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DANKE, GERMANY. President Marcos waves to the Filipino community who gathered at the Marriott Hotel in Berlin to greet him at the end of his two-day state visit to Germany on Tuesday before heading to the Czech Republic. Behind Mr. Marcos are Speaker Martin Romualdez (left) and Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel. PPA Pool

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DA: Diversifying irrigation to boost farmers' income

By GABRIEL CHRISTEL GALANG and TRIKKE ROSEL

The Department of Agriculture (DA) believes that diversifying irrigation other than for rice use would increase the take-home pay of farmers.

In a press briefing with the delegates of the DA, Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), Assistant Secretary and DA spokesperson Arnel de Mesa said the agriculture sector

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has been "very aggressive" in pushing better irrigation systems to increase rice production, as well as other high-value crops.

"If farmers can better manage irrigation, [they could also] diversify irrigation on crops other than rice to boost their take-home income," he said on Wednesday, Mar. 13.

Crops valued at around ₱1.3 billion have been damaged due to the ongoing El Niño phenomenon, heavily affecting production in Western Visayas, Zamboanga, Ilocos, and the Mindoro provinces.

Around 14,414 hectares or 1.5 percent of the total rice area was ruined, according to the DA.

To offset the prolonged dry spell, the agriculture sector has been actively pursuing the Philippine Solar Irrigation Project (PSIP) and pushing for the retention of lowered Most Favored Nation (MFN) tariff rates for essential agricultural products.

"Under the General Appropriations Act, we have ₱250 million for this year," De Mesa said. "And then we have submitted this to the National Economic and Development Authority for deliberation of the Investment Coordination Committee for the ₱17 billion PSIP."

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. instructed that the next National Expenditure Program should devote ₱50 billion to the solar irrigation project.

"We're exploring other options. Right now, we're requesting the Department of Budget and Management an additional ₱12 billion for PSIP," De Mesa added.

When asked about the damage that could be saved from renewable irrigation, the DA spokesperson said that saving accrual for farmers would be around ₱12,000 to ₱15,000 per hectare if diesel use is minimized.

However, former DA undersecretary for policy planning and research Fermin Adriano pointed out that solar is an intermittent energy source, stating that "not every [farm] area will be able to operate solar power and will still require water pumps and machinery.

De Mesa explained that despite the periodically sourced power, the DA chief is actively looking at hybrid

yields to boost rice production amid the dry spell.

Furthermore, former agriculture officials discussed the current proactive measures that could mitigate the effects of El Niño would improve the local supply of basic commodities, enhance farmer productivity, and possibly lower inflation rates.

Last month, the Marcos administration announced that they are working on expanding the PSIP to water around 180,000 hectares of rice farms in the country.

DA seeks retention of lowered MFN tariff rates

In a forum at the Manila Hotel on Wednesday, March 13, moderated by former senator Joey Lina and former communications secretary Sonny Coloma, De Mesa said the retention of the lowered MFN tariff rates is essential, especially that the country is facing the threats of El Niño.

"This will ensure stable, if not lower, prices for these products, particularly during the El Niño event this year that will affect our farming sector. This decision is highly valued," De Mesa said.

In 2019, the agricultural sector in the Philippines suffered significant losses amounting to ₱8 billion due to the El Niño phenomenon.

The tariff rates for pork will be maintained at 15 percent in-quota and 25 percent out-quota.

Corn will have rates of five percent in-quota and 15 percent out-quota, and rice will be set at 35 percent for both in-quota and out-quota for the extended period.

De Mesa emphasized the necessity of expanding market sources in order to guarantee ample and reasonably priced food supply within the nation.

This measure, he said, would reduce vulnerabilities and mitigate inflationary impacts caused by El Niño, the escalating consequences of the African swine fever (ASF), and external pressures such as geopolitical tensions and export bans in some countries.

He added that the decreased tariff rates contributed in lowering corn inflation, while increasing rice supply and meat importation lowered meat inflation.



Manila slaps ban on poultry products from Sweden

THE government slapped a temporary ban on poultry meat, day old chicks and eggs from Sweden, which confirmed the outbreak of bird flu in one of its municipalities.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. signed and issued Memorandum Order 12 last March 11. The memo authorized the implementation of the temporary ban.

Laurel noted that there was an outbreak of high pathogenicity avian influenza H5N1 (HPAI) in Ystad, Municipality of Skane County, Sweden last January 5 affecting domestic birds.

"Based on the official report submitted by the Chief Veterinary Officer, Swedish Board of Agriculture, Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation of Sweden to the World Organisation for

Animal Health on 19 January 2024, there was an outbreak of High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza H5N1 in Ystad, Municipality of Skane County Sweden last 05 January 2024 affecting birds [domestic] as confirmed by National Veterinary Institute of Sweden."

The agriculture chief said the ban was put in place to protect the health of the domestic poultry

population.

With the ban in place, Manila suspended the processing, evaluation of the application and issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) import clearance to poultry products from Sweden.

Laurel said all shipments coming from Sweden that are in transit, loaded, or accepted unto port before the official communication of memo to the Swedish authori-

ties will be allowed provided that the products were slaughtered on or before December 22, 2023.

Manila warned that it will confiscate all shipments of poultry products from Sweden (except heat-treated products).

Laurel had also banned the entry of poultry products from the Czech Republic last March 8. He signed and issued MO 11 which ordered the temporary ban.

"Based on the official report submitted by the Director General, State Veterinary Adminis-

tration, Ministry of Agriculture Czech Republic to the World Organisation for Animal Health [WOAH] on 31 January 2024, there was an outbreak of High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza H5N1 [HPAI] in Chocen - Kosorin, Ustinad Orlici, Pardubicky of the Czech Republic on 30 January 2024 affecting birds [domestic], the memo read.

The Philippines does not consider Sweden and the Czech Republic as major sources of poultry products.



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Learning site in Cagayan to boost coconut industry

A COCONUT-BASED learning site for agriculture (Coco LSA) is expected to boost the coconut industry in Region 2 (Cagayan Valley).

