung ayaw talagang umulan," ani Montemayor na ang tinutukoy ay ang epekto ng El Nino phenomenon sa bansa.



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Soybeans, corn hover near 3-year lows as speculators bet on lower prices

CANBERRA — Chicago soybeans and corn futures rose on Monday but remained near three-year lows as demand in top importer China fell and speculators bet on further price declines.

Wheat fell as cheap shipments from the Black Sea region continued to pressure prices.

The most-active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) was up 0.4% at \$11.88-1/4 a bushel by 0525 GMT, while CBOT corn rose 0.2% to \$4.30 a bushel.

Both contracts fell last week to their lowest levels since December 2020, with soybeans touching \$11.79 and corn \$4.28-1/4.

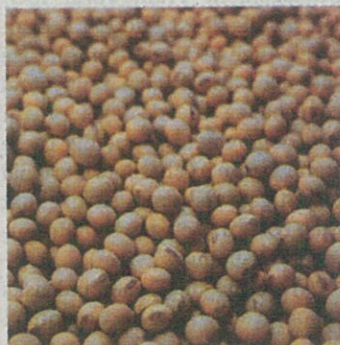
CBOT Wheat dipped 0.3% to \$5.94-3/4 a bushel, holding some distance above a three-year low of \$5.40 reached last September.

Supply of soybeans from South America is plentiful while demand in China weakens as a shrinking pig herd reduces the need for animal feed, said Vitor Pistoia at Rabobank in Sydney.

"China imports roughly 60% of all exported soybeans. If they are not buying a lot, the price will fall," he said, adding that the price dynamic may not change until data showing how much land US farmers have planted with soybeans, corn and wheat are published in late March.

Trade was subdued as markets in China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Malaysia were closed for a public holiday on Monday.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA), Brazilian crop agency Conab and two private



UNSPLASH

forecasters cut their estimates for the 2023/2024 soybean harvest in Brazil, the world's biggest soybean producer.

But the USDA has significantly raised its estimates for Brazil's last harvest and Argentina is on track for a bumper crop, allaying any fears of shortages.

Plentiful supply of Brazilian beans has shriveled US soybean exports this year and pressured Chicago prices.

The USDA raised its estimate for US soybean ending stocks for 2023/2024 to 315 million bushels, up from 280 million in January and well above analysts' estimates.

Speculators' net short position in Chicago soybeans crept closer to all-time records last week, with funds selling soy again on Friday, traders said.

For corn, the USDA and Conab cut their estimates for Brazil's crop but the USDA raised its forecast for US 2023/2024 corn ending stocks by more than most analysts expected to 2.172 billion bushels.

Speculators also hold their biggest net short position in corn for years. — **Reuters**



Soybeans, corn decline

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Indonesia seeks rice imports from Thailand

JAKARTA- Indonesia's government on Monday sought to assure consumers that rice stocks were adequate amid increasing sale restrictions in mini markets and supermarkets since the end of 2023.

"After a coordination meeting with the president, we assure that rice stocks are adequate, and we will speed up availability for modern retailers," Head of the National Food Agency (NFA) Arief Prasetyo Adi told reporters on Monday.

Availability of five kilograms sacks at modern retail outlets have been reportedly scarce since around September last year, leading to a restriction for retail customers.

Head of retail business association (Aprindo), Roy Mandey, confirmed the restrictions, saying it was to ensure distribution and avoid reselling. He said the association was seeking to ensure availability.

According to a weekly inflation meeting broadcasted online on Monday, the price of rice had increased 1.65 percent by the middle of February.

Data from the agriculture ministry showed that the country had a rice deficit of 1.63 million tons in January and 1.15 millions in February.

The NFA said Indonesia plans to import 2.44 million tons of rice in 2024, of which around 445,000 tons is a quota carried over from 2023.

Edy Priyono from the presi-



A farmer collecting paddy during harvest day at a rice field in Candipuro district, Lumajang, East Java province. (Reuters Photo)

dential staff office warned there were planting areas at high risk of flooding in January and February, which could delay harvesting.

Indonesia is seeking to import 200,000 metric tons of rice from Thailand under a government-to-government arrangement, its state food procurement agency (Bulog) said on Monday.

Bulog said earlier this month that it had contracted 500,000 metric tons of rice from Vietnam,

Myanmar, and Pakistan.

Indonesia has already approved a 2 million ton rice import quota this year, a quarter of which is expected to arrive by March, officials said. In 2023, it imported 3.06 million tons of the grain, a near-record.

Indonesia's initial forecast for 32 million metric tons of rice output in 2024 has been undercut by predictions that rice output in January and February is expected to drop 46 percent from a year ago

to 2.25 million tons, officials said.

Output was disrupted last year by the dry El Nino weather pattern but production is expected to recover this year. The meteorological agency (BMKG) forecast El Nino would remain in early 2024 and gradually neutralize by April.

Last year, Indonesian President Joko Widodo said his government had secured commitment from India and Thailand to shore up supply for 2024. -Reuters

Date: FEB. 13, 2024 Page: 31



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■ Cocoa prices scale record heights

LONDON, United Kingdom (AFP) — Cocoa struck record renewed peaks Friday in both London and New York, driven by a supply crunch over bad weather in top producers Ghana and Ivory Coast. The New York price of cocoa zoomed to \$6,030 per tonne, shattering its previous long-standing 1977 high of \$5,379. London cocoa extended its record-breaking week to vault to a new peak at £4,786 per tonne. The rocketing cocoa market has sparked fear over the knock-on impact on the price of chocolate, at a time when the world's major economies are already grappling with elevated inflation. "The ongoing (price) surge has been driven by a worse-than-expected deficit in 2023/2024, the third in a row, due to adverse developments in West Africa," noted Saxo Bank analyst Ole Hansen.