

CLIPPINGS FOR TODAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2024

A. SEC. FTL Jr. QUOTED

BUSINESS WORLD

Seaweed ambitions face funding constraints

BUSINESS MIRROR

DA clarifies temporary ban on cattle imports

DA taps space technology to boost farm output

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

DA allows milk imports from Thailand, Russia, SoKor, Libya

Phl seeks 'best' WTO deal for farmers, fishermen

MANILA STANDARD

Accord inked to boost farm, fishery outputs

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL

DA lauds FAO's support to boost PH aquaculture

B. DA FAMILY

MANILA BULLETIN

BFAR vessel blocked, 'blinded' by China Coast Guard in Bajo de Masinloc...

PH to discuss agri-fisheries policies in WTO conference

THE MANILA TIMES

El Niño losses hit P357M; 6,523 HA affected, says DA

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT

BFAR boat blocked by Chines vessels in Scarborough – PCG

El Niño damage to crops now at P357M

BUSINESS WORLD

Rice processing facility due to rise in Cotabato province

Western Visayas targeted for dairy industry expansion

BUSINESS MIRROR

WTO meet focus: Public stockholding for food security

Solon calls for probe into online sale of smuggled onions, other agri goods

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

El Niño damage to agri sector hits P357.4M

Coconut processors want more funding for VCO research

More Filipinos now fish in Panatag Shoal – BFAR

MANILA STANDARD

Agency eyeing dairy industry in Iloilo town

Lee urges congressional probe into online sale of smuggled onions

BFAR: Filipino fishers back at Bajo de Masinloc

REMATE

Tolentino: Ibalik ang focus sa Agricultural High Schools

PILIPINO STAR NGAYON

Baboy, iba pang pork products pwede na sa Negros Oriental

BFAR: Pinoy na mangingisda sa Scarborough Shoal dumami na

ABANTE

P358 winasak ng El Niño sa agrikultura

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL

Editorial: Smugglers killing Filipino onion farmers

C. AGRI-RELATED STORY

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Editorial: Public health or tobacco farmers

THE MANILA TIMES

Taiwan Technical Mission transforms farming landscape in Pampanga, Tarlac

REMATE

DSWD katuwang ng magsasaka laban sa El Niño

ABANTE TONITE

BBM: Taas-presyo ng bigas 'di lang sa 'Pinas

D. FOREIGN STORY

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT

Corn, soybeans turn lower

BUSINESS WORLD

Angry French farmers storm Paris agriculture fair

BUSINESS MIRROR

Insects were the future of food. They've ended up in the pet aisle



Seaweed ambitions face funding constraints

By **Adrian H. Halili**
Reporter

THE seaweed industry is running up against funding constraints which could foil the government's plans to develop the sector's export potential, analysts said.

Danilo V. Fausto, president of the Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food, Inc., said the seaweed industry needs an allocation of up to P250 million to significantly boost production.

Last week, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said that it is seeking to reclaim the Philippines' spot as the top exporter of seaweed.

"Budgetary support from the government is necessary to expand seaweed farms given that the country has a huge untapped potential for seaweed production," Mr. Fausto said on Viber.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. has said that the DA has allocated P1 billion for the construction of large tissue culture laboratories, dry-

ers, warehouses, and technical training.

Mr. Fausto said that the Philippines has 102,000 hectares of municipal waters that can be used for seaweed production. Only 17,000 hectares are currently in use, with most farms being located in Mindanao.

He said that seaweed accounts for over 30% of fisheries production, with 72% of seaweed producers located in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and Zamboanga Peninsula.

The DA is hoping to expand seaweed production sites by 85,000 hectares.

Retired Pampanga State Agricultural University professor Roy S. Kempis said in a Viber message that he is not necessarily in favor of expanding production with the aim of reclaiming the top producer spot.

"Rather, the expansion and the investment required must strike a balance between addressing the domestic needs and wants of the commodity and harnessing or capturing a part of the export market," Mr. Kempis said.

He said that aside from financial support, producers must also receive investment assistance involving seedlings, implements, lines, floaters, and counterweights.

According to the DA, the Philippines accounted for 80% of the world's seaweed requirement in 1990, while Indonesia produced 10%.

Mr. Laurel said that Indonesian output is now five times that of the Philippines.

Mr. Fausto warned that the US government, through the Nation-

al Organics Standards Board, is reviewing the organic status of carrageenan, a seaweed product.

"Delisting carrageenan would imperil the Philippine market share in the US (52%, valued at about \$40 million), and have a potential adverse effect on the European market (18% market share, about \$75 million), due to disinformation about carrageenan safety," he added.

Seaweed production rose 5.3% to 1.6 million metric tons in 2023, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority.



DA clarifies temporary ban on cattle imports

MILK and milk products from Thailand, Russia, South Korea and Libya that meet regulatory conditions may enter the Philippines, according to a circular issued by the Department of Agriculture (DA).

The DA issued the clarification in Memorandum Circular (MC) 6 signed by Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. last February 22. MC 6 outlined the conditions for allowing certain products from cattle and buffalo in 4 countries with confirmed outbreaks of lumpy skin disease (LSD).

"To ensure that safe trade is practiced during disease situations, this Memorandum Circular is issued to clarify the conditions of the applied temporary restriction in DAMO [Memorandum Order] No. 06 series of 2024 regarding commodities that may be affected by LSD, in adherence to the WOAHP Terrestrial Animal Health Code Article 11.9," the MC read.

MC 6 mandated that veterinary authorities from Thailand, Russia, South Korea should attest that milk and milk products from their countries were subjected to

pasteurization or any combination of control measures with equivalent performance as described in the Codex Alimentarius.

Also allowed are skeletal muscle meat, casings, gelatine and collagen, tallow, hooves and horns, according to the circular. "These are considered 'safe commodities' and are not included in the temporary restriction, subject to the Philippines's import terms and conditions."

MC 6 indicated that meal and flour from blood, meat other than skeletal muscle, or bones from bovines and water buffaloes are excluded from the temporary ban.

However, shipments of these products must have international veterinary certificates attesting that the products were processed using heat treatment to a minimum internal temperature of 65 degrees Celsius for at least 30 minutes. Veterinary authorities must guarantee that the necessary precautions were taken after processing to avoid contact of the commodities with any potential source of the LSD virus.

The same requirement

applies for hides of bovines and water buffaloes. The international veterinary certificate, however, must indicate that the products were derived from animals which had undergone ante- and post-mortem inspections "in accordance with Chapter 6.3" and dry-salted or wet-salted for a period of at least 14 days prior to dispatch or treated for a period at least 7 days in salt with the addition of 2 percent sodium carbonate.

The certificate must also indicate that the hides of bovine and water buffaloes were dried for a period of at least 42 days at a temperature of at least 20 degrees Celsius and that the necessary precautions were taken after processing to avoid contact of the commodities with any potential source of LSD virus.

The DA issued MO 6 early this month to prevent the entry of LSD to the Philippines and protect the health of the local cattle and buffalo population.

"Thailand, Russia, South Korea, and Libya have reported on-going or stable cases of LSD as shown in the World Organization for Animal Health's (WOAH) World

Animal Health Information System [WAHIS], and even in stable outbreak, the virus can still be present and potentially spread through movement of animals and animal products," MC 6 read.

Item 3 of DA MO 6 series of 2024 stated that "importation of live cattle and buffalo, their products and by-products including milk and milk products, embryos, skin and semen should adhere to the WOAHP recommendations for importation Article 11.9."

Item 4 further stated that "shipments that have not complied with the conditions outlined in item 3 shall be dealt with as per Administrative Circular 6 series of 2022, Article V, Section II [E]."

The DA noted that LSD is a disease of economic importance as it causes temporary reduction in milk production, temporary or permanent sterility in bulls, and damage to hides, and occasionally, death.

"The LSD virus is also remarkably stable, surviving for long periods at ambient temperature, especially in dried scabs as they are very resistant to inactivation."



DA taps space technology to boost farm output

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) entered into a partnership with the Philippine Space Agency (PhilSA) to use advanced space technology in its bid to increase farm productivity.

The Bureau of Agricultural and Fisheries Engineering (BAFE) and PhilSA signed last February 21 a memorandum of agreement (MOA) to "modernize" data collection, analysis and dissemination. BAFE is an attached agency of the DA.

"This MOA signing signifies a convergence of expertise, resources, and innovative thinking aimed

at harnessing the power of technology to transform our agricultural landscape," Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. said in a statement.

The project entails joint research, exchange of expertise and information, capacity-building exercises, and project implementation focused on monitoring of farm-to-market roads and major



A FARMER transplants rice seedlings in Sumapang Matanda, Malolos, Bulacan. BUSINESSMIRROR FILE PHOTO

agricultural commodities, such as onion and corn.

"This partnership will utilize space technology, remote sensing, and sophisticated agricultural systems to drive innovation and efficiency in the sector, with



the pilot testing taking place in Nueva Ecija."

The DA chief said embracing technological advances is crucial in addressing challenges faced by farmers and ensuring food security in the country. He added that

digital agriculture will unlock opportunities for farmers and fisherfolk, providing them with tools and knowledge to increase productivity.

"Using technology and data analytics, we can gain invaluable insights into crop health, soil conditions, enabling us to make informed decisions and implement targeted interventions."

He said information will help policymakers with near real-time data and insights for strategic planning and decision-making.

