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BRIEFS

Agri-machinery plant under way

INITIAL work to build an agriculture machinery assembly plant that aims to boost farming in the Philippines has begun through a P1.6-billion partnership between the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Korea Agricultural Machinery Industry Cooperative (KAMICO).

In a statement on Tuesday, the DA said that the parties have accomplished the prerequisites needed to establish the center, including site visits in Cabanatuan City in Nueva Ecija and Tiaong in Quezon and meetings with concerned local government units for terms and conditions.

"This is the result of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed last year between DA and KAMICO that aims to set up the Korea Agricultural Machinery Manufacturing Cluster in the country," said Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr.

The initial project investment of \$30 million (P1.6 billion) has three phases, with the last phase involving technology transfer, cooperative production, and domestic supply and export promotion. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**



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PH eyes production of agri machinery with help from S. Korean cooperative

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has made significant progress in complying with the prerequisites for the establishment of an Agri-Machinery Assembly Center in the Philippines to be undertaken through the Korea Agricultural Machinery Industry Cooperative (KAMICO).

The DA said officials of KAMICO visited sites in Cabanatuan, Nueva Ecija and Tiaong, Quezon last week to assess conditions offered by the local government units for the possible site of the project.

KAMICO officers then met with the DA for a wrap-up meeting and discussed the findings of their visits.

DA Secretary Francisco Tiu

Laurel Jr. said the project, expected to boost local food production, is a result of a memorandum of understanding signed last year between DA and KAMICO.

The project, with an initial investment value of \$30 million and composed of three phases aims to establish a manufacturing plant to produce Korean agricultural machinery in the Philippines.

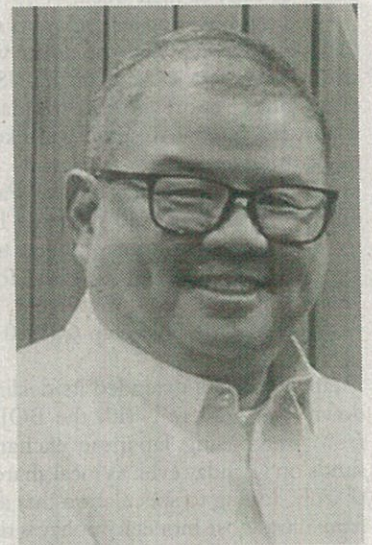
For the first phase, KAMICO will invite companies to produce rice farming machinery and establish parts of the supply system while the second phase is expected to attract additional companies and ensure technical cooperation with Philippine companies associated with Official Development Assistance – Technology Advice and

Solutions from Korea.

For the third and final phase, the project will conduct technology transfer and cooperative production to local companies and undertake domestic supply and export promotion.

The DA said the project will also set the standard for agricultural machinery and equipment that will be made available for local farmers and subsequently be exported to other agricultural countries.

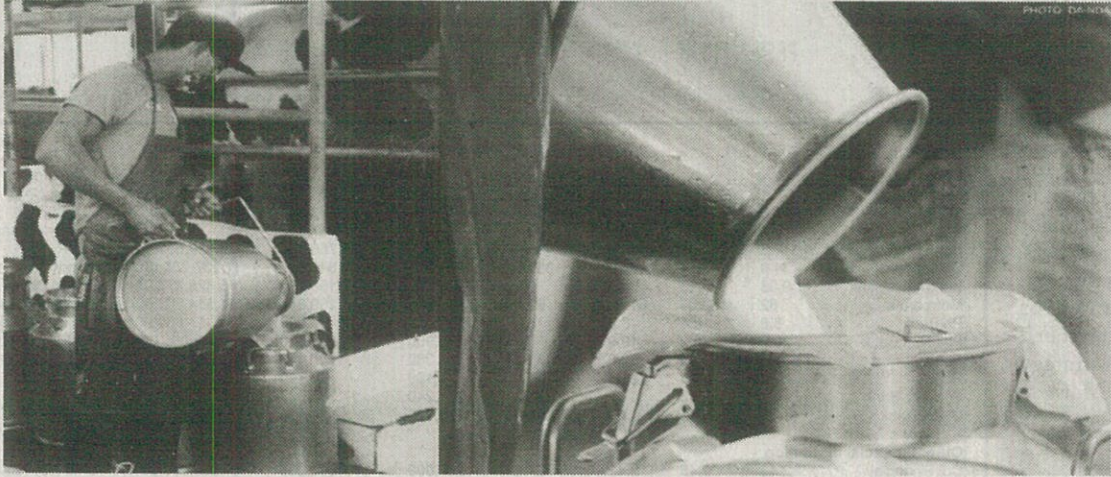
The agency said the establishment of an agricultural machinery production bases and industrialization infrastructure in the country will increase employment and promote specialization and advanced technology transfer among Filipino technicians.