Located in Barangay Amunitan in Gonzaga, Cagayan, the THL Integrated Coconut Farm and Nature Park has officially opened its gates "marking the dawn of a new era in agricultural education," according to the **Agricultural Training Institute-Regional Training Center 2 (ATI-RTC2)**.

With this achievement, the THL Integrated Coconut Farm and Nature Park was provided with official LSA signage, and certification from the ATI-RTC2 was also awarded to founder and owner Nenita Ayuyang.

ATI-RTC2 Officer in Charge Director Claris Marayag-Alaska said the coco-based LSA in Gonzaga is the first in Region 2, expressing her thanks to Ayuyang for embracing one of the programs of ATI.

"This coco-based learning site for agriculture will serve as a training venue and technology demonstration area in the municipality of Gonzaga for coconut production and its components," Alaska said.

She is encouraging coconut farmers in the municipality to attend capability-building activities to capacitate them not just in coconut production but also in value-adding practices, and the planting of other crops that can be integrated with coconut farming.

The ATI-RTC2 also expressed its

steadfast support for the successful operation of the coco-based SLA, emphasizing the collaborative efforts required to empower generations of coconut growers in Gonzaga and beyond.

As the coco-based LSA cooperator, Ayuyang, who is also both a farm manager and a practical agriculturist, expressed her strong commitment to fulfilling her duties and responsibilities diligently.

"Encouraged by the messages of support from partner-agencies, I accept the challenges ahead with confidence, wholeheartedly accepting my role in advancing agricultural practices in the locality," she said.

Municipal agriculturist Corazon Baclig thanked ATI and partner-



■ Nenita Ayuyang received a plaque of appreciation for her founding the THL Integrated Coconut Farm and Nature Park in Gonzaga, Cagayan. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

agencies for their unwavering support to the farmers in Gonzaga, affirming the commitment of their office to collaborate closely with Coco LSA to ensure the provision

of continuous training and extension services to benefit coconut farmers in the area.

"With the establishment of knowledge

and innovation emerges that is poised to elevate agricultural practices and transform livelihoods in Gonzaga and beyond," ATI-RTC2 said. **LEANDER C. DOMINGO**



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PCC marks 31 years

THE Philippine Carabao Center (PCC) located at the Central Luzon State University (CLSU) in Nueva Ecija celebrated its 31st anniversary on March 8 with the theme "Excellence in Unity."

Liza Battad, PCC executive director, said the center under the Department of Agriculture has been instrumental in promoting socioeconomic empowerment and sustainable development for the past 31 years.

"It is known for its mandate in protecting, breeding and promoting carabao as a milk, meat, draft power and hide source for rural farmers," Battad said.

The event included the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the product exhibit where various products using carabao's milk were displayed.

With Battad was Ericson de la Cruz, PCC-CLSU director, who led the said ceremony, while Edgar Orden, CLSU vice president for research and extension, served as the keynote speaker of the event.

Also the concurrent director of the Central Luzon Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development Consortium, Orden recognized the achievements of PCC as an organization that changed the industry through the concerted efforts of its dedicated leaders and staff to achieve greater heights and enhance the lives of the people and communities it serves.

In his keynote address, Orden said

that with its current leadership, personnel, facilities and partners, "there is no doubt that PCC will continue to be a front-runner in developing further the carabao industry of the country."

"We look forward to the next years for PCC to be known worldwide as a supplier of genetically improved breeders, highly productive animals, the finest carabao milk, and milk products and highly competent human resources," he said.

Orden added that these could add more significant chapters to the PCC's colorful story, which is "the story of the carabao for the people."

Also gracing the event was Evaristo Abella, CLSU president, who received a plaque of appreciation for the continuous support of the university in the research and extension endeavor of PCC along with other partner institutions present at the event.

Aireen Padilla of the CLSU Strategic Communication Office said the celebration was attended by 253 participants from PCC national headquarters, farmer partners and regional networks from various academic institutions.

Padilla said these higher education institutions include the University of the Philippines Los Baños, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, Cagayan State University, and CLSU faculty and staff.

LEANDER C. DOMINGO



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Searca calls for inclusive farm tourism

INCLUSIVE farm tourism was the resounding message of the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca) director during the recent 7th Philippine Farm Tourism Conference in Bohol.

Themed "Farm Tourism: Consciousness for Healthy Living and New Experiences," the conference was co-presented by the Center and the International School of Sustainable Tourism (ISST) and was hosted by the Bohol provincial government.

Searca Director Glenn Gregorio said the conference at the Bellevue Resort held from February 26-28 featured success stories on sustainable growth through cultivating fruit and vegetable farms, aquaculture and artisanal fisheries, and green investments in farm tourism.

"Farm tourism as a gateway to wellness and a vehicle to carbon neutrality has a role in helping the farmers transform their mindsets and uplift their quality of life," he said in his keynote address rallying for inclusive farm tourism.

Gregorio said inclusiveness in farm tourism makes the undertaking competitive, inclusive and resilient.

"It is competitive because stakeholders can innovate, upgrade and add value to products and services to match tourist demand and grow market share; inclusive because all stakeholders, including the poor and the marginalized, receive a sustainable flow of benefits; and lastly, resilient because stakeholders are capable of addressing, absorbing and overcoming shocks in the market, policy environment, resource base or other aspect of the system," he explained.

Gregorio also highlighted Searca's initiatives on farm tourism.

These are the Global Farm Tourism Summit in 2018 featuring

lecture discussions and panel sessions on climate-resilient farming, women empowerment in farm tourism and millennial farming, and the International Ecotourism Travel Mart in 2023, the first green travel mart and selling fair in the world, both of which are in partnership with ISST.

Meanwhile, the 4th Lakbay Bukid Awards on February 27 also coincided with the farm tourism conference recognizing Asia's foremost farm tourism pioneers, movers, developers, supporters and legislators.

The selection of the first youth Lakbay Bukid awardee, Francis Perdigon of Perdigon Farm in Butuan City, Agusan del Norte, was spearheaded by Searca.

Perdigon is a Generation Z farmer and a licensed agriculturist, and his hands-on involvement in farm work "demonstrates a genuine dedication to farming and rural development while cultivating interest and enthusiasm for agriculture among youths," according to Searca.