"The collaboration between DA-BAFE and PhilSA exemplifies the spirit of partnership and synergy that is essential for driving meaningful change. By pooling together our respective expertise and resources, we can co-create innovative solutions

that have the potential to revolutionize the way we approach agriculture," he said.

"As we embark on this journey together, let us envision a future where every Filipino farmer has access to cutting-edge digital tools and technologies that empower them to thrive in an ever-changing environment."

As the central engineering arm of DA mandated to ensure effective and efficient mechanization and infrastructure interventions to modernize the agriculture and fishery sector, BAFE will utilize other digital technologies including Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering Management Information System and Geographic Information System for Agricultural and Fisheries Machinery and Infrastructure.



DA allows milk imports from Thailand, Russia, SoKor, Libya

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. has allowed the importation of milk and milk products from Thailand, Russia, South Korea and Libya after he had previously ordered a ban on the entry of live cattle and buffalo from the four countries amid the threat of lumpy skin disease (LSD).

Laurel issued Memorandum Circular No. 6 amending Memorandum Order No. 6, stating that only live bovines, water buffaloes, semen and embryos are covered by the prohibition.

In an amended directive, Laurel said that the importation of skeletal muscle meat, casings, gelatin, collagen tallow, hooves and horns is allowed.

"These are considered safe commodities and are not included

in the temporary restriction, subject to the Philippines' import terms and conditions," he added.

Aside from milk and milk products, meal and flour from blood, meat and other skeletal muscle or bones, hides and other products from cattle and water buffaloes can also be imported from the four countries as long as importers can secure a veterinary certificate from the country of origin that these were subjected to pasteurization, according to the agriculture chief.

He emphasized that the ban on live cattle and buffaloes from Thailand, South Korea, Russia and Libya was necessary to prevent the entry of LSD to the Philippines and protect the health of the local cattle and buffalo population.

"LSD is a disease of economic

importance as it causes temporary reduction in milk production, temporary or permanent sterility in bulls, damage to hides and, occasionally, death," Laurel said.

"The LSD virus is also remarkably stable, surviving for long periods at ambient temperature, especially in dried scabs, as they are very resistant to inactivation," he added.

Thailand, Russia, South Korea and Libya have reported ongoing cases of LSD as shown in the World Organization for Animal Health's World Animal Health Information System.

"The virus can still potentially spread through the movement of animals and animal products," Laurel said.

- Bella Cariaso



Phl seeks 'best' WTO deal for farmers, fishermen

By JASPER EMMANUEL ARCALAS

"Get the best deal."

This sums up the marching order of President Marcos to the Philippine delegation that will negotiate with over 160 countries during the high-level World Trade Organization (WTO) ministerial conference in the United Arab Emirates this week.

"(To) get the best possible deal for our country," Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. told The STAR when asked about Marcos' marching order to him,

Turn to B4



Phl seeks From B1

a few days before he flew to Abu Dhabi for the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC13) scheduled from Feb. 26 to 29.

The MC is the WTO's highest policy-making body, comprising all its 164 member-states, that could influence the trajectory of the global trade environment.

In particular, the MC13 is being described by international observers as a "make or break" for the WTO as the

multilateral trading system faces a slew of challenges – from geopolitical tensions to deepening divergence – on its importance today.

The Philippines is expected to advance its interests in key agricultural and fisheries issues during the biennial meet of the ministers of the 164 member-countries of the WTO, sources familiar with the matter told **The STAR**.

The country could be prioritizing three areas in the agriculture and fisheries nego-

tiations: state procurement of food stocks for food security or public stockholding; a new special safeguard mechanism (SSM), which is a trade remedy tool that allows countries to raise tariffs when import surges affect domestic farmers; and additional rules on curbing state subsidies that lead to illegal, unreported and underreported fishing as well as overfishing.

These three areas in agriculture and fisheries have been the sticking points for the Philippines in previous WTO MCs, especially in the two most recent ones MC11 in Buenos Aires, Argentina (2017) and MC12 in Geneva, Switzerland (2022).

The draft ministerial text put forward ahead of the MC13 indicated that ministers would attempt to have a permanent solution on public stockholding by MC14. However, for SSM, the best thing that WTO members would be able to achieve by MC14 would be the adoption of its modalities, or the policy direction that would guide further negotiations on the matter.

Former agriculture undersecretary Ernesto Ordoñez said he expects the negotiations to yield a "better" outcome for the Philippines as Tiu Laurel "knows" the issues of the farmers and fishermen "very well" since he came from the private sector.

Ordoñez currently serves as the chairperson of the National Sectoral Committee on International Trade (NSC-CIT) of the Philippine Council for Agriculture and Fisheries, the private-sector led consultative body of the DA. The NSC-CIT, through its Working Group on Trade Negotiations, conducted a dialogue between DA officials and industry stakeholders about the upcoming MC13 recently.

"Each country thinks for itself. We must throw away this idea that we must be holier than the Pope. We must do

what is good for our country," Ordonez told **The STAR**.

Tiu Laurel is co-leading the Philippine negotiating team for the MC13 together with Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual.

Tiu Laurel's group from the agriculture department is composed of seasoned and returning officials including undersecretary for fisheries Drusila Bayate and recently appointed undersecretary for policy, planning and regulations Asis Perez.

Both Perez and Bayate are former officials of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, with the former serving as director and the latter as assistant director.

Also joining the delegation is Policy Research Service director Jerome Bunyi, who spent over a decade as the country's agriculture attaché to the WTO and has been part of negotiating teams to previous MCs.

Reforms in dispute settlement

At the same time, the Philippines will advocate reforms in enhancing the WTO's function as well as work with fellow member countries in resolving the impasse in the organization's appellate body.

Pascual will lead the Philippine delegation composed of officials from the House of Representatives and various government agencies such as the DA, Department of Foreign Affairs, Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines and Philippine Mission to the WTO in Geneva.

"For the MC13, the Philippines is working with other members to resolve the impasse in the WTO Appellate Body (AB) or come up with a functioning dispute settlement system by 2024," the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said.

The WTO's appellate body is an independent seven-person body that considers appeals on dispute settlement cases in the organi-

Date: FEB 26, 2024 Page: B1, B4 & B5



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zation. When one or more parties to the dispute settlement cases appeal, the appellate body reviews the findings and conclusion of a panel.

The appellate body ceased to function since the last AB member's term ended in November 2020. Interim solutions like the Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement (MPIA) and the Non-Appeal Agreement have been implemented to compensate for this.

"We hope to see concrete and positive outcomes on WTO reforms, non-violation complaint, e-commerce, investment facilitation and substantial progress in agriculture and fisheries subsidies negotiations," Trade Undersecretary Allan Gepty said in a preparatory workshop for the MC13.

Turn to B5

Phl seeks From B4

Apart from resolving the appellate body issues, the Philippines will also champion reforms enhancing the WTO's functions, notification and transparency mechanism, as well as achieve meaningful outcomes on agriculture negotiations.

"The Philippines sees the importance of the second wave of fisheries subsidies negotiations," the DTI said.

"Through these, the country targets to establish a balanced approach on the disciplines on overcapacity and overfishing including an effective and appropriate special and differential treatment for developing and least-developed members," it added.

Meanwhile, significant progress and outcomes are also expected by the end of the discussions on electronic commerce, investment facilitation for development, trade and environment, as well as the integration of micro-small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the global value chain.

- With Catherine Talavera



Accord inked to boost farm, fishery outputs

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has entered into a partnership with the Philippine Space Agency (PhilSA) to use advanced space technology to increase local farm productivity, improve resource utilization, and enhance project monitoring.

The Bureau of Agricultural and Fisheries Engineering (BAFE) and PhilSA signed last Wednesday a memorandum of agreement (MOA) to modernize data collection, analysis and dissemination, fostering informed decision-making and sustainable growth in the agriculture and fisheries sectors.

"The collaboration between DA-BAFE and PhilSA exemplifies the spirit of partnership and synergy that is essential for driving meaningful change. By pooling together our respective expertise and resources, we can co-create innovative solutions that have the potential to revolutionize the way we approach agriculture," said Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel.

Phase 1 of the project involves joint research, exchange of expertise and information, capacity-building exercises, and project implementation focused on monitoring of farm-to-market roads and major agricultural commodities such as onion and corn.



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DA lauds FAO's support to boost PH aquaculture

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) lauded the efforts of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to help boost the country's aquaculture industry.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. made the statement following the bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the High-level Ministerial Session of the 37th FAO Regional

Conference for Asia and the Pacific in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Tiu Laurel met with FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu, who noted that aquaculture is a "promising industry" in the country, on Feb. 20.

Dongyu said boosting the industry may help the administration achieve its food security and economic targets.

Tiu Laurel, on the other hand, commended the FAO's programs and assistance in the Philippines.

Besides aquaculture, the two leaders also talked about increasing rice yield through the use of improved rice varieties, as well as the modernization of mechanisms to strengthen the country's agrifood systems.

PNA



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BFAR vessel blocked, 'blinded' by China Coast Guard in Bajo de Masinloc — PCG

The China Coast Guard (CCG) blocked, shadowed, and intercepted the automatic identification system (AIS) signal of a Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) vessel in Bajo de Masinloc (Panatag or Scarborough Shoal) in Zambales, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) disclosed on Sunday, Feb. 25.

