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DA chief retakes NFA reins after Ombudsman suspends OIC Santos

By Othel V. Campos

AGRICULTURE Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. reassumed his post as

administrator of the National Food Authority after the Ombudsman suspended two more executives of the agency, including the man he appointed to be

officer-in-charge.

"We want to stabilize the situation at the NFA following the events of last week. We want to help NFA employees

during these challenging times to continue to provide uninterrupted service, especially during this harvest season," Tiu Laurel said.

The Ombudsman suspended NFA officer-in-charge Piolito Santos along and acting department manager for operation Jonathan Yazon in relation to the controversial sale of 75,000 bags of rice buffer stocks.

Santos held his post for barely a week when he was appointed by the NFA Council on March 6, after the Ombudsman suspended 139 NFA personnel, including administrator Roderico Bioco and assistant administrator John Robert Hermano.

Tiu Laurel on Monday designated director IV Larry Lacson as officer-in-charge deputy administrator of the NFA to carry out the functions of the food agency and ensure uninterrupted service to consumers.

NFA is tasked to build a national rice buffer stock of around 300,000 metric tons by purchasing rice from local farmers.

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Acting NFA chief also gets suspended over rice deal

By Meg J. Adonis
@MegINQ

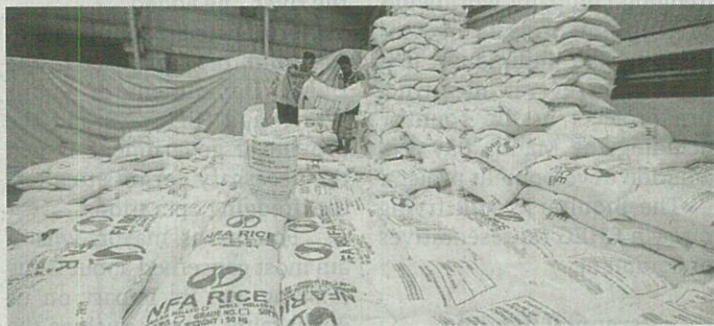
The Office of the Ombudsman has suspended two more officials of the National Food Authority (NFA) amid an ongoing investigation into the allegedly anomalous sale of the government's rice buffer stocks.

In a statement on Monday, the Department of Agriculture (DA) confirmed that recently appointed NFA officer in charge (OIC) Piolito Santos and Jonathan Yazon, acting department manager for operation and coordination, were also placed under preventive suspension in connection with the controversy.

Following their suspension, Agriculture Secretary **Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.** will again sit as NFA administrator, while DA Director Larry Lacson will be the officer in charge deputy administrator.

"We want to stabilize the situation at the NFA following the events of last week," Tiu Laurel said. "We want to help NFA employees during these challenging times to continue to provide uninterrupted service, especially during this harvest season."

In an order handed down



NOT SPARED Two more officials of the National Food Authority have been suspended by the Office of the Ombudsman over the allegedly anomalous sale of its buffer rice stock to private companies. —INQUIRER FILE PHOTO

on March 4, the Office of the Ombudsman ordered the six-month preventive suspension of NFA Administrator Roderico Bioco, along with 138 other officials and employees of the food agency, to pave the way for an investigation into the supposedly anomalous rice deal.

Bioco was replaced by Santos who was appointed NFA OIC following an emergency meeting.

NFA mandate

Under the Rice Tariffication Act, the NFA is mandated to build a national rice buffer stock of around 300,000 met-

ric tons by purchasing solely from local farmers. The rice is to be distributed during emergencies or calamity situations although the food agency is allowed to dispose of aging stocks without these conditions.

However, NFA Assistant Administrator for operations Lemuel Pagayunan claimed in a Feb. 12 letter-complaint to the Office of the President that Bioco and other officials sold 75,000 bags of rice worth P93.75 million to G4 Rice Mill San Miguel Corp. and NBK San Pedro Rice Mill—both

private traders.

Pagayunan said the officials authorized the sale without the approval of the NFA Council, adding that the transaction did not undergo a public bidding.

The DA stressed that Bioco and the officials had sold rice at a price that was "disadvantageous" to the government.

It was also revealed during a motu proprio inquiry held by the House committee on agriculture last week that the NFA buffer stock was sold for P25 a kilo when the market price at the time was P70 a kilo.

Lawmakers asked Bioco why the agency sold the rice at a cheaper price to private corporations when it could have sold the stock to the government.

Bioco replied that as NFA administrator, he was authorized to dispose of the rice without the NFA Council's approval.

He further claimed that the food agency had been selling rice stocks to private traders without holding a public bidding since 2021. INQ



Ombudsman suspends NFA acting chief

OIC recommended sale of rice stocks – Martires

BY PETER TABINGO

THE Office of the Ombudsman has suspended two more ranking officials of the National Food Authority (NFA) in connection with its continuing investigation into alleged irregularities in the sale of rice buffer stocks to favored traders.

On a phone interview, Ombudsman Samuel Martires confirmed that he

suspended NFA acting administrator Piolito Santos and acting Operations and Coordination department manager Jonathan Yazon.

“They were actually part of the first batch of NFA officers we suspended but their names were dropped initially as I was still waiting for some documents to verify their participation,” Martires said.

He added: “From the records we have

on hand, Santos was one of the NFA officers who recommended the sale to (suspended NFA administrator) Bioco while Yazon was a signatory to the release of grain reserves.”

Last March 1, Martires issued an order placing Bioco and 138 other NFA officers under six month preventive suspension to allow investigators unbridled access to the paper trail of the transactions and

agency records regarding the sale of the buffer stocks.

“The subject of this investigation is a matter of public interest because this involves our staple food. It impacts all of us since it appears that NFA officials have been selling rice stocks at P25 per kilo to big traders when even the poorest

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OIC

Filipino households are buying at more than twice that," the Ombudsman pointed out.