TIU LAUREL



5% local sourcing to jumpstart dairy industry



Consumption of milk is projected to increase to 1.978 million metric tons in 2024. (DA Photo)

THE Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. (PCAFI) has called for the full implementation of a law requiring commercial milk processors and traders to secure a portion of their milk supply from local sources.

Danilo Fausto, PCAFI president, said in an aid memoire dated March 7 to Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. the full implementation of

Section 17 of the National Dairy Development Act of 1995 will jumpstart the development of the local industry.

"We recommend to require the commercial sector to secure their milk supply from local sources

at least five percent of their total requirement, either in full or staggered basis over a certain fixed period," Fausto said in the document.

Fausto said if processors and traders fail to comply, they must "establish their own dairy farm in the Philippines to supply their requirement and not to import from other countries."

He said a special safeguard duty should be imposed on imported milk if these entities continue to source from other countries.

The DA through the National Dairy Authority (NDA) aims to boost the country's milk output to 80 million liters by 2028. This, however, is a small portion of the projected demand of 2.143 million

metric tons (MT) by 2028.

NDA said increasing milk output 2.5 times over the next five years requires a dramatic increase in the number of animals in the milking line, enhancement of dairy productivity, expansion of distribution networks, construction of additional dairy-related infrastructures and promotion of the consumption of local milk and dairy products.

NDA records show milk produced from cattle in 2023 reached 17,850 MT, which is 0.8 percent of total milk consumption of 1.937 million MT.

Consumption rose 1,372 MT in 2023 from 2022 and NDA projects this to reach 1.978 million MT this year. *-Jed Macapagal*

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Laurel takes NFA reins after 2 more execs are suspended

AGRICULTURE Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. on Monday reassumed the National Food Authority (NFA) leadership following the suspension issued by the Office of the Ombudsman against two more officials of the food body.

The new preventive suspension order includes the newly designated NFA Officer-in-charge Piolito Santos and the Department Manager for Operation and Coordination Jonathan Yazon.

In a news release, Laurel assured unhampered operations in the NFA despite the ongoing investigation on the alleged

improper sale of rice buffer stock.

"We want to stabilize the situation at the NFA following the events of last week," he said.

Laurel also encouraged the remaining personnel to sustain working on their respective functions.

"We want to help NFA employees during these challenging times to continue to provide uninterrupted service, especially during this harvest season," he said.

Laurel, meanwhile, assigned Director IV Larry Lacson as the new officer in charge deputy



LAUREL

administrator.

On March 6, Laurel designated Santos, who was the NFA's former Assistant Administrator for Finance and Administration, as the new NFA OIC.

This came following the first preventive suspension order

of the Ombudsman against NFA administrator Roderico Bioco, assistant administrator for operations John Robert Hermanto, 13 regional managers, 26 branch managers, and 99 warehouse supervisors.

To date, the Office of the Ombudsman and the DA's parallel investigating panel are conducting probes on the sale of NFA buffer stock rice which was allegedly disadvantageous to the government and was conducted without bidding.