The incident occurred last Thursday, Feb. 22, during the conduct of the rotational deployment of the PCG and BFAR in Bajo de Masinloc, according to PCG spokesperson for West Philippine Sea Commodore Jay Tarriela. ▶ 8

BFAR vessel blocked, 'blinded' by China Coast Guard in Bajo de Masinloc — PCG 1◀

BFAR multi-mission offshore vessel BRP Datu Sanday (MMOV-3302) departed Capinpin Port in Orion, Bataan on Feb. 21 to distribute fuel to Filipino fishermen and hold patrol operations in Bajo de Masinloc.

Around 6:34 a.m. on Feb. 22, China Coast Guard (CCG) vessel with bow number "3105" started shadowing BRP Datu Sanday at approximately 24.15 nautical miles southeast of Bajo de Masinloc, Tarriela said. An unidentified warship was also observed to be accompanying the CCG ship.

While BRP Datu Sanday was sailing closer to Bajo de Masinloc, the CCG deployed rigid-hull inflatable boats (RHIBs) "3065" and "3302-1" to lay down a floating barrier, a technique that they frequently use to block foreign vessel from accessing the shoal.

Tarriela said that the CCG then started blocking the AIS signal of BRP Datu Sanday around 8:05 a.m. "to support China's press release of successful 'repelling' of Philippine state vessels in [Bajo de Masinloc]."

Shortly after that, the CCG released a statement via its official website that they have repelled a Philippine vessel that allegedly intruded into the waters adjacent to Huangyan Dao, the name they call Bajo de Masinloc.

The AIS is an important factor in safe sea maneuvering as it transmits a vessel's position so that other ships are aware of its location.

Blinding a ship by blocking its AIS signal poses several risks including possible grounding or collision.

"Regarding AIS signal jamming,

we noticed that even if our AIS are turned on, there are instances that our vessels cannot transmit their AIS signal," Tarriela said.

But this was not the first time that the CCG allegedly blocked a Philippine vessel's AIS signal, according to Tarriela.

"We also noticed this occurrence during the last deployment of BRP Teresa Magbanua and BRP Datu Tamblot," he said.

"We assume that they do the jamming every time they release their statements that they repelled our vessels. Through such jamming, any commercial AIS monitoring cannot also disprove such statements because they may not be able to find our vessels," he explained.

'Continued harassment'

After blinding BRP Datu Sanday, CCG 3105 started corraling, shadowing, and conducting dangerous maneuvers towards BRP Datu Sanday along with Chinese maritime militia vessels "00107" and "00309" as the BFAR vessel approached the anchorage area of Filipino fishing boats at approximately 1.5 nautical miles south, southwest off Bajo de Masinloc, according to Tarriela.

The harassment, however, did not stop BRP Datu Sanday as it successfully reached the Filipino fishermen who were waiting for the fuel assistance.

BRP Datu Sanday distributed fuel to a total of 44 Filipino fishing boats, enabling them to last longer at sea and

catch more fish.

Tensions rose when the CCG 3105 deployed a RHIB which approached the Filipino fishing boat "Subic." BRP Datu Sanday responded by dispatching a rubber boat with BFAR personnel onboard to document the Chinese boat and escort the Filipino fishermen.

Chinese aircraft in PH airspace

Tarriela revealed that PLA Navy warship "175" also approached the port beam of BRP Datu Sanday at a close distance of 10 nautical miles while the BFAR vessel was preparing to leave Bajo de Masinloc on Friday, Feb. 23.

The PLA Navy 175 then did a daring act when it launched a helicopter with tail number "68" which "did aerial surveys passing by from northwest to east off Bajo de Masinloc."

"We observed that one of their gray hulls deployed a PLA Navy helicopter, which conducted patrols in the territorial airspace while we distributed the fuel subsidy to the Filipino [fishing boats]," Tarriela said.

Throughout the mission, Tarriela said that there were three PLA Navy warships, four CCG vessels, seven maritime militia boats, a drone, and a PLA Navy helicopter that were monitored in Bajo de Masinloc against a singular BFAR vessel that was the BRP Datu Sanday.

A total of 28 radio challenges were also issued by the CCG but Tarriela said the BRP Datu Sanday promptly responded to all of them. (Martin Sadongdong)

Date: Feb 26, 2024 Page: B2



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PH to discuss agri-fisheries policies in WTO conference

By KHRISCIELLE E. YALAO

The Philippine delegation, led by Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Alfredo E. Pascual, will join other members of the international community in discussing relevant policies in the agri-fisheries and other economic sectors during the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference (MC13) this week.

According to the DTI, the delegation will be tackling agriculture reforms in WTO's mechanisms to resolve "public stockholding for food security purposes, and an effective special safeguard mechanism (SSM) for developing countries."

It will also discuss fisheries subsidies negotiations where the country aims to "establish a balanced approach on the disciplines on overcapacity and overfishing including an effective and appropriate special and differential treatment for developing and least-developed Members."

Talks on electronic commerce, investment facilitation for development, trade and environment, integration of micro-small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the Global Value Chain are also expected to make headway.

To prepare, the DTI convened briefing sessions throughout February, involving non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) such as SENTRO, Federation of Free Farmers, Federation of Free Workers, Nestle Philippines, and Agap Partylist.

The MC13, the highest decision-making body of the WTO, will be held in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE) from Feb. 26 to 29.

With Pascual are officials from the House of Representatives and Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines (IPOPHL), and Philippine Mission to the WTO in Geneva.



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EL NIÑO LOSSES HIT P357M; 6,523 HA AFFECTED, SAYS DA

AGRICULTURAL damage caused by El Niño has ballooned to P357.4 million, with the majority of losses recorded in palay production, the **Department of Agriculture (DA)** said.

The weather pattern was said to have so far affected 6,523 hectares (ha) of farmlands in the regions of Ilocos, Mimaropa, Western Visayas and the Zamboanga Peninsula.

For rice fields alone, the affected area was estimated at 5,011 ha or 0.52 percent of the total target area planted. The production loss was recorded at 11,480 MT or around 0.12 percent of this year's targeted dry cropping season output.

"As for corn, area affected by the dry spell is at 1,263 hectares or 0.11 percent of the total target area planted, while the production loss of 2,897 MT is 0.06 percent of target production for the 2024 dry cropping season," the DA said in its latest El Niño bulletin.

About 275,000 ha of rice fields are expected to be vulnerable to the impact of the El Niño weather phenomenon, the DA earlier said. This is equivalent to an estimated 1.1 million MT of palay or rice stocks good for 20 days.

As of February 24, around 7,668 farm-

ers were recorded to have been affected by drought.

In line with this, the DA reiterated plans to provide assistance through the distribution of vegetable seeds and planting materials for high-value crops in the affected regions.

Additionally, it will distribute planting materials for water-efficient high-value crops in the Zamboanga Peninsula, aiming to assist farmers in recovering from the impact of a dry spell that has been intensified by El Niño.

Implementation of an alternate wetting-and-drying technique to cut water use in rice fields and exploration of solar-powered irrigation is also in the pipeline to address drought-prone regions, the department said.

Cloud-seeding will also be conducted in partnership with the state weather bureau and the Philippine Air Force as part of efforts to alleviate water scarcity, especially in the Cagayan Valley Region.

"Promotion of drought-resistant crops and pest-control efforts are also underway to assist farmers in areas suffering from low rainfall levels," the DA said.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

Malaya Business Insight

Date: FEB 26, 2024 Page: B1 & B2



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DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

BFAR boat blocked by Chinese vessels in Scarborough – PCG

BY VICTOR REYES

FOUR Chinese vessels harassed in two separate days a Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) vessel patrolling and distributing supplies to Filipino fishermen at the contested Scarborough Shoal or Bajo de Masinloc, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG)

reported yesterday.

The PCG said the harassment started on the morning of February 15 when a Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) vessel, with bow number 3105, conducted blocking maneuvers against BFAR's multi-mission offshore vessel BRP Datu Sanday

See BFAR ► Page B2

BFAR

about 1.3 nautical miles south of the shoal.

On February 22 at around 10:18 a.m., the PCG said the same CCG vessel, accompanied by Chinese maritime militia vessels (CMMVs) with bow numbers 00107 and 00309, again corralled BRP Datu Sanday about 1.2 nautical miles south of Scarborough.

On the same day at 10:39 a.m., CCMV 00107 again conducted dangerous maneuvers against BRP Datu Sanday, with the nearest distance of 100 meters, at about 1.5 nautical miles south of the Scarborough Shoal.

Likewise, on February 22 at 10:48 a.m., another Chinese fishing vessel, with bow number 3168, believed to be a CMMV, conducted dangerous maneuvers against the BFAR vessel with a nearest distance of 50 meters about .7 nautical miles southwest of the shoal.

"However, despite these maneuvers, the skipper of BRP Datu Sanday exhibited excellent seamanship skills and managed to evade the blocking attempts," said Commodore Jay Tarriela, the PCG spokesman for the West Philippine Sea.

The PCG said CCG 3105 also issued 28 radio challenges against BRP Datu Sanday, while one of the three other Chinese Navy ships monitored in the area likewise made a radio challenge.

The PCG said a Chinese Navy helicopter also conducted aerial surveys, while two CCG rubber hull inflatable boats were seen laying buoy barriers at the shoal.

This is not the first time Chinese vessels harassed government vessels at the shoal, which is about 124 nautical miles from Masinloc, Zambales.