Martires disclosed that investigators are reviewing recommendations from regional NFA officers to lift the suspension against some warehouse officers who were included in the first batch of 139 names.

"I have ordered the lifting of suspension just this afternoon against an officer of NFA in Batangas. The officer, (Harold) Cuartero, turned out to be not a warehouse manager but an acting assistant branch manager. If we find others who are not at all involved. We will also lift their suspension. We are working extra hours to expedite things," Martires said.

Martires clarified that the investigation panel obtained the list of NFA officials from the Department of Agriculture (DA) with the assurance that the roster was the most updated one available.

"We did not pluck those names out of thin air. We do not know

who the NFA regional and area managers were so we requested the DA for an official copy," he explained.

With Santos' suspension, DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. re-assumed his post as NFA administrator

At present, an internal team from the DA and a separate one from the Office of the Ombudsman are conducting investigations on the issue.

Amid this development, Laurel designated director IV Larry Lacson as OIC deputy administrator of the NFA to ensure uninterrupted service at the government-owned and controlled corporation.

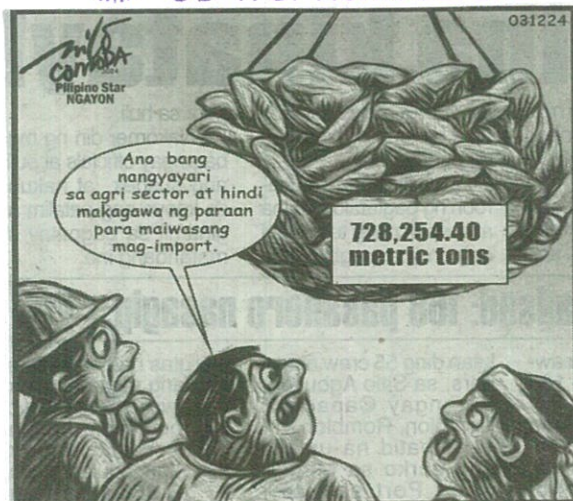
"We want to stabilize the situation at the NFA following the events of last week. We want to help NFA employees during these challenging times to continue to provide uninterrupted service, especially during this harvest season," Laurel said.

Santos was appointed by the NFA Council last Wednesday as acting administrator prior to his suspension. — *With Jed Macapagal*

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Editorial

Patuloy sa pag-import ng bigas ang Pinas

HINDI na maganda ang nangyayari na patuloy sa pag-angkat ng bigas ang Pilipinas. Naturingang agricultural na bansa pero ang kinakain sa hapag ng bawat Pilipino ay kanin na mula sa ibang bansa. Mas hamak na malaki ang taniman ng palay sa Pilipinas kaysa Vietnam at Thailand pero ang mga nabanggit na bansa ang nagsusuplay ng bigas sa bansa. Bukod sa Vietnam at Thailand, bumibili rin ng bigas ang Pilipinas sa China at India. Sa nangyayaring ito, ang Pilipinas ang nangungunang rice importer sa mundo. Sumunod sa Pilipinas ang Indonesia, China at European Union. Kakahiya! Agrikultural na bansa ang Pilipinas pero bumibili ng bigas.

Sa unang dalawang buwan ng 2024, nakaangkat na ang Pilipinas ng 728,254.49 metrikong tonelada ng bigas. Ayon sa Bureau of Plant Industry, sa Vietnam galing ang bigas. Noong nakaraang taon, sinuplayan ng Vietnam ang Pilipinas ng 390,997.22 metriko tonelada.

Ayon sa Foreign Agricultural Service of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), magpapatuloy pa ang pag-angkat ng bigas ng Pilipinas ngayong taon. Pagtaya ng USDA, aangkat ang Pilipinas ng 4.1 milyong metriko tonelada ng bigas sa taong ito.

Nang manungkulang Agriculture Secretary si Pres. Ferdinand Marcos Jr., sinabi niya na pagbubutihin ang pamamahala sa nasabing tanggapan para maging masagana at stable ang ani. Masama raw ang loob niya sa walang tigil na pag-angkat ng bigas. Hindi man sinabi, gusto niyang maputo! na ang pag-import. Subalit walang nangyari—nagpatuloy ang importasyon at lumaki pa.

Habang patuloy ang bansa sa pag-angkat may-roon naman palang nangyayaring korapsiyon sa National Food Authority (NFA) kung saan sangkot ang administrador nito at 138 na opisyal at empleyado. Inaakusahan sila sa pagbebeenta ng rice buffer stock sa mga pinaboran nilang traders na nagkakahalaga ng P93.7 milyon. Ipinag-utos ng Office of Ombudsman ang pagsuspende sa mga sangkot.

Ayon kay Agriculture Secretary **Francisco Tiu Laurel**, ang mga sangkot ay sina Administrator Roderico Bioco, Assistant Administrator for operations John Robert Hermano, 12 regional managers, 26 branch managers at 99 na warehouse supervisors na hindi naman pinangalanan. Nabulgar ang korapsiyon makaraang ibunyag mismo ng NFA na 75,000 sako ng bigas ang binenta sa piling millers at traders sa halagang P25 bawat kilo na hindi dumaan sa public bidding.

Patuloy ang rice importation. Bumabaha ang mga imported na bigas. At ang tanging kawawa ay mga maliliit na magsasaka. Bundat naman ang mga korap. Kakahiya talaga!