Searca also hosted an institutional exhibit at the conference showcasing its publications on food security, climate resilience and natural resource management, as well as information materials on its programs and services through its Partnerships Unit and Applied Knowledge Resources Unit.

The Asean Centre for Biodiversity, the Department of Tourism, the Tourism Promotions Board, the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, the Philippine Exporters Confederation, the Department of Trade and Industry, and Philippine Airlines as the official carrier joined and supported the event. **LEANDER C. DOMINGO**



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DA: Price of rice may drop to P45 to P48 per kilo soon

THE price of regular- and well-milled rice may drop at P45 to P48 per kilogram as the country approaches the peak harvest season, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said Wednesday.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said they are monitoring a decline in retail prices, although the prevailing price range is still at P49/kg. to P50/kg. in Metro Manila.

"It's slowly dropping, we are seeing P40 plus/kg level. That level is possible. We are looking at it and our harvest is okay," he said in a radio interview.

De Mesa said the El Niño phenomenon has minimal effects on the country's harvest season, which is expected from March to April.

It has accounted for 14,000 hectares of damaged rice farms so far, or only 1.5 percent of the total area allotted for rice.

To date, around 728,000MT of imported rice have entered the country.

The DA further said it is aiming to achieve more than 90 percent rather than 100 percent, rice self-sufficiency by the end of the current administration. De Mesa said the DA is aiming to maximize productivity.

De Mesa said the Philippines' rice sufficiency level currently stands between 86% and 88%. "Our target is 95% to 97% by the end of this administration," he said. For now, the Philippines has to rely on importation to ensure ample supply.

The Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech) meanwhile has distributed over 26,400 farm equipment units in the past four years, benefiting nearly one million Filipino farmers.

Othel V. Campos

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Palace announces new appointees

By ALEXIS ROMERO

Malacañang has announced a new set of appointees in several agencies, including the finance and agriculture departments and the Office of the President.

In a Facebook post, the Presidential Communications Office (PCO) said the appointees in the finance department are Joven Balbosa (undersecretary), Gerald Alan Quebral (assistant secretary), Cherry Mae Gonzales and Donalyn Minimo (directors IV) and Rizalino Jose Torralba (collector of customs VI).

President Marcos also appointed Bureau of the Treasury officer-in-charge Sharon Almanza as national treasurer.

The newly appointed officials in the **agriculture department** are Christopher Morales and Cheryl Marie Caballero, Constante Palabrica, Ernesto Enriquez and Larry Lacson, and Abbey Charles Gawaran.

Marcos also designated new officials to agencies under his office, namely Cris Tenorio (director IV of the Assets Management Office), Manuel Plaza III (member of the Games and Amusement Board), Julius Leonen (PCO director III), Adrian Bautista (PCO director II) and Felix Castro Jr. (OP assistant secretary).

Other appointees are Christian Tan Aguado (part-time commissioner representing the languages of the southern cultural communities of the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino), Reggie Cruz (Pampango language of the KWF), Bianca Patrice Go (commissioner representing Mindanao of the National Youth Commission), Ernesto Severino (member of the Philippine Postal Corp. board of directors), Ivy Grace Rivera (agrarian reform director IV), Sittie Rahma Alawi, Jimmicio Daoaten and Reynaldo Sy (information and communication technology directors IV) and Jhino Ilano (information and communication technology director III).

The President also appointed Lynna Joy Cardinal (provincial trade and industry officer), Mario Tani (foreign trade service officer II), Anthony Rivera (foreign trade service officer III), Rudolph Jay Velasco (foreign trade service officer IV), Althea Karen Antonio, Alma Argayoso and May Niña Celynne Layug (special trade representatives), Reymundo de Guzman Jr. (Office of Transportation Cooperatives executive director II) and Gregorio Pastorfide (member of the University of the Philippines Board of Regents).



'PhilMech will meet RCEF distribution targets'

THE Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech) vowed to distribute P30 billion worth of farm equipment under a program funded by tariffs collected from rice imports.

PhilMech, an attached agency of the Department of Agriculture (DA), said it has distributed 26,412 farm equipment over the last four years through the mechanization program bankrolled by the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), or Rice Fund.

The farm machineries, distributed between mid-2020 and March 3 this year, were delivered to 368 local government units (LGUs) and 6,385 farmers' cooperatives and associations (FCAs) with a total membership of almost 1 million individuals.

Meanwhile, the number of pro-

cured agricultural equipment totaled 28,817 from the start of the RCEF-Mechanization Program in mid-2019.

Distribution of farm equipment over the last four years translates to a 91.6-percent delivery rate under the program.

PHilMech said it has obligated a total P24.9 billion of Rice Fund for the procurement of 28,817 agricultural equipment made up 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.

"Equally important is PHilMech's training 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," the agency said in a statement.

"PHilMech intends to finish distributing at least P30 billion worth of farm machines under the RCEF Mechanization Program."

Under Republic Act 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law, PHilMech gets P5 billion every year from 2019 to 2024 to distribute various agricultural equipment to qualified FCAs and LGUs.

The P5 billion is sourced from tariffs collected on rice imports. 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.

The Philippines's rice imports for 2024 could exceed 4 million

metric tons (MMT) on expectations of lower paddy harvest, according to a report published by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The USDA raised its projection for Philippine rice imports for 2024 to 4.1 MMT from the previous 3.9 MMT in the latest edition of its report on global grains trade.

The country's purchases of imported rice last year fell by nearly 9 percent to nearly 3.5 MMT due to volatile global market conditions such as higher prices and lower supply. Rice imports in 2022 reached a record 3.826 MMT.

El Niño, however, could again boost the country's imports as the DA projected that rice production for 2024 will post flat growth.

The Philippines's unmilled

rice production last year reached a record 20.06 MMT, 1.56 percent higher than the 19.756 MMT produced in 2022, according to data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Last month, the DA made an assurance that the country's rice supply is sufficient through the first half of this year, with recent imports and the upcoming harvest that peaks in March and April, ensuring stable price of the country's main food staple through June in spite of El Niño.

The DA said, however, that prices may stay elevated through September this year, due to concerns over El Niño's impact on global rice supply and heightened demand for the grain that, consequently, is keeping international prices high.