Prior to the latest harassments, China also subjected to dangerous maneuvers another PCG vessel, the BRP Teresa Magbanua, on four occasions while it was patrolling the shoal from January 1 to 9.

China gained control of the shoal in 2012 after a standoff with Philippine vessels. Since then, Chinese vessels have been preventing Filipino fishermen from fishing inside the shoal's lagoon.

PH PRESENCE

Meanwhile, Tarriela disputed the claim of international research network South China Sea Probing Initiative that the presence of Filipino fishermen

at the shoal was meant to challenge China's control of the area.

"Their presence in that area is primarily driven by their need to secure a livelihood and provide sustenance for their families, and not to provoke anyone," said on his X (former Twitter) account.

The group earlier said the presence of fishing boats at the shoal last February 22 was "an organized provocative behavior, and has nothing to do with the livelihood of fishermen, just aiming to challenge the status quo of Chinese control."

The group, on its X account, also posted pictures of the Filipino fishing boats at the vicinity of the shoal.

Tarriela said: "These Filipino fishing boats are waiting in line to receive fuel subsidies from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources boat, BRP Datu Sanday."

"We are not like China that uses fishing vessels as part of its gray zone tactics to alter the status quo in the West Philippine Sea. Filipino fishermen have been fishing in these waters for generations, long before the establishment of the Chinese Coast Guard," he added.

Malaya Business Insight

Date: FEB. 26, 2024 Page: A3



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DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

El Niño damage to crops now at P357M

INITIAL cost of damage to the agriculture sector of the effects of El Niño climbed to P357.38 million as of February 25 from the previous estimate on February 8 of P109.44 million, according to latest data from the Department of Agriculture's (DA)

Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Operations Center.

The DA attached agency in its advisory yesterday said damage from the weather phenomenon is equivalent to 6,523 hectares of areas tended by 7,668 farmers in

the regions of Ilocos, Mimaropa, Western Visayas and Zamboanga Peninsula.

Initial El Niño agricultural damage from the said regions also amounted to 11,480 metric tons (MT) of rice worth P284.27

million, 2,897 MT of corn worth P60.70 million and 225 MT of high value crops worth P12.41 million.

The DA said it will distribute vegetable seeds in affected areas as well as planting materials for high-

value crops that require less water to help farmers recover from the damage and losses due to the dry spell stoked by El Niño.

DA, in collaboration with relevant agencies like the Department of Science and Technolo-

gy-Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical Astronomical Services Administration and Department of National Defense-Philippine Air Force, has also started cloud-seeding operations to ease water shortage. -*Jed Macapagal*



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Rice processing facility due to rise in Cotabato province

THE GOVERNMENT of Cotabato province broke ground on Friday on a rice processing facility designed to improve the quality of milled rice while reducing weight, thereby allowing farmers to earn more from their crop.



ZIRCONICUSO-FREEPIK

The P50-million Rice Processing Center 3, which was funded by the Department of Agriculture in Region 12, features a warehouse, a multi-pass rice mill with capacity of 3 tons, a truck for hauling product, a forklift, three drying stations and recirculating dryer.

The project beneficiary is the Budasan Farmers Irrigators Multipurpose Cooperative of barangay Bulakanon in Makilala municipality.

Governor Emmylou J. Taliño-Mendoza said the project will boost food security in the province.

The province's Rice Technical Working Group has been pursuing projects to improve rice production efficiency.

Ms. Mendoza cited joint efforts with the Philippine Center for Post-harvest Development and Mechanization, using mechanization funds from the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund.

In 2022, Cotabato province was the top producer in Region 12, third in Mindanao, and 10th nationally in rice production. —

Maya M. Padillo



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Western Visayas targeted for dairy industry expansion

THE National Dairy Authority (NDA) is set to construct dairy facilities in the Western Visayas to expand the industry's footprint in the region.

In a statement on Sunday, the NDA said it will establish a P40-million dairy center which will feature laboratories and test farms.

The site chosen is a three-hectare property in New Lucena, Iloilo province.

NDA Administrator Gabriel L. Lagamayo said the facilities will seek to disseminate "innovative dairy techniques and farm management practices."

The NDA added that a feed center will be constructed within the property to ensure optimal nutrition for dairy cattle and increased output.

The government is aiming to increase dairy production to 80 million liters of milk per year by 2028.

In 2023, dairy production amounted to 17,850 metric tons (MT), or about 0.8% of milk consumption of 1.94 million MT, with the rest being imported. The dairy herd was 75,798 head in 2023.

Imports of milk and milk products are expected to increase this year amid the continued growth in demand, according to the US Department of Agriculture.

Mr. Lagamayo urged dairy farmers in the area to adopt new technology to boost production.

Additionally, the NDA said that it will expand its national network to 12 regional offices, in aid of a "more focused approach on provinces." — **Adrian H. Halili**



WTO meet focus: Public stockholding for food security

By ANDREA E. SAN JUAN

✉ @andreasanjuan

WITH the upcoming 13th World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference (MC13), Manila will champion reforms which include achieving "meaningful" outcomes on agriculture negotiation to achieve a "permanent" solution for public stockholding for food security purposes, among others, according to the Department of Trade and Industry's International Trade Policy Group.

In a statement on Saturday, the DTI said the Philippines is hoping for the international trade body to arrive at "meaningful outcomes" on agriculture talks.

Among these are "to achieve

a permanent solution for public stockholding for food security purposes, and an effective special safeguard mechanism [SSM] for developing countries."

The department said the country "sees the importance" of the second wave of fisheries subsidies negotiations as it targets to "establish a balanced approach on the disciplines on overcapacity and overfishing, including an effective and appropriate special and differential treatment for developing and least-developed members."

Last February 16, the multilateral trade body said Ambassador Einar Gunnarsson of Iceland, the chair of the fisheries subsidies negotiations, circulated to ministers a draft text on Additional Provisions

on Fisheries Subsidies, with disciplines on subsidies contributing to overcapacity and overfishing, as the "basis for finalizing the negotiations on these issues at the 13th Ministerial Conference [MC13]."

According to the WTO website, the chair said the text, which draws on members' proposals and discussions, reflects his "best" attempt to identify a balance most likely to build consensus.

"To assist the work at the Ministerial Conference, I have bracketed language in a few places in the new text to draw attention to issues in respect of which significant divergences in views remain. I believe ministers' attention to these areas will be particularly warranted," the chair said, citing subsidies to

distant water fishing and artisanal fishing, as well as certain figures in the text for transition periods and thresholds for special and differential treatment (SDT) for developing country members and least-developed country members.

"While this text reflects my best attempt to identify a balance that I see as most likely to build consensus, the final outcome remains in the hands of members working together," the chair said.

Meanwhile, DTI said the Philippines is working with other members of the multilateral trade body "to resolve the impasse in the WTO Appellate Body [AB] or come up with a functioning dispute settlement system by 2024."

SEE "WTO," A2

WTO...

CONTINUED FROM A1

Other reforms that the country will champion at the conference, DTI said, are "enhancing WTO's functions, notification and transparency mechanism."

The Philippines also expects "significant progress and outcomes" on electronic commerce, investment facilitation for development, trade and environment, as well as the integration of micro-small and medium enterprises

(MSMEs) in the Global Value Chain.

The 13th WTO Ministerial Conference will take place from February 26 to 29, 2024 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

Trade and Industry Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual will lead the Philippine delegation. Accompanying the Philippines's trade chief are officials from the House of Representatives and various government agencies such as the Department of Agriculture, Department of Foreign Affairs, Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines, and Philippine Mission to the WTO in Geneva.

The DTI said it convened briefing

sessions in preparation for the MC13. On February 8, 2024, it conducted a joint briefing for Congress, followed by a briefing for NGOs and CSOs on February 15, 2024 that was attended by representatives from SENTRO, Federation of Free Farmers, Federation of Free Workers, Nestle Philippines, and Agap Partylist, among others.

The Ministerial Conference is the "highest decision-making body" of the WTO attended by trade ministers and senior officials from the organization's 164 members. The last Ministerial Conference (MC12) was held on June 12 to 17 in Geneva, Switzerland.

Date: Fri. 26. 2021 Page: 15



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DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Solon calls for probe into online sale of smuggled onions, other agri goods

BY JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ

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THE government must investigate the reported surge in smuggled onions and other agricultural products being marketed online, according to a lawmaker.

AGRI Party-list Rep. Wilbert T. Lee said he filed House Resolution 1600 to protect the livelihoods of local farmers and fishermen while ensuring consumer safety.

Lee said there is a need for "decisive government action to protect our consumers as well as the livelihood of Filipino farmers and fishermen amid the online sale of smuggled onions."

The Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura raised concerns about onion farmers facing losses with the current P28 per kilo farmgate price versus the average production cost of P30 per kilo.

"We have received complaints from local onion farmers who are losing money due to the low farmgate price of their product. They are concerned that their produce may not be sold, especially with the availability of cheap smuggled onions online," the legislator said.

"Some consumers who purchased online have complained about receiving poor-quality products, with some even being rotten. Unfortunately, they cannot return them. The Department of Agriculture [DA] has also reported confiscating smuggled onions in the past that were contaminated with *E. coli*. Smuggled

goods bypass phytosanitary tests or inspections."

Lee said he acknowledges the economic considerations of consumers opting for cheaper products despite potential health risks.

He urged the Department of Trade and Industry and other relevant agencies to curb the online sale of illegally sourced agricultural goods.