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LOSSES PROJECTED IN BILLIONS OF PESOS

EL NIÑO CAUSES DROP IN SUGAR PRODUCTION, EARLY END TO MILLING SEASON IN NEGROS

By **Carla Gomez**
@carlagomezINQ

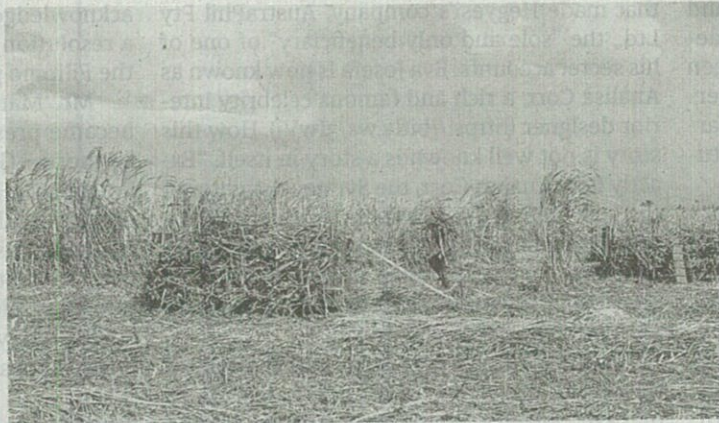
BACOLOD CITY—The drought brought on by the El Niño weather phenomenon has caused a drop in sugar production and an early end to the milling season in some areas in Negros Occidental, the leading sugar producer in the country.

The Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) was still verifying the actual area affected while the drop in production was still being computed, but it would likely be substantial, said SRA Administrator Pablo Luis Azcona on Sunday.

This early, however, the losses could run into billions of pesos, according to Manuel Lamata, United Sugar Producers Federation of the Philippines president.

According to Azcona, "the dry spell has caused the cane to be harvested to mature early with a drop in tonnage, specifically crops planted from February to March 2023."

"The dry spell also caused easier harvesting as the trucks, people and mechanical harvesters do not get bogged down. This, plus the drop in tonnage has caused a lot of farms to end milling earlier," he added.



EARLY HARVEST Sugar milling season in Negros Occidental, which is supposed to last until June, is projected to end as early as March, due to the drought that has dried up cane fields and prompted planters to harvest early. —**CONTRIBUTED PHOTO**

Azcona said a number of mills have been seeing a drop of cane deliveries by about 10,000 tons in one-week range—a clear sign of dwindling cane supply.

"We already have mills indicating closure a few months earlier than usual as the cane supply dwindles," he said.

Lamata said milling would usually start in September and would end in May and June. "But now, it looks like [milling will end] as early as March and April," he said.

The dry spell since November 2023 has caused farms without irrigation to have problems

planting as they could not get the cane to germinate.

"Most probably, they will plant when the rains come, hopefully at the end of May. The next problem is availability of cane points plus a clearly delayed season. This will also affect the 2024-25 season," Azcona said.

Pray for rain

Lamata affirmed that the prolonged drought has also greatly affected the sugar generated from canes.

"The sugarcane to be harvested has dried up therefore

losing a lot of sugar supposedly to be manufactured. What is worse is the crop for next year's harvest is already being affected," he said, adding, "Only those who have irrigation facilities can survive this. Others would have to pray hard for the rains to come right away."

Lamata said about 100,000 hectares of sugarcane fields in Negros Occidental alone have been affected by the extreme heat brought on by the El Niño phenomenon. "This will cause billions of pesos in losses," he said.

Aurelio Gerardo Valderrama Jr., president of the Confederation of Sugar Producers' Associations, said the drought has been felt badly on sugarcane fields in northern Negros Occidental.

"Definitely, milling is faster and a probable drop in production is expected but overall we might reach the 1.8 metric tons [harvest] projection," he said.

"From what we have been hearing, the south is bad, and that's probably why most mills will be closing early," he added.

Enrique Rojas, National Federation of Sugarcane Planters president, called on the government to initiate cloud seeding operations in areas most affected by the drought. **INQ**



Agri losses due to El Niño hit P1.23 B

By PIA LEE-BRAGO
and RHODINA VILLANUEVA

The agriculture sector has suffered P1.23 billion worth of damage due to the El Niño phenomenon since January, the National Disaster Risk Reduc-

tion and Management Council (NDRRMC) said yesterday.

In its latest report, the NDRRMC said Western Visayas was the hardest-hit region with P678.7 million in agricultural damage, followed by Mimaropa (P319.7 million), Cagayan Valley

(P180.4 million), Ilocos (P54.4 million), Calabarzon (P2.75 million) and Zamboanga peninsula (P717,527).

El Niño has so far affected 29,409 farmers and fisherfolk and 26,731 hectares of crops nationwide.

The Department of Agriculture said the government is ready to provide credit and insurance assistance to farmers and fisherfolk affected by the weather aberration usually characterized by a long dry spell.

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Agri From Page 1

According to the United Nations weather agency, the 2023-24 El Niño is one of the five strongest on record. While it is now gradually weakening, it would continue to impact heavily on the global climate in the coming months.

Above normal temperatures are predicted over almost all land areas between March and May.

An update from the World Meteorological Organization said there is about a 60 percent chance of El Niño persisting during March-May and an 80 percent chance of neutral conditions – neither El Niño

or La Niña – in April to June.

There is a chance of La Niña developing later in the year, but the odds are currently uncertain, according to experts.

Hospitals across the country, meanwhile, are prepared for medical emergencies and other health issues that are expected to arise due to the effects of El Niño, the Department of Health said yesterday.

In a report to the Presidential Task Force on El Niño, DOH officials said they are working closely with relevant national government agencies to ensure there will be no disruption in medical and health care services for the duration of El Niño.



Farmgate raw sugar prices seen returning to 'fair' levels

By **JASPER EMMANUEL ARCALAS**

The **Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA)** expects farmgate prices of raw sugar to return to "fair" levels for sugarcane farmers as the government greenlit a program that would temporarily siphon off 300,000 metric tons of supply from market circulation.

The SRA board, led by Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., issued Sugar Order (SO) 2 that allows traders to secure an import allocation privilege in future import programs on the condition that they would procure raw sugar at "premium" prices.

The maximum 300,000 MT of raw sugar will be held off for domestic

use as they will be classified as "C" sugar or reserved sugar for 90 days unless approved by the SRA board for earlier reclassification, based on SO 2.