The DA earlier said they would look at the NFA's transactions as early as 2019. PNA

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Milk production up, importation down - NDA

By **BELLA CARIASO**

The country has recorded an increase in local milk production and a decrease in milk importation, according to the **National Dairy Administration**.

NDA officials said the country's current milk import is down to 98 percent from 99 percent last year.

In his speech during the 29th anniversary of the NDA in Quezon City yesterday, NDA officer-in-charge Gavino Alfredo Benitez said the agency was on track toward attaining its goal to increase local milk sufficiency by five percent in 2028, with a target of 80 million liters.

"I am pleased to share that based on the figures we have received, we project that by 2025 we will be halfway through our goal, with milk production by then at about 40 million liters. With our continued efforts and teamwork, we will soon reach or even surpass our target," Benitez said.

Data from the NDA showed that herd production grew by 45 percent, from 52,000 in 2018 to 75,000 in 2023.

Milk production grew by 65 percent, from 17 million liters in 2018 to 28 million liters in 2023.

Meanwhile, Danilo Fausto, president of the Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. (PCAFI), contradicted the figures of the NDA, saying the total local milk production remains below one percent.

"In the past 45 years, we've been developing the dairy industry. We are still below the one percent sufficiency level. We need to do something about it," Fausto said.

Fausto, who is also chairman of the Dairy Confederation of the Philippines, said the Department of Agriculture should implement Republic Act 7884 or the Dairy Development Act.

The law requires multinational companies to source five percent of their requirement from local suppliers.

"We are insisting on the implementation of section 17 of RA 7884, which is the Dairy Development Act. That section requires commercial processors and traders, the multinationals who sell

dairy products in the country, to source a certain percentage of their requirement from local suppliers," Fausto said.

He said local stakeholders raised the issue during a meeting with Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. on Thursday.

"We requested the secretary to implement it now. If the suppliers cannot meet the demands of these multinational companies, we request them to come to the Philippines and put up their dairy farms here. If they will not do that, we proposed that we impose special safeguard duties on imported dairy products and these special duties will be used to develop the dairy industry," Fausto added.

Budget hike sought

Meanwhile, the NDA is seeking a more than five-fold increase in its budget next year to bankroll programs intended to boost local milk production and attain the five percent target in the country's requirement by 2028.

Agriculture officials said they would lobby for a P3-billion budget for the NDA next year, or an increase of about 478 percent from the agency's current funding of P520 million.

The higher budget will be used to establish one "dairy zone" in every island region and in other areas to boost milk production and stimulate local economies, the NDA said.

The request to increase the budget of the NDA is part of the agency's goal for local milk production, which is to meet at least five percent of the country's total requirement in four years' time.

"I have emphasized the importance of investing in the dairy industry, recognizing it as a low-hanging fruit with immense potential for immediate impact, especially in combating undernourishment among children," Laurel said in a message read by Agriculture Undersecretary Agnes Miranda on his behalf.

"We will make sure that the NDA will get the funding that it needs, starting with the earmarked P3 billion for the expansion of the NDA operations," Laurel added.

- With Jasper Emmanuel Arcalas

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JARIUS BONDOC

NFA: 'palabigasan' of crooks in any admin

"The ship drowned," **National Food Authority** administrator Emil Ong infamously alibied in 1990. Congress was then investigating the mysterious disappearance of a barge-load of rice which the NFA claimed had sunk.

Cory Aquino was president then. The probe stemmed from senator Teofisto Guingona Jr.'s exposé of a Binondo cartel that controlled 90 percent of rice trade. NFA abetted the seven-member syndicate. By law, the president appoints the NFA administrator.

Thirty-four years hence, NFA remains notorious. Last week NFA chief Roderico Bioco was accused of selling fresh emergency buffer stocks to two favored traders. The 75,000 bagsful were misdeclared as old and deteriorating. The NFA governing council, composed of state bank heads, was not informed; there was no public bidding.