"In coordination with the Bureau of Plant Industry [BPI], the government needs to thoroughly assess the health hazards of onions sold online through phytosanitary tests and provide appropriate warnings to the public, especially if these products are unsafe for consumption," he emphasized.

Amid the still rampant large-scale agricultural smuggling in the country, Lee underscored the need for the urgent passage of his proposed bill to amend Republic Act 10845, or the "Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016," to impose heavier punishment on agricultural smugglers, hoarders, price manipulators, cartels, government officials, and employees who take part in this crime, which is considered economic sabotage.

"We urgently need to pass a stricter law to eradicate the plague of agricultural smuggling, which causes losses to our farmers. Additionally, increased government support for local producers from cultivation to selling their produce will encourage them to enhance production, ultimately lowering the prices of their products."

Date: FEB. 26, 2021 Page: 4



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DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

El Niño damage to agri sector hits P357.4 M

By **BELLA CARIASO**

The damage the El Niño phenomenon brought to the agriculture sector in four regions alone – Ilocos, Mimaropa, Western Visayas and Zamboanga peninsula – has already ballooned to P357.4 million, according to the **Department of Agriculture (DA)**.

In a report yesterday, the DA said at least 6,523 hectares of farmlands were affected by the ongoing drought, with a volume of production loss totaling 14,601 metric tons.

It added that 7,668 farmers suffered because of the ongoing dry spell.

According to the DA, 80 percent of the damage came from rice plantations after 5,011 hectares were affected by the spell. This translates to a loss of P284.27 million.

Corn (P60.7 million covering 1,261 hectares) and high value crops (P12.41 million for 249 hectares) also suffered significant damage.

The DA said that vegetable seeds will be distributed in Western Visayas and Ilocos regions while planting materials for high-value crops that require less water will be given in Zamboanga peninsula to help farmers recover from losses.

It said that it is collaborating with the Department of Science and Technology, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration, Department of National Defense and Philippine Air Force for cloud-seeding operations to ease water shortage in Region 2.

"Promotion of drought-resistant crops and pest-control efforts are also underway to assist farmers in areas suffering from low rainfall levels," the DA added, aside from implementing an alternate wetting-and-drying method to reduce water consumption in rice fields.

The DA is also considering the use of solar-powered irrigation systems to augment water supply in areas vulnerable to drought and the use of shallow tube wells in rain-fed areas.

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

PAGASA has said that the number of provinces affected by the dry spell is expected to increase after it reported that 41 areas were hit amid the ongoing strong El Niño phenomenon.



Coconut processors want more funding for VCO research

By RAINIER ALLAN RONDA

The Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and the **Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA)** need to fund more studies to prove the health benefits of virgin coconut oil (VCO), a coconut processors group said.

The VCO Producers and Traders Association of the Philippines (VCO Philippines) said a 2021 clinical trial on VCO as an effective adjunct treatment for COVID-19 cases in Valenzuela City has gained international publication.

The group said studies on the coconut

derivative product would be a big boon to the coconut farming industry as well as the coconut processing industry, showing the multiplier effects of such government assistance to the sector.

VCO Philippines issued the call after a study spearheaded by the DOST-Food Nutrition and Research Institute (DOST-FNRI) titled, "Virgin coconut oil (VCO) supplementation relieves symptoms and inflammation among COVID-19 positive adults: A single-blind randomized trial," was published by the Cambridge University Press on their prestigious *Journal of Nutritional Science* last Jan. 23.

The *Journal of Nutritional Science* is an international, peer-reviewed, online only, open access journal that welcomes high-quality research articles in all aspects of nutrition. The journal says that the underlying aim of all published research should be the development of nutritional concepts.

"More studies on the efficacy of VCO should be considered to determine whether VCO can provide safe and affordable adjunct therapy against viruses. This will also be valuable support for the VCO industry," VCO Philippines said.



FEB. 26, 2024 / PAGE: 124

yesterday shows China Coast Guard personnel on a rigid-hulled inflatable boat shadowing a Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources boat delivering supplies to fishermen on Panatag Shoal on Feb. 22. AFP



More Filipinos now fish in Panatag Shoal – BFAR

By **BELLA CARIASO**

More Filipino fisherfolk are operating in Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal in the West Philippine Sea amid the increased presence of Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and Bureau of Fisheries

and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) vessels.

In a radio interview yesterday, BFAR spokesman Nazario Briguera said at least 44 fishing boats benefited from the supply mission conducted by the *BRP Datu Sanday* in Panatag Shoal, also called Bajo de Masinloc.

"Compared to the previous mission, more Filipino fishing boats were given assistance. From 21 from the last operation, it increased to 44, and this is a good sign that more fishermen fish in Bajo de Masinloc," Briguera said.

Datu Sanday has returned to the

mainland after a successful mission despite the reported blocking attempt by a Chinese maritime militia vessel (CMMV), Briguera added.

"It was able to distribute 44,900 liters of diesel, 270 liters of drinking

Turn to Page 4



More From Page 1

water and 20 gallons of fresh water," Briguera said.

Filipino fishers also reported that their fish catch increased to 40 metric tons, he added.

The BFAR and PCG's support boosted local fisherfolk's morale, he noted.

"This is part of the directive of the President (Marcos) to increase the presence (of BFAR and PCG vessels) in the West Philippine Sea, especially in Bajo de Masinloc. Our fishermen can keep on fishing instead of focusing their attention on the Chinese military militia. They will not encounter disturbance. It will be the BFAR and Coast Guard vessels who will engage the Chinese vessels," he added.

Meanwhile, the BFAR is collating fishermen's affidavits as part of efforts to gather evidence that Chinese and Vietnamese fishermen used cyanide in Panatag Shoal, Briguera said.

He recalled that his previous statement that Chinese and Vietnamese fishermen illegally used cyanide was

based on local fishermen's accounts.

The Department of Justice has been active in the country's ongoing legal action against China over the grounding of its coast guard vessels near Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal, which resulted in significant damage to the area's fragile coral ecosystem, according to Justice Secretary Crispin Remulla.

PCG data

There were three Philippine assets and 16 Chinese vessels present during the BRP *Datu Sanday*'s supply mission on Feb. 22-23, according to PCG-West Philippine Sea spokesman Commodore Jay Tarriela.

The Philippines had BFAR's *Datu Sanday*, a rigid-hull inflatable boat (RHIB) and BFAR aircraft RP-C602 while China had four China Coast Guard vessels and a quadcopter drone, four CMMVs physically monitored, three CMMVs monitored through the automatic identification system (AIS) and three People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy vessels and a helicopter.

Tarriela clarified that during the

Feb. 21-23 BFAR mission, the three PLA-Navy vessels were located 25 nautical miles away from Bajo de Masinloc and did not approach territorial sea limits.

"Nonetheless, we observed that one of their gray hulls deployed a PLA Navy helicopter, which conducted patrols in the territorial airspace while we distributed the fuel subsidy to the Filipino fishing boats," he added.

It was not mentioned in the report if all 16 Chinese assets were in the area during the BFAR's supply mission.

In the "summary of aggressive actions," it was noted that as early as 6:51 a.m. on Feb. 22, two CCG RHIBs placed a buoy barrier in the shoal.

The reported blocking of *Datu Sanday*'s AIS began at 8:05 a.m. that day, believed to be intended to support China's press release that they succeeded in "repelling" the Philippines' state vessels in the shoal.

Tarriela earlier denied that the BFAR ship was driven away by a CCG vessel.

This was reportedly not the first time that their signal was blocked.

- With Evelyn Macairan



Agency eyeing dairy industry in Iloilo town

By Othel V. Campos

THE National Dairy Authority (NDA) strengthens its presence in Western Visayas as part of a broader goal of promoting the domestic dairy industry.

NDA administrator Gabriel Lagamayo earlier signed a memorandum of agreement with New Lucena Mayor Liecel Mondejar-Seville for collaboration on improving the towns capacity to produce fresh milk.

"As mentioned by the Mayor, she anticipates tasting milk produced right here in New Lucena. There will be no other producers here but our farmers, as they are the primary beneficiaries of our animal distribution programs," Lagamayo said.

Under the accord, the DA will establish the Western Visayas regional office, laboratory, dairy showroom, dairy demo farm, and the country's first feed center, in a three-hectare property provided by the town.

New Lucena is a fourth class municipality in Iloilo province.

The Sangguniang Bayan agriculture and cooperative committee fully supports the agreement that will help upgrade New Lucena's livestock industry.

Seville noted how NDA and her town will mutually benefit from the project.



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Lee urges congressional probe into online sale of smuggled onions

By Rio N. Araja

AGRI party-list Rep. Wilbert Lee is seeking an inquiry into the reported proliferation of smuggled onions and other possible agricultural products being sold online.

The lawmaker also said this act “is detrimental to the livelihood of the local farmers and fisherfolk, and a threat

to the health of consumers.”

Lee filed House Resolution No. 1600, saying: “There is a need to take decisive action and measures from the government to protect our consumers as well as the livelihood of Filipino farmers and fisherfolk amid the online selling of smuggled onions.”

The Samahang Industriya ng Agri-

kultura (Sinag) earlier said onion farmers were already incurring losses with the P28 per kilo farmgate price as the production costs stood at P30 per kilo.

“Farmers have been complaining,” he said.

“On the other hand, online buyers are also complaining about the bad quality of the onions they have bought,” Lee said.