PH at risk of food security shocks

BY NIÑA MYKA PAULINE ARCEO

FOOD security risk in the Asia-Pacific (APAC) will remain elevated, Moody's Investors Service said, with the Philippines demonstrating both higher exposure to shocks and lower resilience.

In a report on Wednesday, Moody's said that several structural factors contribute to food security risks in the region.

These include severe climate shocks affecting food production, increasing global demand for food due to population growth, and geopolitical tensions disrupting agricultural production and trade flows, both regionally and globally.

Furthermore, it cautioned that climate-driven shocks will persistently raise food security worries.

The heightened occurrence

and intensity of extreme weather events, such as floods and storm-induced landslides, will keep affecting crop yields.

"This year, we expect the continuation of El Niño to impact crop yields in APAC, as well as in other regions such as Latin America," Moody's said.

It stated that although food prices have dropped overall since their peak in 2022, prices for certain crops, like rice, which is a staple in the area, are still high.

This is due to smaller-than-anticipated rice harvests and an

increase in export restrictions during the latter part of 2023, keeping prices high and raising worries about food security in the region.

High rice inflation in PH

In the case of the Philippines, inflation rose again last month to 3.4 percent due to elevated rice inflation. It accounted for 2.1 percentage points of overall inflation.

It rose to 23.7 percent last month from 22.6 percent in January, marking the highest level since February 2009, when it also reached 24.6 percent. It is also anticipated to stay elevated until July or August of this year.

Moody's said that several rice-exporting nations, including India, China and Thailand, anticipate reduced crop yields for the 2023-2024 season due to dry weather associated with the El Niño.

With limited Indian rice exports, Thailand and Vietnam are expected to play a significant role in global rice shipments, making trade prices more susceptible to weather conditions in these countries shortly.

"The proportional rise in food security risk in Asia has been smaller than other emerging markets, and this slower pace of deterioration partly reflects APAC being a major producer for primary crops," Moody's said.

"However, APAC is still home to some of the most populous economies, and as such still accounts for half the people facing moderate or severe food insecurity in the world," it added.

It was mentioned that almost half of the area faces increased exposure to climate-related risks like water management issues.

Additionally, a considerable

portion of the region is less capable of handling such shocks due to higher social and governance risks.

Countries facing both increased exposure to risks and lower resilience are primarily located in South Asia, like Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka; the Pacific islands, such as the Solomon Islands; and Southeast Asia, including the Philippines and Laos.

"A large proportion of their populations are unable to afford a healthy diet... in comparison, a number of economies in Northeast Asia display lower exposure and higher resilience," Moody's said.

It cited that the Philippine government is initiating a food stamp program targeting the poorest households and providing financial aid to local farmers and small-scale retailers.

While these policies are in effect aimed at alleviating food security

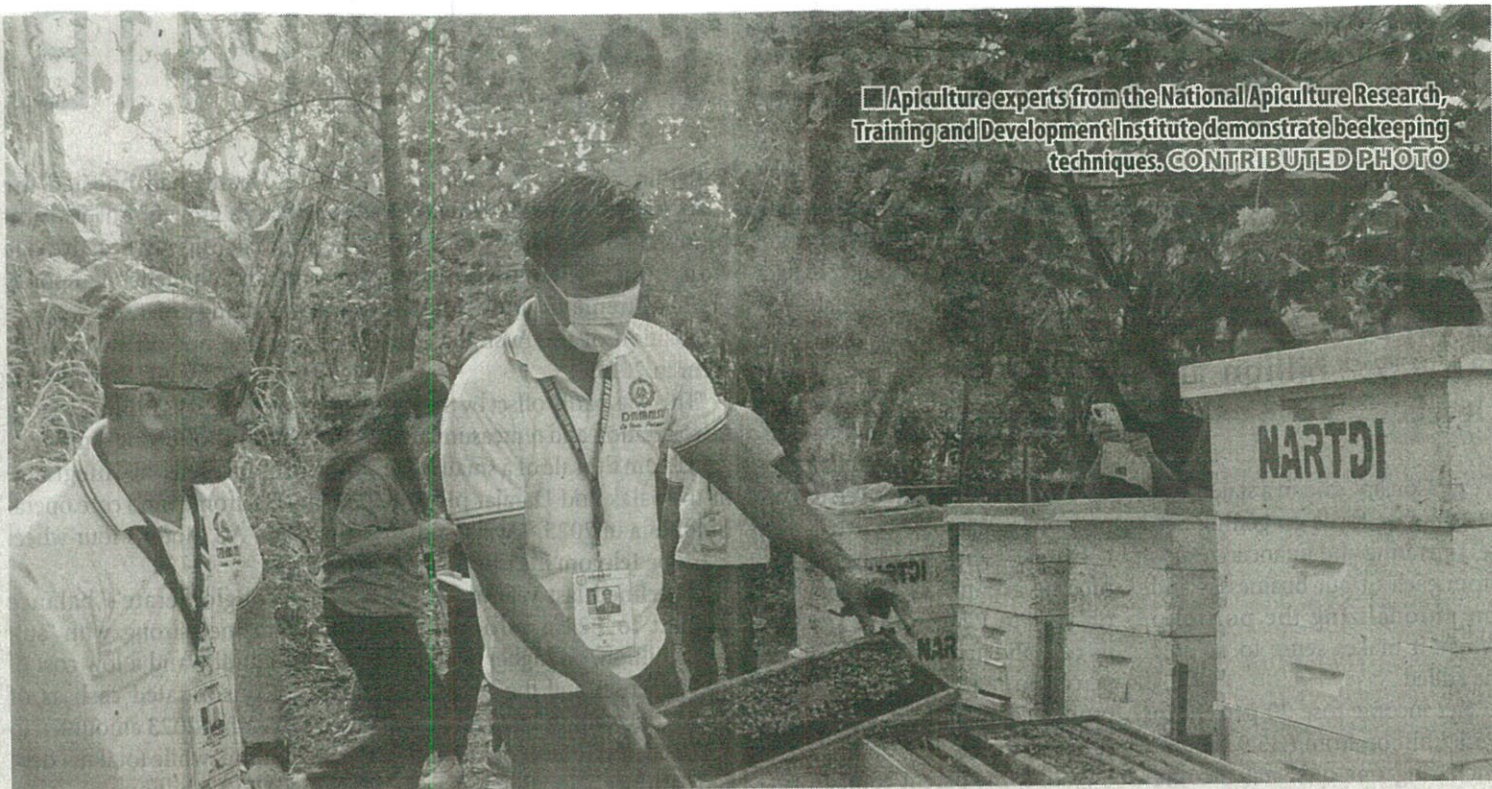
concerns, Moody's stressed that they won't completely eliminate them.