Government's loss is evident. The 75,000 bags contained 3,750,000 kilos of rice. At P70 a kilo retail rate, total worth was P262,500,000. Bioco allegedly sold to the two traders at only P25 a kilo or P93,750,000 total. Underprice: P168,750,000.

Ombudsman Samuel Martires preventively suspended Bioco for six months. As well, 138 others: assistant administrator for operations John Robert Hermano, 12 regional managers, 27 branch managers and 98 provincial and city warehouse supervisors.

President Bongbong Marcos Jr. was concurrent agriculture secretary in July 2022-November 2023. He put Bioco in office.

Mislabeling NFA rice buffer stocks as rotting and thus for sale to favored traders is an old racket. Martires became Ombudsman in Aug. 2018. He missed by a few months a similar scam during president Rody Duterte's tenure. I wrote about it thrice. Excerpts:

- (Feb. 9, 2018) "Cheap government rice has vanished from public marts. With no grains to sell, most NFA stalls have been closed for a week now. Retailers in the few open ones say their stocks will last only till this weekend.

"Not only the eight million poorest of the poor subsist on NFA's P26-a-kilo rice. Although preferring fancy varieties, middle-class buyers now contend with suddenly higher prices, P37 to P40 a kilo. The NFA shortage has spawned profiteering.

"Fake news swirls that calamities depleted NFA's 24-day buffer. [In truth, officials] emptied NFA's warehouses of last year's Thai rice imports. Of commercial quality because long-grained, well-milled and only 15 percent broken, those falsely were reclassified as low-class, then sold at bargain rates to favored traders in Bulacan."

- (March 23, 2018) "NFA management sold 700,000 bags, or 35 million kilos, of 'old stocks' in June-August 2017. Those purportedly were in regional warehouses as far back as 2014-2015. The policy is to auction old stocks at a discount. Traders

re-mill such stocks for resale.

"Immediate past NFA managers are appalled. Records show that 2014 stocks already were sold in 2015, and 2015 stocks were sold in 2016.

"The racket entails P50-P100 kickback from each auctioned bag. If true, that kickback from 700,000 bags ranged from P35 million-P70 million."

- (April 18, 2018) "NFA chairman Leoncio Evasco was removed hours after he handed Duterte a memo against administrator Jason Aquino.

"Evasco reported that Aquino had sold 10.4 million kilos of NFA rice in Eastern Visayas warehouses to favored grains traders in Bulacan.

"Sale price was only P235 million – disadvantageous to the government, Evasco said, since the agency had procured it for P261 million. Duterte's former agrarian reform secretary Rafael Mariano exposed the same details to the press Monday, calling on fellow Leftists in Congress to investigate.

"Aquino previously had claimed that the stocks he sold from Central Luzon, Bicol and Muslim Mindanao were 'aging.' Having been procured as far back as 2014-2015, the agency had to sell at a low price to recoup costs.

"Immediate past administrators disputed Aquino, saying they dutifully had sold out their stocks to poor consumers before stepping down in June 2016. Council member Atty. Teodoro Jumamil, representing the Development Bank of the Philippines, revealed this to senators in February.

"Jumamil reportedly opted out of the Council Monday, when the DBP seat was given to the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

"DBP chairman Alberto Romulo recently told Aquino complaints about the latter's construction of a new NFA central building. Allegedly overpriced, the project was by a constructor blacklisted by the government.

"It's unclear what happened to another Aquino critic in the Council, assistant secretary Mercedita Sombilla of the National Economic and Development Authority."

During Noynoy Aquino's presidency, agriculture secretary Proceso Alcala was also NFA chairman. An ex-congressman, Alcala picked his former aide Orlan Calayag as administrator.

Years earlier Calayag had emigrated to America and acquired US citizenship. The appointment violated the NFA charter which requires the administrator to be a Filipino citizen. Senators subsequently investigated Alcala and Calayag due to unabated rice smuggling.

Malacañang under president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo decided all NFA rice import volumes and prices. Multibillion-peso kickbacks were reported.