“The Department of Agriculture has reported that it found E. coli on confiscated onions. Smuggled onions did not pass through the phytosanitary tests,” he added.

He urged the Department of Trade and Industry and other concerned government agencies to implement more stringent measures to curb the sale of illegally sourced agricultural products online.



BFAR: Filipino fishers back at Bajo de Masinloc

MORE Filipino fishermen are now fishing in the Bajo de Masinloc or Scarborough Shoal despite the presence of Chinese Coast Guard and militia vessels, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) said Sunday.

BFAR spokesman Nazario Briguera said almost 45,000 liters of diesel fuel, 217 liters of potable water and 20 gallons of fresh water were supplied to fisherfolks during the latest resupply mission at the shoal.

"The good thing about this is that, compared to our previous mission, the number of Filipino fishing boats that were given aid has increased. From 21 in the past, now at 44," he said in an interview with Super Radyo dzBB.

Bajo de Masinloc is 240 kilometers (150 miles) west of the Philippines' main island of Luzon and nearly 900 kilometers from the nearest major Chinese land mass of Hainan.

It has been a flashpoint between the countries since China seized it from the Philippines in 2012. *Next page*

BFAR:...

From A1

Since then, Beijing has deployed patrol boats that Manila said harass Philippine vessels and prevent Filipino fishermen from reaching the lagoon where fish are more plentiful.

Over the weekend, the Philippine Coast Guard released drone footage showing a Chinese Coast Guard vessel blocking BRP Datu Sanday during the resupply mission at Bajo de Masinloc on Feb. 22.

The CCG ship was also seen deploying a new floating barrier in the area.

Meanwhile, China rejected allegations it was responsible for damaging at least 21,000 acres of reef in the South China Sea.

China issued the statement after a study conducted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) showed that Chinese activities in the disputed waters in the South China Sea, such as its dredging and landfill activities and giant clam harvesting have left a drastic damage in its marine environment.

Chinese dredging and landfill activities damaged 4,500 acres of reef, while the clam harvesting affected 16,000 acres, making China the top contributor to the damage in the area, according to the CSIS.

Beijing stressed that it always attached "great importance to the protection of the ecological environment of the Nansha Islands and reefs and their adjacent waters" as well as "carried out environmental protection and monitoring work in accordance with domestic and international laws."

The Chinese Embassy in Manila said the CSIS study is "neither factual nor verifiable."

George Poling, one of the researchers of the study, urged countries, especially the claimant states of the South China Sea, to form a coalition that would call on Beijing to stop its "damaging activities."

He pointed out the South China Sea "is the most productive fishing ground on earth," with 12 percent of the global fish catch being sourced there. **Vince Lopez, Rey Requejo and Macon Ramos-Araneta**

Date: FEB. 26, 2024 Page: 2



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Tolentino: Ibalik ang focus sa Agricultural High Schools

HINIMOK ni Senador Francis "Tol" Tolentino ang sektor ng edukasyon na ibalik ang pagtutok sa mga paaralang pang-agrikultura upang maisama ang mga kabataan sa pagpapalakas ng sektor ng agrikultura, pangisdaan at aquaculture.

Sa kanyang regular na programa sa DZRH, nakipag-usap si Senator Tolentino kay Department of Agriculture Undersecretary

Asis Perez upang bigyang-diin ang kahalagahan ng muling pagtutok sa agricultural high schools sa Pilipinas.

"Sa education sector, ang isang dapat mabigyan ng pansin dito ay ang agricultural high schools kasi noong araw, napakaraming agricultural high schools," ani Tolentino.

Sinabi ng senador na kung maibabalik ang focus sa agricultural high schools, pagsapit ng kole-

hiyo ng mga mag-aaral at magkakaroon ng interes ang kabataan na mag-aral ng agrikultura.

Binigyang-diin din ni Tolentino ang pangangailangang isama ang mga institusyong pangkaalaman sa public-private partnerships na magta-transform sa triple helix model of innovation.

"Ang nakikita kong missing link ay ang partisipasyon ng mga unibersidad— mga knowledge institutions. Sa fisheries,

agricultural schools, maging research, dapat kasama na ang lahat ng mga estudyante. Kung hindi, magkakaroon ng disconnect," sabi ni Sen. Tol.

Sinang-ayunan ni Usec. Perez ang suhestiyong ito ni Sen. Tolentino sa pagsasabing "Hindi lang po agriculture kundi pati fisheries at aquaculture dahil iyon ang source ng ating ulam. Ito po iyong ipu-pursue natin."

RNT

Date: FEB. 26 2024 Page: 9



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

Baboy, iba pang pork products pwede na sa Negros Oriental

Maaari nang magpasok ng buhay na baboy o anumang pork products sa lalawigan ng Negros Oriental.

Ito'y matapos na tangalin ni Negros Oriental Governor Manuel "Chaco" Sagarbarria ang ban o ang pagbabawal sa pagpasok ng pork products bilang pag-iingat noong kasagsagan ng krisis sa African Swine Fever (ASF).

Layunin ng Executive

Order No. 10 series of 2024 na pinimahan ni Sagarbarria na salbahin ang naghihingalong lokal na industriya ng babuyan sa lalawigan bunsod ng ASF na ininda ng buong bansa.

Ayon sa gobernador, ang pagbabalik normal na operasyon ng hog industry sa lalawigan ang tanging hakbang na nakikita ng kaniyang pamunuan matapos ang konsultasyon sa mga stakeholders.

Dahil dito, umaasa ang kapitolyo ng Negros Oriental na makakatu-long ito sa mga magbababoy sa kanilang lalawigan maging ng karatig-lalawigan sa Central Visayas, Western Visayas, at Mindanao na

dati nang nakakatransak-syon ng kanilang probin-sya sa industriya.

Matapos ilabas ang kautusan ng gobernador, malaya nang muling makapasok sa Negros Oriental ang baboy at produkto nito mula sa labas ng lalawigan. Kailangan lamang na sundin ang mga basic requirements na itinakda ng Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) at Department of Agriculture (DA).

Umaasa si Sagarbarria na ang ibang lalawigan ay susunod rin sa ginawang pagtatanggal ng ban upang mas madama ng buong bansa ang pagbangon ng hog industry. (Doris Franche-Borja)

Date: FEB. 20, 2024 Page: 2



LIBRARY
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

BFAR: Pinoy na nangingisda sa Scarborough Shoal dumami na

Mas dumami ang mga mangingisda sa Bajo Bajo de Masinloc o Scarborough Shoal matapos na mabigyan ng fuel assistance.

Ayon kay Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) Spokesperson Nazario Briguera, mula sa 21 barkong nangingisda, nasa 44 barko na ang nabigyan ng 44,900 litro ng diesel, 217 litro ng inuming tubig at 20 gallon ng fresh water sa isinagawang rotational deployment of BFAR and Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) sa shoal.

Sinabi ni Briguera na ang pagdami ng mga mangingisda ay indikasyon na marami pang isda ang maaaring mahuli sa Bajo de Masinloc.

Sa katunayan aniya,

nakabingwit ang ilang mangingisda ng nasa 40 toneladang isda.

Nitong Huwebes, muling tinangka ng pitong China Coast Guard na harangin ang BRP Datu Sanday na magdadala ng supply sa Scarborough Shoal. Bigo ang CCG at matagumpay na naihatid ang mga tulong sa mga mangingisda.

Nabatid kay PCG spokesperson for the

West Philippine Sea Commodore Jay Tarriela na binuntunan ng CCG ang BRP Datu Sanday upang pigilan na makarating sa Bajo de Masinloc at hindi makapaghatid ng anumang mensahe kabilang na ang automatic identification system (AIS).

Posibleng ginawa ng CCG ang jamming upang muling harasin ang barko ng Pilipinas. (Doris Franche-Borja)



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P358M winasak ng El Niño sa agrikultura

PUMALO na sa P357.4 milyon ang halaga ng mga pananim sa bansa ang winasak ng El Niño phenomenon.

Sa pinakabagong bulletin ng Department of Agriculture, nasa 7,668 magsasaka sa mga rehiyon ng Ilocos, Mimaropa (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan), Western Visayas at Zamboanga Peninsula ang apektado sa pananalasa ng tagtuyot.

Ayon sa kagawaran,

dahil dito ay nalugi ang sektor ng agrikultura ng 11,480 metric ton (MT) sa produksyon ng palay; 2,897 MT sa mais; at 225 MT sa high-value crops mula sa 6,523 ektarya ng mga pananim sa iba't ibang lugar sa bansa.

Ani ng DA, ang 5,011 ektarya ay para sa taniman ng palay na kumakatawan sa 0.52% ng total target area na itinanim habang ang 11,480 MT ng

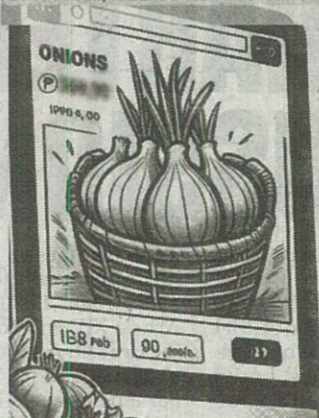
apektadong palay ay nasa 0.12 % ng target dry cropping season output para sa 2024.

Sa mais naman, nasa 1,263 ektarya ng taniman ang apektado ng tagtuyot o 0.11 % ng total target area na tinaniman.