Sugar traders who will purchase 1.5 kilograms of raw sugar will be allowed to import one kilogram of the commodity in the future, according to SO 2 or the voluntary limited volume purchase program.

These premium prices, SRA administrator and CEO Pablo Luis Azcona said, is between P2,700 per 50-kilogram bags and P2,800 per 50-kilogram bags, which is about P54 to P56 per kilogram. At this price range, Azcona said it would stabilize the retail price of refined sugar at P85

per kilogram, which he noted is the "fair" price for consumers.

Azcona said the country has sufficient raw sugar stocks despite the classification of the 300,000 MT of the sweetener as reserved stocks.

He said that the SRA board can reclassify the stocks even before the 90-day holding period if necessary to ensure sufficient raw sugar stocks circulating in the domestic market.

Under SO 2, the purchasing program will cover a maximum of 60,000 MT of raw sugar covered by quedans on or before the week ending Jan. 28. Meanwhile, a maximum of 240,000 MT of raw sugar covered by quedans on or after the week ending Feb. 3, are eligible for the program.

The participation of eligible participants will be on a first-come, first-served basis.

The purchase program will be open to farmers, farmers' groups, farmers' cooperatives, farmers' associations, sugar millers, manufacturers and beverage makers as long as they are SRA-licensed domestic or international sugar traders in good standing.

Azcona explained that the purchasing program is the "fairest" compared to previous programs of the SRA since it gives the privilege to import to traders who are helping the farmers through local procurement.

Furthermore, he pointed out that this is also the first time the trad-

ers would be required to procure more raw sugar first before getting a prospective import allocation or privilege.

SRA data showed that the farmgate price of raw sugar immediately returned to P2,500 level in the week of Feb. 11 after staying within the range of P2,375 and P2,490 for 10 straight weeks following disclosure of the prospective purchasing program by the SRA.

As of Feb. 18, the farmgate price of raw sugar has increased to P2,566 per 50-kilogram bags, based on SRA data.

The **STAR** broke the story last month about the SRA's plan to implement the purchasing program in the current crop year.



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Rice imports surge 84.5%; Vietnam still top supplier

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

THE country's volume of imported rice almost doubled during the first two months of 2024, data from the **Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI)** showed.

Rice delivered to the Philippines in January and February totaled 728,254.49 metric tons (MT), higher by 84.57 percent or almost twice the 394,553.66 MT of rice imports in the same months last year.

For February alone, rice shipments were recorded at 303,603.69 MT, lower by 28.5 percent from the previous month's import level of

424,650.80 MT. Year-on-year, this was higher by 113.6 percent from February 2023's import level of 142,079 MT.

Last month's import volume was within the monthly minimum rice import level of 330,00 MT, enough to fill in the average consumption of 37 MT a day, DA Undersecretary Roger Navarro said.

For the whole year, this is equiv-

alent to around 2.6 to 2.8 million MT of rice imports.

Since the year started, the BPI has released 1,009 sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances (SPSICs) to accredited rice importers.

The bulk of the country's imported rice came from Vietnam, which remains the country's top source of rice, having shipped in 390,997.22 MT of the staple, or 53.68 percent of the total imports.

Thailand also delivered about 195,921.38 MT of rice, Pakistan followed with 96,627.50 MT, while 41,160 MT was sourced from Myanmar.

The remaining volume was shared by Cambodia, Japan, India

and Italy.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) forecasted that rice imports of the Philippines for 2024 will hit 4.1 million MT, higher than their earlier forecast of 3.9 million MT.

In its latest World Markets and Trade report, USDA said that the Philippines remains the top importer of the staple in the international market.

The agency attributed the high imports to the small volume of local harvest.

Last year, inbound shipments of the staple totaled 3.6 million MT, down 5.9 percent from the record-high 3.82 million MT logged in 2022.



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Rice imports at end of Feb. top 728,000 MT

RICE IMPORTS totaled 728,254.49 metric tons (MT) year to date at the end of February, up 84.6% from a year earlier, according to the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI).

According to BPI data, rice imports in February more than doubled year on year to 303,603 MT.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) projects Philippine rice imports of 4.1 million MT this year.

The last projection is 5.1% higher than the previous forecast of 3.9 million MT, according to a report from the USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service.

The BPI reported that Vietnam remained the Philippines' top supplier of rice, accounting for 53.7% of imports on volume of 390,997.22 MT.

In January, the Vietnamese government signed a memorandum of understanding to supply the Philippines with 1.5 million to 2 million MT of rice annually for five years.

Thailand supplied 195,921.38 MT during the period, or 27% of the total shipments.

The government has also expressed interest in engaging with Cambodia on a potential deal to supply rice to the Philippines.

Imports from Cambodia amounted to 1,620 MT in the first two months, accounting for 0.2% of the total.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. said that a trade deal would bolster supply at a time when the domestic crop is threatened by droughts and dry spells brought on by El Niño.

Damage to agriculture from El Niño has topped P1.23 billion, with the Western Visayas the hardest hit region, according to a report by the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council.

The government weather service, known as PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration), said last week that 25 provinces on Luzon and five in the Visayas have the potential to develop drought conditions, while 22 may potentially experience dry spells until the end of March. — **Adrian H. Halili**



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PHilMech distributes 28,817 units of farm equipment under RCEF

THE Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech) has delivered 28,817 units of various agricultural equipment since the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) mechanization program started mid-2019.

In a news release on Sunday, PHilMech said 6,385 farmers cooperatives and associations (FCAs) and 368 local government units (LGUs) with almost 1 million members are benefiting from the farm equipment.

PHilMech has obligated PHP24.9 billion for the procure-

ment of 14,713 units of land preparation machines; 4,284 units of crop establishment technologies; 8,210 harvesting and threshing equipment; 768 drying technologies; and 842 milling equipment.