Catch *Sapol* radio show, Saturdays, 8 to 10 a.m., dwIZ (882-AM).

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Buy-local quota needed to support PHL dairy producers, industry says

THE GOVERNMENT needs to impose a buy-local quota for companies dealing in dairy products to support domestic milk producers, an industry association said.

The Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food, Inc. (PCAFI) proposed a buy-local quota of at least 5% for milk processors and traders.

PCAFI said that its recommendation is in line with Section 17 of Republic Act (RA) No. 7884, which requires commercial milk processors and traders to procure a fixed portion of their requirements from the local milk supply, with volumes to be determined by the **National Dairy Authority (NDA)**.

"Under this condition, we recommend requiring the commercial sector to secure their milk supply from local sources for at least 5% of their total requirement, either in full or on a staggered basis, over a certain fixed period," it added.

Section 17 of RA 7884, the law that created the NDA, states that dairy cooperatives and the commercial sector must mutually agree on a level of local milk sourcing three years after the law becomes effective.

In the absence of an agreement, the NDA will determine the local-purchase level.

"Processors who purchase locally produced milk from dairy cooperatives in excess of the volume prescribed by the Authority shall be accorded tax credits

equivalent to 10% of the value of the excess volume purchased," according to the law.

PCAFI said the Philippines imported \$1.6 billion worth of milk, mostly in powder form, from the US, New Zealand, and Australia last year.

"The Philippines continues to produce less than 1% of its requirement, 44 years after the congressional passage of a law known as the Dairy Industry Development Act and followed by the National Dairy Development Act of 1995," it added.

If it is impossible to comply with the law, PCAFI said that the government may require the commercial sector to establish its own dairy farms or impose a special safeguard duty on imported milk products.

"If the argument is that the local production is not enough to supply such a volume of milk as required, the commercial processor or user shall establish their own dairy farm in the Philippines to supply their requirements and not import from other countries," PCAFI said.

"Or if the imported milk is not sourced locally as required under RA 7884, a special safeguard duty should be imposed on imported milk products by commercial importers as provided for under RA 8800 (Safeguard Measures Act) in order to allow the development of the dairy industry," it added. —

Justine Irish D. Tabile



El Niño damage to agri now ₱1.2 B

PAGASA warns of decreasing water levels in 7 major dams

By MARTIN SADONGDONG
and LIZST TORRES ABELLO

Damage to agriculture due to the ongoing El Niño phenomenon has already reached ₱1,236,853,305.08 and the dry spell has impacted 29,409 farmers and fisherfolk nationwide, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) reported.

"The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, through the Task Force El Niño, is taking decisive actions to mitigate the impacts of El Niño as it threatens the communities with severe drought and extreme weather," it said.

The NDRRMC said the Department of Agriculture (DA) has taken steps to improve the water management systems in provinces affected by El Niño. These include the enhancement of 797.99 kilometers of irrigation canal; rehabilitation of 40 units of small-scale irrigation systems; distribution of 1,576 units of irrigation network services; conduct of cloud seeding operations; and construction of 90 small farm reservoirs through "Project Local Adaptation to Water Access" to support the ► 8

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El Niño damage to agri now ₱1.2 B 1◀

food security program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

The DA also distributed 60,013 native animals to 334 groups and 534 individual farmers through the Philippine Native Animal Development Program to support the livelihood of those affected by the prolonged drought.

The agriculture department also provided 111 diversified alternative livelihoods and technologies for fisherfolk in Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), Bicol Region (Region 5), Central Visayas (Region 7), and Zamboanga Peninsula (Region 9).

Meanwhile, the Department of Energy (DOE) assured it was closely monitoring the timely completion of power generation and transmission projects to ensure there will be a sufficient supply of electricity.