Nasa 2,897 MT o katumbas ng 0.06 % ng target production para sa dry cropping season ang nalugi sa produksyon ng mga ito ngayong taon. (Allan Bergonia)



SMUGGLED ONIONS SOLD ONLINE FOR A VERY LOW PRICE, KILLING FILIPINO ONION GROWERS



EDITORIAL

Smugglers killing Filipino onion farmers

AGRI Party-list Representative Wilbert T. Lee has sought an inquiry about the reported proliferation of smuggled onions and other agricultural products being sold online for a very low price that kills Filipino onion growers.

In his House Resolution No. 1600, Lee stressed that "there is a need to take decisive action and measures from the government to protect our consumers as well as the livelihood of Filipino farmers and fisherfolk amid the selling online of smuggled onions."

The Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag) earlier noted that onion farmers are already incurring losses with the current P28 per kilo farmgate price as the production costs now stand at P30 per kilo.

"May mga nagreklamo na po sa atin na local onion farmers na nalulugi na sila dahil sa mababang farmgate price ng kanilang produkto. Nangangamba sila na lalong hindi mabebenta ang kanilang ani dahil sa nabibiling murang smuggled na sibuyas online," the solon said.

The Bicolano lawmaker has urged the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and other relevant government agencies to implement more stringent measures to curb the sale of illegally-sourced agricultural products online.

"In coordination with the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI), kailangan maiging suriin ng gobyerno ang health hazard ng mga ibinebentang sibuyas online sa pagsasagawa ng phytosanitary tests at magbigay ng kaukulang babala sa publiko lalo na kung hindi ito ligtas kainin," he reiterated.

Amid the still rampant large-scale agricultural smuggling in the country, Lee underscored the need for the urgent passage of his proposed bill to amend Republic Act No. 10845 or the "Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016" to impose heavier punishment on agricultural smugglers, hoarders, price manipulators, cartels and government officials and employees who take part in this crime which is considered as economic sabotage.

"Kailangan na pong agarang maipasa ang mas mahigpit na batas para puksain ang salot na agri smuggling na dahilan ng pagkalugi ng ating mga magsasaka, at dagdagan ang suporta ng gobyerno para sa local producers mula sa pagtanim hanggang pagbebenta ng ani, para mahikayat silang pataasin ang kanilang produksyon, na sa huli ay magpapababa din naman sa presyo ng kanilang produkto," explained Lee.



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EDITORIAL

Public health or tobacco farmers

The Philippines has been reaping distinctions in recent years that are an embarrassment to Filipinos. It has been labeled as having the worst airport and traffic, branded as the texting capital of the world as if it is a good thing, and only this month was bestowed the so-called "dirty ashtray" award for caving into lobbying by the tobacco industry. The international civil society watchdog Global Alliance for Tobacco Control (GATC) handed the notorious award to the Philippine delegation to the 10th meeting of signatories to the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) in Panama City early this month. The fifth so far given to the Philippines, it is a public-shaming tool to call out countries influenced by big tobacco players, especially when their governments accept, support, or endorse policies or legislation influenced by cigarette manufacturers.

Welfare of tobacco farmers

At the Senate blue ribbon committee hearing, senior deputy executive secretary Hubert Guevara, head of the Philippine delegation, explained that the award may have been given to the Philippine delegation for statements and interjections that supposedly delayed the agenda of the conference. He justified this by pointing out that they stood on the government's "balanced policy approach," raising concern not only about health but also the welfare of tobacco farmers.

"But if by protecting our state policy, the 30,000 or more families whose lives were dependent on tobacco farming and the rest of our countrymen who are able to avail [themselves of] the benefits of our health-care system funded by the excise taxes on tobacco, we are given the Dirty Ashtray Award, then I am willing to own it up as a head of delegation," he said.

Crux of the problem

This is the crux of the problem. The government cannot ensure the health of the population and at the same time protect the sector that is harming it. It has to choose one over the other. Globally, many governments have chosen the promotion of their people's health over the protection of the tobacco industry since the anti-smoking movement gained momentum

in the 1970s. As a result, many developed countries tightened the noose on cigarette manufacturers by slapping high taxes to make their products inaccessible to as many people as possible. The result was that tobacco companies looked elsewhere for new markets, and developing nations with weak anti-smoking controls such as the Philippines were the natural targets.

The campaign against smoking in the Philippines started to catch up only in the 2000s, culminating in the so-called "sin tax" law reforms in 2012 that raised imposts on products such as cigarettes and alcohol. As a result, the Global Adult Tobacco Survey showed a significant decrease in tobacco use in the Philippines to 19.5 percent in 2021 from 23.8 percent in 2015.

E-cigarettes and vaping

The inevitable decline in tobacco use, however, spawned a much bigger problem. When cigarettes became too costly, enter the so-called alternatives such as e-cigarettes and vaping and heated tobacco products that were cheaper and more accessible even to the youth. To counter this, the government enacted Republic Act No. 11900, the law which aims to regulate the "importation, sale, packaging, distribution, use, and communication of vaporized nicotine and non-nicotine products and novel tobacco products."

However, health advocates criticized the legislation as it made cigarette alternatives more accessible to the youth when it lowered the age of access from 21 to 18 years old, and transferred the regulation of these products from the "pro-health" Food and Drug Administration (FDA), an agency under the Department of Health, to the "pro-tobacco" Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

Wake-up call

As proof, the Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (Seatca) cited the latest Global Youth Tobacco Survey in 2019 showing that 14 percent of Filipino adolescents aged 13 to 15 years use e-cigarettes, while 24.6 percent had used e-cigarettes, or more than double the percentage in 2015.

The government and tobacco farmers should have seen it coming. Ever since the anti-smoking campaign began several decades ago, the future of the tobacco industry has obviously gone downhill from there. Any forward-looking government or businessman should have planned for a future with diminished tobacco usage. While it will take years, the government must now redirect tobacco farmers to plant other crops or undertake other business ventures.

The FDA, meanwhile, should be on board with the regulation of vaping and other so-called cigarette alternatives. The DTI and the local governments must strictly implement the prohibition against tobacco advertising that lures the youth, the sale of these cigarette alternatives in places near schools, and the access of people below 18 years of age.

As former health secretary Esperanza Cabral pointed out, the "dirty ashtray" award should serve as a wake-up call for the government to "stand for public health rather than the vested interests of the tobacco industry."

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■ The fully automated greenhouses serve as a plant nursery that grows and stores seedlings for high value crops.

Taiwan Technical Mission transforms farming landscape in Pampanga, Tarlac

BY MICHAEL A. ANG

THE Taiwan Technical Mission (TTM for short) is helping local farmers in Pampanga and Tarlac to be more efficient and competitive. The TTM constructed a demonstration farm located in Tarlac City, Tarlac in 2022. The five-hectare demonstration farm facility is complete with two full sized modern

greenhouses, equipment sheds for housing and storing the latest farming equipment from Taiwan, organic planting fields, modern offices which also serve as class lecture rooms for orientation and training, as well as housing for its officers. In the short span of two years, the TTM has helped the local farmers by teaching them about intercropping, new crop rota-

tion practices, and the set up and implementation of a crop calendar to maintain competitiveness. Some of the local program participant farmers shared that since they began receiving training and assistance from the TTM, they have become more productive in growing better crops, been able to stay competitive and earn more, and how much they have

developed their farming knowledge to build an edge in their local agricultural industry. The fully automated greenhouses also serve as a plant nursery that grows and stores seedlings for high value crops. The TTM shared that this seedlings facility will be of great assistance to the Filipino farmers when restarting or rebuilding their farms after natural calamities.



■ In just two years, the Taiwan Technical Mission taught local farmers how to grow better crops.



DSWD KATUWANG NG MAGSASAKA LABAN SA EL NIÑO

KUNG pagbabatayan ang pinakahuling ulat ng Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical and Astronomical Service Administration kaugnay sa El Niño, hanggang katapusan ng Pebrero na lang daw ito bunsod sa magsisimula na rin umano ang Northeast Monsoon o kilala sa tawag na Amihan na pinaniniwalaang lulusaw sa tagtuyot.

Isipin n'yo nga naman kung ilang libong magsasaka pa ang tatamaan nitong epekto ng kuwaresma kapag tumagal pa ito ng dalawa hanggang tatlong buwan kung saan halos umabot na sa apatnapung lalawigan ang dumaranas ngayon ng mababang ani dahil sa kakulangan ng suplay ng tubig.

Hindi pa kabilang d'yan ang mga pamilya sa Northern at Central Luzon na nakakaranas ng kawalan ng tubig na maiinom at pandilig sa kanilang pananim na pangunahing pagkain naman nila.

Subalit ayon sa PAGASA, hindi maiiwasan na mararamdaman ng mga kababayan natin ang epekto ng El Nino sa Central Visayas at Western Mindanao sa mga buwan ng Abril at Mayo kaya naman kaliwa't kanang paghahanda ang isinagawa ngayon

ng ilang ahensya ng pamahalaan upang labanan ang posibleng pagtama nito lalo na sa sektor ng agrikultura sa bansa.

Kabilang sa mga programang inilunsad ng Department of Social Welfare and Development katuwang ang iba pang sangay ng gobyerno ay ang project LAWA (Local Adaptation to Water Access) at BINHI (Breaking Insufficiency through Nutritious Harvest for the Impoverished) kung saan layunin nito ang palakasin ang kakayahan ng mahihirap na pamilyang madalas tamaan ng mga kalamidad tulad ng tagtuyot.