PHilMech has so far achieved a 91.6 percent delivery rate for the machines procured under the program.

"PHilMech has gone a long way in procuring and distributing farm machines to qualified FCAs and LGUs under the six-year RCEF-Mechanization Program. Equally important is PHilMech's training and capacitation of the FCAs and LGUs that

received farm equipment, so they will be able to benefit from the technologies given to them, and operate these for many years," PHilMech Director IV Dr. Dionisio Alvindia said.

He said PHilMech intends to finish distributing at least PHP30 billion worth of farm machines under the RCEF mechanization program.

All the agricultural equipment distributed by PHilMech under the RCEF-Mechanization Program are in-kind or grants or are at no cost to qualified FCAs and LGUs nationwide.

PNA



NFA MAFIA TINALUPAN

Ibinunyag ni Senador Raffy Tulfo ang pamamayagpag ng isang mafia sa **National Food Authority (NFA)** na sangkot diumano sa pagbebenta ng stock ng bigas sa pinapaboran nilang mga rice trader sa murang halaga.

Sa kanyang privilege speech nitong Lunes, Marso 11, pinangalanan ni Tulfo ang mga sangkot umano sa korapsiyon na pinangungunahan ni NFA Administrator Roderico Bioco at mga sales official na sina Alwin Uy, Charles Alingod, Max Torda at isang Navarro.

Ayon kay Tulfo, modus ng grupo na bibili sila ng palay sa murang halaga na P24 at may dagdag na P2 subsidy mula sa mga lokal na pamahalaan bilang bahagi ng Palay Marketing Assistance Program for Legislators and Local Government Units o PALLGU.

"So nakukuha po ng NFA ang palay sa halagang P26. Tapos ito po ay ipagigiling nila and they will pay it in kind or with rice mill by-products," saad ng senador.

"Pagkatapos itong Office of the Administrator ay maghahanap ng stocks na puwede nila ibenta," dagdag

pa ni Tulfo.

Sabi pa ni Tulfo, uutusan naman ni Bioco si Director Alwin Uy at Charles Alingod para tukuyin ang stocks at aatasan ang Quality Assurance Officer na mag-isyu ng isang Laboratory Analysis Report na magdedeklara na ang good stocks ay wala na sa maayos na kondisyon.

"At 'pag nakuhaan na ng mga Lab Report itong mga bigas na ito, Administrator Bioco and a certain Navarro will ask Alingod and Uy to negotiate the sale of rice to private millers at sila na din ang kokolekta ng patong on behalf of Bioco and Navarro," ayon kay Tulfo.

"At 'pag nagkasarahan na, they will issue rice sales to the millers gamit ang mga Lab Report na nagsasabing not fit for human consumption upang mapababa ang presyo ng mga ito," dagdag pa niya.

Noong nagdaang linggo, sinuspinde ng Office of the Ombudsman ang 139 opisyal ng NFA dahil sa pagbenta ng 150,000 sako ng bigas sa mga negosyante ng bigas kahit

na hindi aprubado ng NFA Council. Kabilang si Bioco sa mga sinuspinde ng Ombudsman.

"Grabe na ang garapalan sa NFA. Imagine, nagbenta ng 150,000 bags of good rice tapos 'yong mga nangangailangan na ahensiya tinitipid nila? Ito po ang ginawa nila sa probinsya ng Isabela," pagbubunyag ng senador.

"Governor Rodolfo Albano informed me that after requesting to purchase 10,000 bags of rice from NFA for their constituents, para sana sa mga PWD, tanod, farmers, at fisherfolks, pinagbigyan lang sila sa 5,000 bags, na sa huli ay naging 3,000 bags na lang," sabi ni Tulfo.

Ayon kay Tulfo, labag sa PALLGU ang pagbebenta rice stock at pagbibigay ng prayoridad sa mga piling pribadong negosyante.

"Ang napra-prioritize ay itong mga private trader. This is contrary to the PALLGU program where LGUs even subsidize itong pagbili ng NFA ng palay sa mga farmers," sabi ni Tulfo. **(Dindo Matining)**

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Pilipinong magbubukid kanya-kanyang sikap

NAGPROTESTA ang mga magsasaka sa France at Germany nung Enero. Inalis na kasi ng mga gobyerno nila ang subsidiya para sa gasolina ng mga makinang pansaka. Iniharang nila ang mga traktora sa highways at kapitolyo. Ipinamalas sa publiko na kung wala sila, wala ring makakain. Sa totoo'y nagmahal nga ang pagkain sa kanila.

Pero sagana pa rin sa ibang subsidiya ang mga magsasaka sa Europe at America. Tuluy-tuloy ang paghusay ng irigasyon, binhi, at kagamitan. Maluwag sa pautang. Nagpapapalit pa ng mga illegal na manggagawa mula South America at Africa kung tag-ani para mura lang ang labor.

Sa Pilipinas katiting lang ang ayuda sa magbubukid. Sa 3.13 milyong hektaryang maaring laanan, 65% o 2.04 milyon lang ang may irigasyon. Karamihan pa roon ay natutuyuan kapag tag-init.

Hindi natuturuan ng **DA** ang magsasakang Pilipino sa wastong binhi, pataba, at pamatay-pesto. Kanya-kanya lang sila kung ano ang nagkataong mura sa panahon ng

Sapol

NI JARIUS BONDOC



tagtanim at pagpapalaki.

Walang tulong sa modernisasyon mula DA. Walang paupahang makinang pantanim, pang-ani at pangbayo. Kanya-kanyang kayod sa kanya-kanyang pitak ang magbubukid.

Hanggang ngayon ibinibilad ang palay sa highways, imbis na patuyuin sa high-speed driers. Iniimbak sa kanya-kanyang kamalig, imbis na 21 degrees centigrade sa cold storage para walang bukbok.