The Department of Health (DOH), for its part, said the hospitals are ready to accommodate potential surge of patients due to summer-related diseases and illnesses. It said an inventory of water and energy capacity storage in health facilities was conducted, as well as an updating of surge capacity and continuity plans and prepositioning of health commodities.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), through the National Water Resources Board, also reduced the allocations for both the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) and Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) "to conserve the available water supply."

Water levels in 7 dams decreasing

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said water level in major dams in the country continuous to decrease due to significant rainfall reduction.

PAGASA Hydrometeorological Division Hydrologist Oyie Pagulayan told the Manila Bulletin in a phone interview that the trend of the water reservoir in the past two months up to this date is declining.

On the daily average, Pagulayan said the water level has decreased by

0.1 to 0.3 meters since January 2024.

"Based on the data from January to February, there was no significant rainfall within the watershed, which is responsible for replenishing water in the dams. So far, the recorded rainfall has been very minimal, resulting in a higher rate of utilization compared to replenishment," Pagulayan said.

In Angat Dam, the water level on Tuesday decreased by 0.30 meters (m) from its elevation on Monday of 203.08 m to 202.78 m.

Ipo Dam water level showed no significant change as there was little difference of 0.01 m from the previous record of 99.50 m to 99.51 m.

Other dams that had water level reduction include La Mesa Dam at 0.4 m, Ambuklao Dam at 0.21 m, San Roque Dam at 0.24 m, Pantabangan Dam at 0.29 m, Magat Dam at 0.5 m, and Caliraya Dam at 0.2 m.

Pagulayan said Binga Dam water level increased by 0.12 meters from 569.60 m to 569.72 meters.

Pagulayan noted that multi-purpose dams such as Angat, San Roque, Pantabangan, and Magat have their requirements on the amount of water level contained or the "rule curve," which if continuously not met, would make its service areas suffer.

She said that Angat Dam still has enough water to support particular areas as the reservoir water level remains at 202.78 on Monday. While the rule curve was only at 194.81 m, Pagulayan advised that the usage of water resources should still be done carefully.

Western Visayas hardest hit

The NDRRMC said Western Visayas (Region 6) is bearing the brunt of El Nino's impact. The total recorded damage to agriculture in the region is now around ₱678 million.

Mimaropa (Occidental and Oriental Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, Palawan) or Region 4B follows with agriculture damage at ₱319 million, Cagayan Valley (Region 2) at ₱120 million, Ilocos Region (Region 1) at ₱54 million, Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon) or Region 4A at ₱2.75 million, and Zamboanga Peninsula (Region 9) at ₱717,527.

Four areas have so far declared a state of calamity due to the impact of El Niño. These are Bulalaco (San Pedro) and Mansalay towns in Oriental Mindoro, Looc town in Occidental Mindoro, and Zamboanga City in Zamboanga del Sur.



RCEF bet pahabain pa

ISINULONG sa Kamara de Representantes ang pagsasagawa ng pag-aaral kung dapat pang palawigin ang implementasyon ng Rice Competitive Enhancement Fund (RCEF) na magtatapos na sa Hunyo.

Inihain ni AGRI party-list Rep. Wilbert Lee ang House Resolution 1636 upang pag-aralan ang pagpapalawig ng RCEF na naglalayong tulungan ang mga magsasaka na maging moderno ang pagsasaka sa bansa.

Sa P10 bilyong pondo na inilalaan sa RCEF taontaon, 50% ang napupunta sa Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech), 30% sa binhi, 10% sa pautang sa mga magsasaka, at 10% sa mga extension service na ibinigay ng PhilMech, PhilRice, Agricultural Training Institute, at Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).

Ayon sa batas, ang RCEF ay tatagal lamang ng anim na taon mula sa pagsasabatas ng Rice Tarification law. Umaapela umano ang mga grupo ng magsasaka na palawigin ang implementasyon ng RCEF.