It was highlighted that 74 percent of Filipinos cannot afford a nutritious diet.

"Strong policy support will encourage new companies and financial institutions to enter agri-related sectors, which will support farm productivity and crop yields," it said.

"The role of agri-related companies may also be elevated to a more strategic level in terms of their contribution to national food security...such as through the advancement of advanced agrochemical technologies and management of key grain reserves," it added.

Moreover, it indicated that financial institutions involved in supporting this system, particularly in providing agricultural insurance, could also gain advantages due to robust government policy support.



SCUs partner to boost beekeeping industry

BY LEANDER C. DOMINGO

THE Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University (DMMMSU) has forged agreements with a number of state colleges and universities (SCUs) for the establishment of beekeeping satellite centers to boost the industry.

Maricon Viduya, DMMMSU Strategic Communications director, said the participating SCUs that executed a memorandum of agreement (MoA) with them include the University of Southeastern Philippines, Occidental Mindoro State College, Dr. Emilio B. Espinosa Sr. Masbate State University and Camarines Norte State College.

Viduya said partner SCUs will establish beekeeping satellite centers, which "signifies a concerted effort to address the growing demand for honeybee product production and pollination services nationwide."

"By leveraging their respective strengths in research and extension services, the collaborating institutions intend to facilitate knowledge exchange, capacity-building and technology transfer in beekeeping," she said.

DMMMSU President Jaime Manuel Jr. said the establishment of beekeeping satellite centers signals a promising chapter in the country's journey toward sustainable development in the field of beekeeping or apiculture.

Expressing his enthusiasm for the collaboration, Manuel highlighted the industry's potential to harness the diverse expertise and

sources of the partner-institutions.

"Through this partnership, we aim to empower local beekeepers, promote environmental sustainability and drive innovation in the apiculture sector," Manuel said.

Viduya said the MoA signing ceremony was attended by key stakeholders from the government, academia and the beekeeping industry, underscoring the widespread support and recognition of the collaborative endeavor.

In 1991, the Apiculture Training and Development Center (ATDC), now known as the National Apiculture Research, Training and Development Institute (Nartdi), was established at the DMMMSU campus in Bacnotan, La Union.

DMMMSU said the ATDC was established due to the need for an institution to spearhead and support the development of the local beekeeping industry.

According to DMMMSU, beekeeping is one of the most important forms of agriculture in

the world and about one-third of the seed yield of crops worldwide is supported by the pollination of cross-pollinated plants.

It also noted that diversified bee products like honey, beeswax, royal jelly, bee venom, pollen and propolis have potential demand, both in the local and international markets.

"Hence, apiculture should be developed as an urban agro-based industry since it enhances the balance of the ecosystem. It maximizes the labor resources of both the women and youth sectors of society," the university stated.

However, DMMMSU said the growing demand for beekeeping training and technical assistance could hardly be met by the Nartdi.

"This is due to its limited resources and the absence of authority in the center to prepare, implement and oversee research and extension programs in apiculture, thus the creation of the Nartdi in 1999," the university said.



Moody's: Phl highly exposed to food security risks

By KEISHA TA-ASAN

Food security risks will likely remain elevated in Asia-Pacific even if prices of food ease this year, with the Philippines among the most exposed to shocks and risks in the region, Moody's Investors Service said.

The debt watcher said in a report different economies have varying risk exposure and resilience to food shocks in the Asia Pacific (APAC) region.

"Countries that exhibit both higher exposure to shocks and lower resilience are mainly in South Asia, (Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), the Pacific Islands (Solomon Islands) and Southeast Asia (Philippines and

Laos)," it said.

According to Moody's, food security risks will remain elevated this year amid frequent and severe climate shocks that will disrupt food production processes, including the impact of El Niño on crop production.

"This year, we expect the continuation of El Niño to impact crop yields in APAC, as well as in other regions such as Latin America. While food prices have generally come down from their peaks in 2022, prices for a few crops – such as rice, a staple in this region – remain elevated," it said.

"This comes on the back of a series of lower-than-expected rice harvests and a wave of export restrictions in

the second half of 2023, which have kept rice prices high and renewed concerns about food security in the region," it said.

Global demand for food will also continue to rise on the back of a growing population in the region and geopolitical tensions may further disrupt trade flows of agricultural goods and input.

Latest data from the Philippine Statistics Authority showed headline inflation quickened to a two-month high of 3.4 percent in February from 2.8 percent in January, snapping four straight months of decline amid faster upticks in food prices.

Food inflation went up to 4.8 per-

cent from 3.3 percent as rice posted a higher inflation rate of 23.7 percent in February from the previous month's 22.6 percent. It was the highest since the 24.6 percent recorded in February 2009.

"Nearly half of the region has higher exposure to physical climate risk or water management risk. A significant proportion of the region also has lower resilience to respond to shocks, as reflected by higher social and governance risk scores," Moody's said.

Based on the debt watcher's heat map, the Philippines scored four out of five in terms of physical climate risks, with five being the highest. Around 74 percent of the country's population

is also unable to afford a healthy diet.

Moody's noted that even if the governments in most exposed countries would implement policy measures to mitigate the impact of food shock, these interventions would not fully offset food security risks.

"Food security risk will put downward pressure on economic growth potential and fiscal strength, and pose risks to political stability and external vulnerability," the debt watcher said, adding that risks can have long-lasting implications.

"Volatility in commodity prices can also increase volatility of domestic inflation, which can delay monetary policy adjustments," Moody's added.