Walang tulong mula sa DA sa pagdadala ng ani sa palengke. Kanya-kanyang gastos ang maggugulay sa pag-sako ng ani at pag-upa ng sasakyan. At kulang ang cold storages kaya nabubulok ang ani.

Pinagkakaitan pa ng Bureau of Plant Industry central office ang field personnel ng datos ng imports. 'Yon ay para maipuslit ng smugglers ang gulay mula China.

Date: MAR 12, 2024 Page: A7



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TO LAST 60 DAYS

DTI ORDERS PRICE FREEZE IN TWO DROUGHT-HIT ORIENTAL MINDORO TOWNS

By **Alden M. Monzon**
@AldenMonzonINQ

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) on Monday issued two price freeze bulletins covering the towns of Bulalacao and Mansalay in Oriental Mindoro that have been separately placed under a state of calamity by their local governments due to severe and prolonged drought.

The DTI bulletin for Bulalacao took effect last Feb. 26, while that for Mansalay began on March 7.

Both orders will be in effect for 60 days starting their respective dates of effectivity, as mandated under Section 6 of Republic Act No. 7581, or the Price Act, according to the government agency.

"[The] DTI would like to emphasize that individuals who violate these regulations will be subject to penalties, including imprisonment for a duration of one to 10 years, or a fine ranging from P5,000 to as much as P1 million," the DTI said in a statement on Monday.

The DTI said its provincial monitoring and enforcement teams would also "intensify their efforts to monitor the pricing and availability of essential goods within the department's jurisdiction."

The DTI added that the measures were being implemented to ensure that businesses and establishments in these towns would comply with the government-mandated imposed price freeze.

Basic goods

The basic necessities that fall under the DTI mandate include rice, corn, fresh eggs, fresh pork, beef, poultry meat and bread.

Also included in this category are canned fish and other marine products, processed milk, coffee, bottled water, laundry soap, detergent, candles and salt.

The drought in Bulalacao caused by the El Niño weather phenomenon has damaged most of the town's rice and onion crops, prompting the municipal government to place the town in a state of calamity on Feb. 26, making it the first locality to do so; and followed by Mansalay, its neighboring town, on March 7.

The Bulalacao agriculture office has reported that rice and onion fields in the municipality were damaged by the drought, with losses initially placed at P87 million.

Mansalay, a coastal farming town like Bulalacao, had tallied at least 1,096.92 hectares of damaged crops, with 740 rice farmers affected and estimated losses amounting to P418.35 million. INQ



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High demand to feed growth in broiler output

By **JASPER EMMANUEL ARCALAS**

Local broiler production could grow by at least two percent to as much as 1.943 million metric tons (MMT) this year on the back of growing demand as chicken meat remains an affordable commodity for Filipino households.

United Broiler Raisers Association (Ubra) chairman Elias Jose Inciong said his group expects broiler production this year to grow to between

1.758 MMT and 1.943 MMT, with a midpoint of 1.851 MMT. Inciong added that these estimates reflect at least a two percent year-on-year production growth.

"That is conservative already since the industry can grow from four percent to seven percent in a normal year. Current demand is really that huge because of the substitution from pork to chicken (meat)," Inciong said in a recent interview with reporters.

For one, the anticipated series of town fiestas in the second quarter would provide support to demand for chicken meat, Inciong said.

Aside from growing consumption, Inciong noted that layer raisers affected by bird flu have shifted to broiler production to recoup their losses and remain in the poultry industry. Even hog raisers who experienced losses due to African swine fever ventured into chicken meat production.

In terms of heads, Inciong said the country is estimated to produce 1.607 billion birds of broiler this year. The figure is broken down as follows: 391 million in the first quarter, 405 million in the second quarter, 409 million in the third quarter and 402 million in the fourth quarter.

Based on Ubra's projections, the country's total chicken meat demand this year could be anywhere between a low of 1.502 MMT and a high of 1.623 MMT. The group estimated

that the midpoint demand would be around 1.56 MMT.

Meanwhile, chicken meat imports, excluding mechanically deboned meat, would be about 167,969.52 MT this year.

The groups' estimates indicated that the country will end the year with a carry-over stocks of about 424,000 MT to around 500,000 MT which, Inciong said, would be sufficient to meet the country's demand for over three months.



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Rody: P20/K rice impossible

There is no way for rice prices to dip to P20 per kilo as promised by President Marcos, according to former president Rodrigo Duterte.

"I feel bad for President Marcos. The rising prices will continue. There is no turning back," Duterte said on Sunday in an interview with his friend Apollo Quiboloy, a religious leader wanted in the US for sex trafficking of children, posted by vloggers.

The price of rice has steadily increased since last year. Premium rice retails at P67 per kilo while local well-milled rice is at P57 and local regular rice is at P53 per kilo.

While it is impossible to bring down the price to P20, Duterte said the increase in rice prices can be controlled if Marcos asks Congress for emergency powers.

"Not martial law. Just emergency powers," Duterte said.

Meanwhile, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) hiked its import forecast for the Philippines by 200,000 metric tons from its estimate of 3.9 million MT in February due to a foreseen "smaller crop" harvest.

The country's rice output in market year 2023-2024 is expected to settle at around 12.3 million MT, down two percent from last month's projection and three percent from last year, the USDA said.

— Diana Lhyd Suelto



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RE, health care, agri, IT biz deals in focus in Marcos trip to Europe

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. said he will be pushing for stronger economic cooperation with Germany and the Czech Republic during his visit to Europe this week.

"We are eager to invite German and Czech businesses to consider the Philippines as a production hub for their products," the President said in his departure statement at the Villamor Airbase in Pasay City on Monday.

During his working visit in Germany on March 12 and 13, 2024, the President is expected to pursue agreements on renewable energy, manufacturing, health care, agriculture, aerospace, innovation and startups, Information Technology-Business Process Management (IT-BPM), and minerals processing.