Kaakibat ng programang ito ang paggawa ng maliliit na water impounding facilities na sadyang magsusuplay ng tubig sa mga magsasaka sa mga lugar na walang



sapat na patubig sa mga pananim.

Katulong ng DSWD at Department of Agriculture ang lokal na pamahalaan sa pagpapatupad ng proyektong ito sa ilang lalawigan na itinuturing na may kakulangan ng irigasyon kabilang na ang mga probinsya ng Catanduanes, Masbate at Sorsogon sa Bicol at ilan pang lugar sa Kabisayaan at Mindanao.

Sa madaling sabi, hindi lang pagtugon sa pangangailangan ng asistensya ng mga pobrang mamamayan ang ginagawa ngayon ng DSWD kundi katuwang na rin ito sa pagpapatupad ng mga proyekto para labanan ang epekto ng climate change na hindi naman kasama sa normal na mandato ng ahensya.



BBM: Taas-presyo ng bigas 'di lang sa 'Pinas

Nagpaliwanag si Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. kung bakit mataas ang presyo ng bigas sa bansa matapos tanungin ng isang netizen kung ang ibig bang sabihin ni BBM ay "Bigas Biglang Mahal."

Ang tanong ay mula sa isang netizen na bumisita sa Malacañang Museum kung saan maaaring magbigay ng mensahe ang mga ito sa pangulo.

Sa kanyang lingguhang vlog, sinabi ng pangulo na maraming dahilan kung bakit mataas ang presyo ng bigas kabilang na rito ang external factors na wala sa kontrol ng gobyerno.

Mataas aniya ang presyo ng

mga bansang nag-e-export ng bigas tulad ng Thailand at Vietnam kaya kapag umangkat ng bigas ang Pilipinas ay mataas na ang halaga nito.

"I'm glad that you did, dahil talaga namang hindi natin maiwasan na makita talagang nagiging problema ang pagtaas ng presyo ng bigas dito sa Pilipinas. Pero kung titingnan natin, kahit na 'yong mga nag-e-export na mga bansa ay tumataas din ang presyo nila halos katumbas lang nang pagtaas dito sa Pilipinas," tugon ng pangulo.

Sinabi pa ni Pangulong Marcos na kapag tumaas ang presyo ng langis ay sumasabay rin sa pag-

taas ang mga fertilizer at patubig kaya ito ang inaayos ngayon ng gobyerno.

Pinapalakas na aniya ang sektor ng agrikultura upang lumaki ang ani ng mga magsasaka at hindi na kailangang mag-import ang bansa.

"Lahat ng external shocks ay tinatamaan talaga tayo kaya ang ginagawa natin pinapalakas ang agrikultura upang ang produksiyon natin ay maging sapat at hindi na tayo nag-iimport, mababawasan ang mga inputs para sa ating mga farmer at sana naman ma-stabilize man lang natin 'yong presyo ng bigas," dagdag ng pangulo. (Aileen Taliping)

Malaya Business Insight

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Corn, soybeans turn lower

CHICAGO- Chicago Board of Trade corn futures on Friday fell to \$4 per bushel in the front-month contract for the first time since November 2020, as hefty US and global supplies weighed over the market.

Chicago soybean futures also turned lower on supply pressures and as weekly US exports dropped to the lowest since last May, according to government data.

But it is the speed in which corn prices have fallen that has startled growers and market analysts, who say the low prices could impact the US farm economy as producers are finalizing

their spring planting plans.

Most CBOT corn futures set new life-of-contract lows. CBOT's March corn futures CH24 have plunged more than 9 percent so far this month, the biggest February percentage dive since 1975.

Meanwhile, projections released by the US Department of Agriculture in October forecast that it would cost US farmers about \$4.80 per bushel to raise corn in 2024.

"There is literally nothing holding up the corn market right now, because we just produced too much," said Karl Setzer, partner at Consus Ag Consulting. - *Reuters*



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Angry French farmers storm Paris agriculture fair

PARIS — A group of French farmers stormed a major Paris farm fair on Saturday ahead of a planned visit by President Emmanuel Macron amid anger over costs, red tape and green regulations.

Facing dozens of police officers inside the trade fair, the farmers were shouting and booing, calling for the resignation of Mr. Macron and using expletives aimed at the French leader.

"This is our home!" they shouted, as lines of French CRS riot police sought to contain the demonstration. There were some clashes with demonstrators and the police arrested at least one of them, a witness told Reuters.

Pascal Beteille, one of the demonstrators, said he did not expect anything from Mr. Macron's visit. "This is our home and he's welcoming us with CRS," he told Reuters.

Mr. Macron, who met French farmers' union leaders over breakfast, was scheduled to walk within the alleys of the trade fair afterwards.

"I'm saying this for all farmers: you're not helping any of your colleagues by smashing up stands, you're not helping any of your colleagues by making the show impossible, and in a way scaring families away from coming," Mr. Macron told reporters after his meeting with union leaders.

The protests delayed the opening of the show to the public by at least an hour. The French president said he would convene farmers' union representatives and other stakeholders of the sector at the Elysee palace in three weeks after he canceled a debate he wanted to hold at the fair with farmers, food processors and retailers.

He denied a reports that he planned to invite controversial environmentalist group *Soulevements de la Terre* to that debate, which had further stirred anger among French farmers.

An impromptu heated discussion between Mr. Macron

and demonstrators was being broadcast live on French news channels.

The Paris farm show — a major event in France, attracting around 600,000 visitors over nine days — is a political fixture, where presidents and their opponents are expected to engage with the public under intense media scrutiny.

Farmers' protests, which have spread across Europe, have stoked concerns in France and beyond about their political fallout, given they represent a growing constituency for the far right, expected to make gains in European Parliament elections in June. — **Reuters**



Insects were the future of food. They've ended up in the pet aisle

FOR their first attempt at making food from insects, Sean Warner and Patrick Pittaluga started with a bug burger.

Their patty, which combined black beans with black soldier fly larvae, was cooked up at their Georgia Tech apartment not long after the United Nations had published an influential 2013 report that touted insects as the future of food, a natural resource that could help with rising meat costs and climate concerns as the global population grows.

But the bug burger didn't taste great, and before long, the entrepreneurs steered their Grubly Farms brand to focus on insect-based food for dogs and chickens.

The pivot from feeding humans to furry and feathered creatures was a practical adaptation to what many startups and established brands have seen in their attempts to build a market for these ingredients: Whatever the environmental good, people just aren't yet willing to eat bugs. But they are perfectly happy to feed the critters to their pets.

Food for animals is fueling demand for insect protein, which could jump 4,900 percent from 2021 to half a million metric tons by the end of the decade, according to a Rabobank report.

Those prospects for growth have drawn venture capitalists to the fledgling industry. Investors plowed \$76.77 million into insect-based food companies in 2022 and another \$14.92 million last year, according to PitchBook data. Mark Cuban and Robert Downey Jr. are among the investors who have put money into insect protein companies.

The startups face a tricky balancing act as they

try to create demand for their products—one that has led them away from catering to human diners.

"Being too early is just as risky as being too late," says Phil Poirier, co-founder of Montreal-based Wilder Harrier, whose products include cricket dog snacks and black soldier fly dry food.

Health-minded appeals

DINERS have proven a tough crowd for insect-protein evangelists. Only a quarter of consumers in the United States are willing to incorporate insect ingredients into their regular diet, according to a 2021 YouGov survey that had a similar finding for key European markets like Germany and the United Kingdom.

The reticence reflects that some people are unsettled by the idea of eating bugs—but also the challenge that insect proteins aren't yet filling a specific taste or nutritional void.

"Outside of sustainability, in the human food application, edible insects aren't exactly solving a clear pain point," says Alessandro Di Trapani, the co-founder of insect dog food maker Grub Club Pets.

That has left the animal market as much more fertile territory. Pet food made with crickets and black soldier fly larvae is sold by major retailers including Petco and Chewy.

Tyson Foods announced a partnership in October with insect supplier Protix to build a facility in the US to make insect proteins and fats to be used in pet food and animal agriculture. Mars Inc. sells dry cat food made with black soldier fly larvae in the UK.

Insect-based foods have caught on in pet aisles with product descriptions that appeal to health-minded shoppers, including saying that the food doesn't trigger dog's allergies and is good for sensitive stomachs.

Anne Carlson, the founder of Jiminy's cricket-based pet food, saw a stronger business model—and potential for greater environmental impact—in feeding canines.

"Dogs eat the same thing every day, and if you swap it with a sustainable alternative, you basically get all of their eating occasions," says Carlson, who makes dog food, treats and dental chews. "That's not the case for people. Best-case scenario, maybe I get your breakfast every day with a bar."

So far, pet food has driven the volume growth in the insect protein market, said Gorjan Nikolic, a senior analyst at Rabobank who co-authored the report on the segment's potential.

But he expects rapid change: Once more research is conducted and larger-scale production lowers prices, Nikolic sees aquaculture becoming the biggest buyer of insect proteins, using them as feed for fish and other seafood. Pet food, however, is still expected to account for about 30 percent of demand in 2030, he said.

Most livestock and farmed fish are still fed traditional soy or fishmeal, which is cheaper than insect feed. As researchers assess whether insects can have "functional benefits" like supporting faster growth or a lower mortality rate, Nikolic said demand from commercial farmers or those feed products could increase. **Bloomberg News**