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Marcos secures \$4B trade deals in Germany

BUSINESS AGREEMENTS
— President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. exchanges pleasantries with German business leaders after signing \$4 billion worth of business agreements during his working visit in Berlin, Germany on Tuesday, March 12, 2024. (PPA)



By ARGYLL CYRUS GEDUCOS

BERLIN, Germany – President Marcos cornered at least \$4 billion worth of business agreements during his working visit here on Tuesday, March 12 (Germany time).

Eight deals, including three letters of intent (LOIs), two memoranda of agreement (MOAs), and three memoranda of understanding (MOUs), were signed by the Philippine government and German businesses during the Philippine Business Forum here.

In his speech, the President said the Philippines looks forward to fostering strong business ties with Germany as it is the biggest economy in the European Union and it is a global force in technology and innovation.

“I invite esteemed German business leaders to continue to keep in mind the Philippines as a reliable partner that can support your market expansion and operations,” Marcos said. “We remain steadfast in our commitment to purposeful reforms, evident in key legislative amendments.”

The trade agreements are:

- LOI intended to develop a partner hospital that would train and support other lower-tier hospitals. Its facilities include classrooms, scanning rooms, internet connectivity, IT equipment, and OP and administration rooms.

- LOI for the development of an Innovation Think Tank hub and spoke model to address

► **5**



Marcos secures \$4B trade deals in Germany 1◀

the strategic target of an inclusive innovation ecosystem in the Philippines.

- LOI for the strategic and digital partnership in healthcare with the Department of Health (DOH) to revolutionize healthcare in the Philippines, and ensure safety, quality, accessibility, and affordability.

- MOA for a public-private partnership venture that would rehabilitate, reclaim, and recultivate degraded farmlands for organic farming projects that will sustainably produce high-quality, healthy organic food at reasonable prices.

- MOA to expand potential collaborations in mobility solutions, software services, manufacturing, factory automation, logistics services, energy, security, and safety systems for buildings, consumer appliances, and healthcare.

- MOU on investing in a fully integrated solar cell manufacturing facility in the Philippines.

- MOU to build a manufacturing facility that would modify automobiles into high-end 1-of-1 versions and armor-protected cars. It also seeks to manufacture military-grade armored personnel carriers for the Asian Market.

- MOU to put up data centers that will host a digital insurance platform that will serve the Philippines and the Southeast Asian region. It intends to provide insurance providers and insurance distribution companies with a fully integrated platform to increase insurance penetration in the country and the region.

**Foreign investments
to keep Pinoys at home**
In inviting German business

leaders to invest in the Philippines, the President said this will not only help boost the economy but will also keep Filipinos at home with their families instead of working abroad.

"We are giving them incentives so they would build their factories in the Philippines," he said. "If they lack workers in Germany, why not open manufacturing plants in the Philippines? They have a lot of skilled, hardworking, and trustworthy Filipino workers to choose from."

According to Marcos, the government continues to explore avenues for economic growth and employment opportunities both in the Philippines and abroad.

He reaffirmed his administration's resolve to implement programs that will create sustainable livelihood opportunities in the province, reducing the need for many Filipinos to seek employment overseas.

"In the Bagong Pilipinas, we will foster opportunities for Filipinos to work locally so they won't have to leave their loved ones," the President said.

There are currently at least 35,000 Filipinos living and working in Germany.

Meeting with German business leaders

While in Germany, President Marcos met with officials of German companies Siemens, WPD GmbH, and Airbus Asia-Pacific.

In a Facebook post, Marcos said his meeting with the leaders of these companies will open more job opportunities in many industries in

the Philippines.

"Our partnerships with Siemens AG and Wind Power Development will create more jobs in healthcare tech, green manufacturing, and renewable energy," he said.

"With Airbus on board, Filipinos will gain expertise in aerospace, enhancing our global standing in the aviation market," he added.

Marcos met Siemens president

and CEO Dr. Roland Busch here on Tuesday, March 12. The two discussed upcoming projects of Siemens AG in the country that focus on improving the Philippines' healthcare sector.

In Marcos' meeting with Airbus Asia-Pacific president and regional head Anand Stanley, both discussed strengthening the country's aerospace capabilities. Marcos recognized Airbus' willingness to support the Philippines' Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) modernization