This will be in addition to the Joint Declaration of Intent (JDI) on Strengthening Maritime Cooperation as well as the Cooperation Programme between the Technical Educational and Skills Development Authority (Tesda) and the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) which will be signed, while Marcos is in Germany.

At the second part of his European trip at the Czech Republic on 14 and 15 March 2024, Marcos said

he wants to explore cooperation agriculture, manufacturing, especially in the automotive industry, transportation, renewable energy, space, and scientific instruments with Prague.

While the President is in Prague, the Philippines-Czech Republic Joint Communiqué on the establishment of a labor consultation for the safe and orderly migration of Filipino workers will be signed.

"I look forward to having productive discussions, fruitful collaboration, and memorable experiences that will further cement the enduring ties between the Philippines, and Germany and of course, the Czech Republic," Marcos said.

He said his visit in the two countries comes at a pivotal period as the country celebrates the 50th anniversary of its diplomatic relations with the Czech Republic and 70th anniversary of its diplomatic relations with Germany.

"Thus, I look on my trip to the center of Europe with anticipation and optimism for the opportunities to be explored and for our friendship with the German and Czech nations to be affirmed and strengthened," Marcos said.

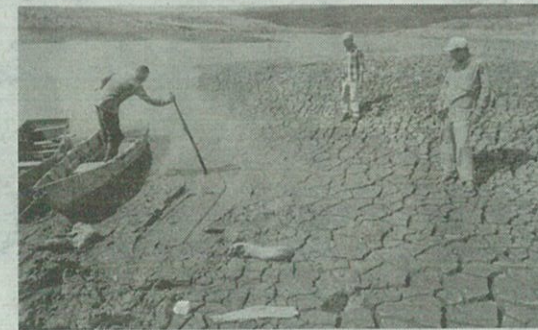
Samuel P. Medenilla



EL NIÑO AGRI DAMAGE EXCEEDS P1.2B

THE El Niño weather phenomenon has so far caused over P1.23 billion in agricultural damage across the country, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) reported Monday.

In its latest situation report, the agency said Western Visayas is the hardest-hit region, incurring P678.7 million in agricultural damage; followed by Mimaropa (P319.7 million); Cagay-



an Valley (P180.4 million); Ilocos (P54.4 million); Calabarzon (P2.75 million) and Zamboanga Peninsula (P717,527).

A total of 29,409 farmers and fisherfolk have been affected while the affected crop area has reached a total of 26,731.4 hectares.

Out of the total affected crop area, 11,276.32 hectares were classified as "totally damaged" or having no chance of recovery from the effects of the El Niño while 15,455.08 hectares were partially damaged or having a chance of recovery.

PNA

Ngayong araw na ito ay ibabahagi ko sa inyo ang farm ng tinaguriang "Father of Leafy Vegetables" sa Mabalacat City, Pampanga.

Ang aking tinutukoy ay si Tatay Felimon Gumawon, 74-taong gulang na tubong Bicol pero nagkaroon ng magandang buhay at kapalaran sa Pampanga dahil sa pagtatanim ng iba't ibang

gulay tulad ng dahon ng sili, kangkong, onion dpring, spinach at iba pa," ani Tatay Felimon.

Sinabi ni Tatay Felimon, mabilis pumasok ang pera at araw-araw ay may kita sa pagtatanim ng gulay.

Inihalimbawa ni Tatay Felimon ang dalawang pitak (Kalublub sa Pampanga) na tanim niyang sili ay kumikita siya ng hanggang



ni MER LAYSON

rito palagay ko manghina ako, kaya ang misis ko ang aking pinagbabakasyon," sabi pa ni Tatay Felimon.

Hindi rin problema ni Tatay Felimon ang mga

Buhay tuwing Linggo, alas-7 hanggang alas-8 ng umaga sa OnePH Signal TV, Channel 1 ng TV-5. Mapapakingan din po sa Radyo Singko 92.3 News FM.

Malaki ang kita sa dahon ng sili... FATHER OF LEAFY VEGETABLES FARM



(Counter clockwise) Ang Magsasakang Reporter at si Tatay Felimon Gumawon. Nasa itaas na larawan naman ang malawak na farm na pinagayaman ng huli sa mga tanim na leafy green vegetables, naka-inset ang hitik sa bunga ng sili na naghahatid sa kanya ng malaking kita.

uri ng gulay.

Si Tatay Felimon ay tinawag na father of leafy vegetables dahil siya ang nagpasimula ng "all year round" na pagtatanim ng gulay sa Mabalacat City.

Hindi nagtatanim ng palay at mais si Tatay Felimon na siyang karaniwang itinatanim ng mga magsasaka sa Pampanga, sa halip ay mga gulay ang kanyang itinatanim sa dalawa't kalahating ektaryang lupa na kanyang sinasaka.

Nirerentahan lamang ni Tatay Felimon sa tunay na may-ari ng lupa ang kanyang sinasaka.

Aniya, 125,000 kada taon ang kanyang upa o binabayaran sa 2-1/2 hectare.

Sa kabila ng siya ay nangungupahan lamang, pero mas malaki pa ang kanyang kinikita sa mga may sariling lupa.

"Karamihan kasi ay palay at mais ang tanim ng mga magsasaka sa Pampanga. Bago sila umani ay bibilang pa ng dalawa hanggang tatlong buwan. Habang ako ay 15 to 20-days hanggang isang buwan lamang ay aani na ng mga tanim kong

P30,000 kaba buwan.

"Malaki ang kita sa sili. Sa dahon pa lamang ay masisiyahan ka na sa kita, bonus pa ang bunga," ani Tatay Felimon.

Sinabi pa niya, sa loob lamang ng 25 days ay maaaring nang talbusan ang sili at habang tinatalbusan ay lalong yumayabong.