"Since its enactment, there is a need for Congress to comprehensively assess the accomplishments and challenges met in implementing this program and how it has positively impacted the lives and livelihood of our rice farmers," sabi ni Lee. (Billy Begas)



EDITORIAL

Rising to El Niño challenge

AS EARLY as April last year, the government has had its guns at the ready to effectively address the projected El Niño phenomenon.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) in July reminded the public a strong El Niño would likely persist until February 2024, and that global climate models predict it would continue until May.

PAGASA has said the provinces to be hit by drought this month of March is also expected to go up to 30 compared to 24 by the end of February.

Below normal rainfall conditions or 21 to 60 percent reduction from the average for five consecutive months or way below normal rainfall conditions for three consecutive months will be experienced in drought-affected provinces.

PAGASA said 22 other provinces – five in Luzon, nine in the Visayas and eight in Mindanao – would experience dry spell while 15 other provinces will experience dry conditions.

The government’s El Niño task force earlier said 80 of 82 provinces would be affected by El Niño in April and May and, while El Niño has shown signs of weakening, PAGASA said there could be a delay in the onset of the rainy season in the country due to the pre-development of La Niña, which show a 55 percent chance of it developing in the next six months.

“
Efforts of the government to standardize the country’s water management system is in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations

We find it encouraging that there are policy interventions in place to help mitigate El Niño and La Niña-

related losses.

They include introducing drought-tolerant crop varieties, expanding irrigation, restricting rice exports, storing and distributing grains, expanding social protection coverage, and introducing food import subsidies.

Analyses have indicated that introducing all these policy interventions at the same time is by far the most effective at minimizing Gross Domestic Product losses during El Niño.

There are also other measures like providing social transfers to protect vulnerable populations from welfare losses during El Niño.

Officials are on course in suggesting, and we agree, that the water management should be integrated in terms of agricultural production, industrial use and domestic use, as well as in water recycling and ecosystem restoration.

These are things being done and talked about by agencies, but we feel there should be a greater awareness, among all stakeholders, so that all LGUs, all national government offices and even private investments will be aware of the masterplan on water.

It is interesting that efforts of the government to standardize the country’s water management system is in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.

editorial

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PHL should remain vigilant amid global bird flu outbreaks

WINTER is a bane for tropical countries like the Philippines where there are only two seasons—wet and dry. Of the four seasons in North American and European countries, winter can be both mesmerizing and dangerous. It is fascinating because the coldest season can create the most beautiful landscapes that can warm the hearts, but the falling snow can also signal danger.

For one, icy roads could lead to accidents in highways and the snow could damage homes. Also, the winter season is conducive for outbreaks of animal diseases that usually plague countries that experience snowfall. One of these transboundary animal diseases is avian influenza (AI), which strikes domestic and wild birds.

According to the Washington-based National Association of Federal Veterinarians, the H5N1 variety of the virus that causes avian influenza has led to the losses of commercial flocks in Wisconsin and a game bird production and hunting facility in Pennsylvania. Citing figures from the United States Department of Agriculture, NAFV said the H5N1 outbreaks and related culling operations have wiped out a record 79.3 million poultry across 47 states since February 2022. The toll of H5N1 has surpassed the 2015 outbreak of subtype H5N2, which hit about 49 million birds at US farms.

These outbreaks may have played a big factor in the spike of global meat prices last month. The meat price index of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations went up by 1.8 percent from January, driven by the spike in poultry prices. (See, **"Global meat prices higher in February—FAO report," BUSINESSMIRROR, March 11, 2024**). Prices of pork, another meat product that the Philippines imports, also registered increases due to higher demand from China and a tight supply situation in Europe.

While the cold does not directly affect Filipinos, it can bother consumers who turn to imported poultry whenever supply is tight. And high international prices are bad news for a country like the Philippines where meat processors purchase imported mechanically deboned meat (MDM) in huge quantities. Spikes in the price of deboned poultry meat could lead to higher production cost and more expensive processed meat products.