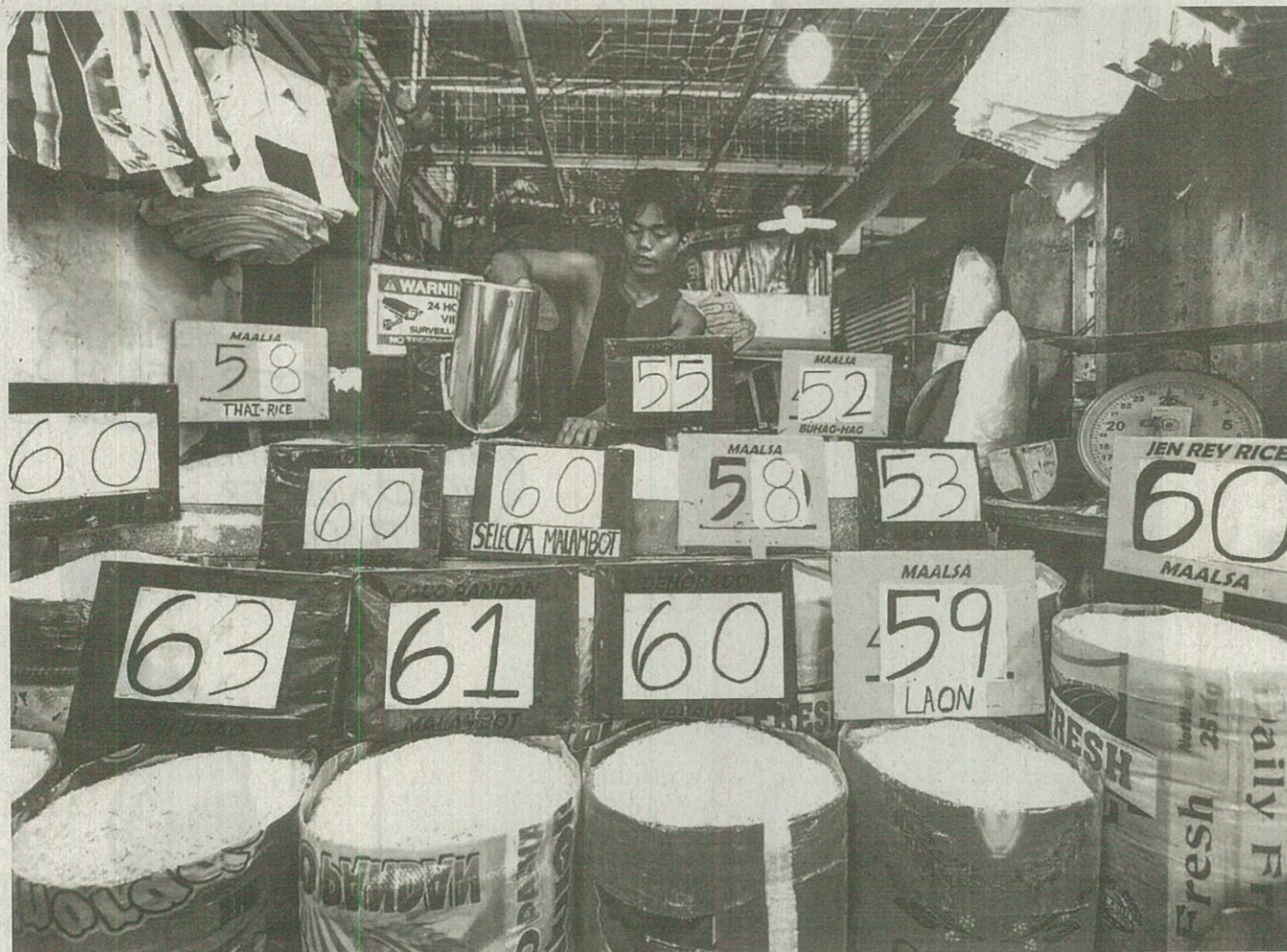
program and reassured the government's commitment to assisting the company in their localization efforts, including its linkages to the country's electronics and aerospace manufacturing industry.

President Marcos discussed with officials of WPD GmbH, a company specializing in the development of wind and solar projects, the latter's ongoing development projects for the establishment of offshore wind farms in Cavite, Negros Occidental, and Guimaras.

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RICE FOR SALE – A vendor arranges rice for sale in a public market in Paco, Manila on Wednesday, March 13, 2024. The vendor said there is no **National Food Authority (NFA)** rice available for sale. According to a farmers' group, the NFA has incurred losses of at least ₱112 million after selling 150,000 bags of rice for only ₱25 per kilo to some traders. (Arnold Quizol)



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PHL among most at-risk countries to food security shocks — Moody's

FOOD SECURITY RISK in the Asia-Pacific region will remain elevated, as climate shocks are expected to persist in the coming years, Moody's Investors Service said.

"Food security risk in Asia-Pacific (APAC) will remain elevated even if food prices fall. First, increasingly frequent and severe climate shocks will disrupt food production processes.

FULL STORY



Read the full story by
scanning the QR code
<tinyurl.com/2cp4u5az>

This year, we expect the continuation of El Niño to impact crop yields in Asia and the Pacific," it said in a report.

Moody's said the region's food security is at risk due to the rising global demand for food, geopolitical tensions and disruptions to agricultural trade and production. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**



The Future of Food

The benefits of farm-to-table, according to a farmer

WHILE farm-to-table dining sounds like a call for sustainability or a cue for luxury, the path food takes from soil to plate uncovers many issues in the agricultural sector. Carlomagno Aguilar, co-founder and Chief Farmer and Head Farm Consultant at FarmYields, Inc. (also known as Carlo The Farmer on YouTube), feels that the same solutions that bring food to the table in the most efficient way can undo a lot of knots in the agricultural industry.

Mr. Aguilar, who has been farming since 2010, opened his talk at the Future of Food Conference in the Center for Culinary Arts – Manila's BGC campus on March 8 with a picture of okra he found in the market. It was blemished, and he said that he had gone to the market at 7 a.m.



PHILIPPINE STAR/WALTER BOLLOZOS



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just to find that. That became a segue to some of the issues he sees with traditional market systems, where middlemen buy the produce from the farmer, which would then be brought to market — going through many hands, with the price increasing each time, until it reached a diner's plate. (Also, he says, the really fresh stuff hits the market at 1 a.m.).

For example, he discussed some of the restaurants and hotels in Pampanga to whom he started selling his own produce after he found out that they'd get their vegetables all the way from Quezon City's Balintawak Market — even when perfectly serviceable farms existed nearby (those farms, it turned out, also sent their stuff to the city market). He says that the gap is created because farmers have informal business setups that don't provide for receipts, for example, which the hotels need for accounting.

Other issues he tackled include food waste (if bought directly from a farmer, "unattractive" but still edible parts of produce would have been used, whereas vegetables in the market have leaves or stems removed), and the loss of variety. He made an example of tomatoes: native-grown tomatoes, juicy as they are, aren't the favorite produce of middlemen because they are compromised easily during travel. This problem then dictated the growing of hardier tomatoes, which unfortunately weren't as good (but which always arrive intact).

"This is what I see: a problem of quality, affordability, availability, and variety," he said.

Farm-to-table farming presents some solutions to these issues, but then there's also the issue of land.

"*Ang daming landowners na hindi nila alam ang gagawin nila sa lupa nila* (there are a lot of landowners who don't know what to do with their land). You can find a lot of farmers who have the skill to grow food, *pero wala silang mataniman* (they have nowhere to plant)," he said. He suggests that owners with idle arable land partner with farmers, especially since there is a market of chefs and restaurateurs for their produce. "With that partnership, it's a win-win situation," he said.

As for tackling the food waste problem, he gives an example of how he benefited from partnering directly with chefs: an excess of carrots and cucumbers meant juice for the chefs, while an excess crop of tomatoes meant an opportunity

for sun-drying. "It's so amazing to work with chefs directly because there is zero waste. They can always transform food into something beautiful," he said. "*Napakalawak po ng market* (the market is huge). Disconnected *lang talaga ang farmers saka mga buyers* (there is just a disconnection between farmers and buyers)."