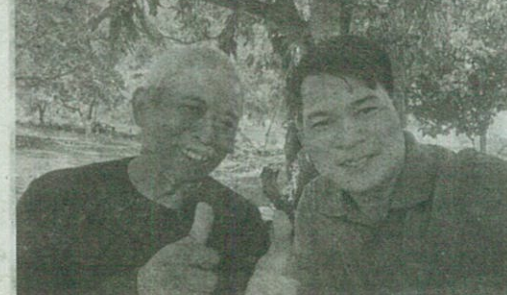
Pahayag pa ni Tatay Felimon, hanggang isang taon ay kumikita siya sa dahon ng sili na kanyang mga tanim at kapag gusto ng pabunghin ay titigil na niya ang pagtabos para mamulaklak at magbunga.

Tatlo ang anak ni Tatay Felimon na pawang professional na ngayon. Ang dalawa ay nasa Canada at ang isa ay nasa Dubai at magaganda ang mga trabaho na may mataas na suweldo.

Itinaguyod at pinagaral ni Tatay Felimon ang kanyang mga anak hanggang makatapos sa kolehiyo sa pamamagitan ng pagtatanim ng gulay.

Kinukuha na si Tatay Felimon ng kanyang mga anak pero ayaw nitong iwan ang pagtatanim ng green leafy vegetables.

"Kapag umalis ako



buyer sa kanyang mga ani dahil pinupuntahan siya mismo sa kanyang farm.

Nakapagpundar at nakabili na rin ng sariling bahay at sasakyan si Tatay Felimon.

Sa ngayon ay marami nang naturuan si Tatay Felimon sa pagtatanim ng gulay kaya ang tawag sa kanya ay Father of Leafy Vegetables.

Sa mga gustong magpaturo kay Tatay Felimon at gustong maging partner siya ay puntahan lamang ninyo siya sa Barangay Mawuaque Malati, Sapang Biabas, Mabalacat City, Pampanga.

Samantala, para sa iba pang tips at sikreto sa pagtatanim ng iba't ibang uri ng halaman sa pamamagitan ng organikong pamamaraan, maari po kayong manood at makinig ng aking TV at Radio program na Masaganang

Maaari rin kayong manood, 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.



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Malaysia's palm oil stocks fall

KUALA LUMPUR/MUMBAI-
Malaysia's palm oil stocks at the
end of February dwindled to their
lowest levels in seven months as
production hit a 10-month low,
offsetting the slowdown in ex-
ports, the industry regulator said
on Monday.

The reduction in stocks in Malay-
sia, the world's second-largest palm
oil producer after Indonesia, would
help in supporting benchmark fu-
tures which lost 10 percent in 2023.

Malaysia's palm oil stocks at the
end of February fell 5 percent
from the previous month to 1.92
million metric tons, their lowest
since July 2023, data from industry
regulator the Malaysian Palm Oil
Board (MPOB) showed.

Crude palm oil production de-
clined 10.18 percent from January
to 1.26 million tons, the lowest
since April 2023, while palm oil
exports plunged 24.75 percent to
1.02 million tons, MPOB said.

A Reuters survey forecast Feb-
ruary inventories at 1.91 million
tons, a 5.7 percent decline from
the previous month, with output
at 1.32 million tons and exports
at 1.14 million tons.

The MPOB report came within
expectations, said Anilkumar Baga-
ni, research head of vegetable oils
broker Sunvin Group. - *Reuters*



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Corn, wheat decline

SINGAPORE- Chicago soybeans eased after climbing to their highest levels in almost three weeks on Monday, as expectations of ample South American supplies kept a lid on prices.

Corn fell for the first time in four sessions, while wheat retreated from strong gains seen in the previous session.

"Sentiment in the agricultural market is bearish," said one Singapore-based trader. "The upside

in prices is limited as there is too much supply."

The most-active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) fell 0.3 percent to \$11.80-1/4 a bushel. Earlier in the session, the contract climbed to its highest since Feb. 20 at \$11.89 a bushel.

Corn lost 0.9 percent to \$4.36 a bushel and wheat fell 0.4 percent to \$5.35-3/4 a bushel.

- Reuters



Soybeans rebound on short covering

SINGAPORE — Chicago soybeans rose on Monday, with the market climbing to its highest levels in almost three weeks on short covering, although expectations of ample South American supplies are likely to keep a lid on prices.

Corn fell for the first time in four sessions, while wheat retreated from strong gains seen in the previous session.

The most active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBoT) was up 0.3% at \$11.87-3/4 a bushel, as of 0020 GMT. Earlier in the session, the contract climbed to its highest since Feb. 20 at \$11.89 a bushel.

Corn lost 0.3% to \$4.38-1/2 a bushel and wheat dipped 0.1% to \$5.37 a bushel.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) slightly lowered its forecast for Brazil's soybean crop

further on Friday, but its outlook was above many private estimates.

The USDA pegged Brazil's harvest at 155 million metric tons, compared with its February estimate of 156 million and analysts' expectations for 152.28 million.

The agency said harvest results in the state of Parana and poor weather conditions in São Paulo were offset by favorable conditions in other areas.

For wheat, the USDA in its monthly report lowered its forecast of 2023/2024 US wheat exports to 710 million bushels, from 725 million bushels previously.

Hefty global grain supplies and strong competition for export business dragged down corn and soybean prices to multi-year low late last month. Large speculators increased their net short position in CBoT corn futures in the week

ended March 5, regulatory data released on Friday showed.

The Commodity Futures Trading Commission's weekly commitments of traders report also showed that noncommercial traders, a category that includes hedge funds, increased their net short position in CBoT wheat and increased their net short position in soybeans.

Money managers lifted their net short position in CBoT soybean futures and options to a record 171,999 contracts from 160,653 a week earlier. That replaced the prior all-time net short of 168,835 contracts from May 2019.

In news, the United Nations food agency's world price index fell in February for a seventh consecutive month as lower prices for all major cereals more than offset the rising price of sugar and meat. — **Reuters**