The experience of these countries that continue to see bird flu outbreaks underscore the difficulty of defeating the disease. It also serves as a reminder for poultry-importing countries like the Philippines to never let their guard down to prevent outbreaks among the domestic bird population. Vigilance is crucial, particularly at this time when the country is also grappling with African swine fever that continues to undermine efforts to increase domestic hog production.

Until and unless we stop importing poultry, the Philippines will always have to keep an eye out for developments in countries experiencing winter. Shipments from abroad must be closely monitored to ensure that they do not carry items that would compromise the health of local poultry. The government must also see to it that poultry raisers get the assistance they need to improve their production and prevent the outbreaks of bird flu in their farms.



Agri group sees better revenue collection, decrease in smuggling under Recto's helm at DOF

THE Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) welcomed the impending confirmation of Secretary Ralph Recto as head of the Department of Finance.

"It is high time that the

DOF will be headed by someone who is not only competent in the field of finance and economics, but more who had deep understanding of the agriculture sector," said SINAG chair Rosendo So.

Local producers have

long worked with Recto from the time he was elected as Batangas congressman in 1996, and as a three-term senator from 2001-2007 and 2010-2022.

Recto was a key ally in

the enactment of the Rice Tariffication Law and in exposing the perennial problem of agricultural smuggling and other illicit trade that have greatly impacted the development of the sector.



Wheat, corn decline

SINGAPORE- Chicago wheat futures slid on Tuesday, with the market facing pressure from leading importer China cancelling more US cargoes amid plentiful world supplies.

Corn lost ground, while soybeans ticked higher, with both markets likely to face headwinds from expectations of near-record South American production.

"Wheat prices are likely to fall

further when you look at production prospects across the northern hemisphere," said one Sydney-based analyst. "Supplies are going to rise."

The most-active wheat contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) slid 0.1 percent to \$5.46-1/2 a bushel. Corn fell 0.2 percent to \$4.40-3/4 a bushel, while soybeans added 0.3 percent to \$11.82-1/4 a bushel. - *Reuters*



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Cocoa hits all-time high; robusta coffee steadies after 16-year closing high

LONDON — New York cocoa prices on ICE gained more than 5% on Monday to record highs as the market remains underpinned by an outlook of limited supplies.

Robusta coffee futures steadied after hitting their highest in at least 16 years last week.

COCOA: May New York cocoa settled up \$332 or 5.2% at \$6,728 a metric ton. The contract rose to an all-time high of \$6,779/ton during the session.

May London cocoa rose 5.4% to £5,516 per ton, short of a record high of £5,620 set last week.

Dealers said cocoa futures remain supported by tight supplies in the main producing region of West Africa.

Cocoa arrivals at ports in top grower Ivory Coast since the start of the season on Oct. 1 had reached 1.114 million metric tons by March 10, down 28.1% from the same period last season, exporters estimated on Monday.

London cocoa speculators cut their net long position by 3,320 lots to 43,912 lots as of March 5, while New York cocoa speculators cut their net long position by 1,457 contracts to 21,303 in the week to March 5.

COFFEE: May robusta coffee settled down \$18 or 0.5% at \$3,279 a ton, having hit a peak of \$3,460 last week — the highest since the current form of the contract started trading in January 2008.

Dealers in Vietnam noted a significant decline in visible stocks and said this early destocking is another sign the 2023/2024 crop is not bigger than 2022/2023 — perhaps slightly smaller.

They added the stocks' decline so early in the season — with six months to go to 2024/25 — shows the current crop has been heavily front-loaded due to strong demand. February coffee exports in Vietnam fell 32.6% month on month to 160,584 tons, data showed.

Robusta coffee speculators raised their net long position by 2,730 lots to 41,241 lots as of March 5, data showed.

May arabica coffee was little changed at \$1.85 per pound (lb).

SUGAR: May raw sugar rose 3.8% to 21.95 cents per lb.

Dealers said sugar has been supported by the prospect of a smaller cane crop in top producer Brazil in the upcoming 2024/2025 season.

May white sugar rose 3.3% to \$617.10 a ton. — **Reuters**