He also thinks that the farm-to-table model can

address price shocks, giving as an example the rise in the price of chilies a few years ago.

A storm had wiped out most of the crop, and farmers with intact plants were able to sell their chilies at a high price. Unfortunately, some farmers took this to mean that chilies could be sold at consistently high prices, but their efforts contributed to a surplus that brought down prices.

With the farm-to-table model, farmers can enter into partnerships with restaurants and chefs so they can set their prices, while the dining partners have a steady supply of produce that is not subject to market demand and shocks.

The traditional model with middlemen also neglects heirloom crops simply because they aren't profitable (thus putting biodiversity in peril). He used eggplants as an example: a native eggplant is small and it would take many pieces to make a kilogram to sell, but the bigger imported varieties hit the weight quota much faster. With the farm-to-table model, since farmers can set their prices (and their partners would be willing to pay them), a farmer can be more adventurous with their crops (which the partner can also ask the farmer to specifically plant). He noted that native varieties are also pest-resistant, which benefits the farmer and the land.

"By localizing food, it addresses the problems of both farmers and chefs," he said.

"The importance of farm-to-table is the synergy of local farmers and chefs," he said. "*Kapag nag-connect ang mga farmers at chefs and restaurant owners* (if the farmers, chefs, and restaurant owners can connect), it will solve a lot of problems." — **Joseph L. Garcia**



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Pakikiisa sa Women's month....

**ACT-AGRI Kaagapay,
namahagi ng bigas at pataba**

Namahagi ang ACT-Agri-kaagapay organization ng daan-daang sako ng de kalidad ng bigas at mga pataba sa mahihirap na residente sa lalawigan ng Batangas.

Mismong sina Mataas Na Kahoy Municipal Mayor Janet Ilagan at civic leader at ACT-Agri-Kaagapay, President Virginia Rodriguez ang nanguna sa distribusyon ng may 500 bags ng bigas at 300 sako ng pataba sa mga pamilya at mga magsasaka sa lalawigan upang matiyak na mayroong sapat na suplay ng pagkain ang mga mahihirap na pamilya doon.

Ayon kay Rodriguez, ang rice assistance program ng ACT-Agri-Kaagapay at distribusyon ng pataba ay nabuo bunsod ng tumataas na presyo ng bigas at mga hamong kinakaharap ng mga consumers, dahil sa patuloy na pagtaas ng presyo ng mga basic commodities.

Tinukoy rin ni Rodriguez na ang mga rice farming households ay kabilang sa mga hindi nakakakuha ng anumang cash assistance.

Giit ni Rodriguez, ang mga maliliit na magsasaka at kanilang pamilya ay nararapat ring mabigyan ng tulong upang matulungang maging produktibo.

"Many farmer incomes and livelihoods should become a thing of the past. And, as every Filipino deserves, farming communities should have decent education, health and housing as well as the conveniences of water, electricity, telecommunications and transport," pahayag pa ni Rodriguez. (Mer Layson)



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Soybeans slip, corn rise

CANBERRA- Chicago soybean futures fell on Wednesday from one-month highs in the previous session as a production forecast downgrade by Brazil's crop agency tests speculative investors who have bet heavily on further price declines.

Corn futures edged higher and wheat futures also rose after falling on Monday to their lowest since August 2020 amid lower Russian export prices and cancelled US sales.

The most-active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) was down 0.7 percent at \$11.88-1/4 a bushel, having hit \$11.97 on Tuesday, its

highest since Feb. 13.

Prices remained down around 8.5 percent this year and last month hit their lowest since 2020.

"It is too early to say whether this is a readjustment or a 'dead cat bounce'", said Andrew Whitelaw, an analyst at Australian consultants Episode 3.

He said speculators had grown their net short position in soybeans and the recent rise could be due to some of them being forced to cover those positions, with downward pressure on prices remaining.

Commodity funds were net buyers of CBOT soybeans on Tuesday, traders said. - *Reuters*

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Russian wheat knocks down global prices as grain stockpiles mount

CHICAGO/SINGAPORE- Russia is flooding the global market with cheap wheat as the world's No. 1 supplier draws down inventories ahead of an expected bumper harvest, easing food inflation for importers but intensifying competition for rival exporters.

Prices of US and European wheat have dropped to their lowest in about 3-1/2 years, weighed down by Russian grain flows, which have prompted China to cancel recent purchases from the United States.

Global cereal supplies are shifting to surplus from the shortages of the past several years caused by unfavorable weather, the coronavirus pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war.

"Russia still has large inventories which need to be sold to free up space for the new harvest, which is expected to be big," said Matt Ammermann, vice president of the Eastern Europe and Black Sea region for brokerage StoneX.

Russia is projected to export a

record 51 million metric tons of wheat in the crop year that ends on May 31, up from 47.5 million a year ago, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) says.

It is forecast to export 4.5 million to 4.8 million tons of wheat in March, which would be bearish for global prices, Ammermann added.

Refinitiv data shows benchmark Russian wheat export prices slipped below \$200 a metric ton (\$5.44 per bushel) this week for the first time since August 2020, marking the lowest early-March price since 2017.

"What is more important is what is going to happen to prices going forward," said Ole Houe, director of advisory services at brokerage IKON Commodities in Sydney.

"When you look at the global production prospects in the second half of the year, there is going to be more supply. Crops across the northern hemisphere are doing very well. Prices will come under more pressure in the near term."

Since last week, the USDA since last week has confirmed that private exporters cancelled sales of 504,000 metric tons of US soft red winter wheat to China, the world's largest producer and consumer of the grain.

China made a series of US wheat purchases in December, when prices were higher.

Now Chinese buyers might need to compensate the sellers for cancelled deals if they had locked in prices, said Jeffrey McPike, a US analyst with brokerage WASEDA Commodities, although it was unclear, as the deals were private contracts.

In addition to the steep decline in world prices, Chinese buyers have cancelled US cargoes amid oversupply in the domestic market.

"The wheat market is oversupplied after a period of intensive replenishment, most of the flour mills are holding certain volumes," China Grain Net, an information provider affiliated with state stockpiler Sinograin, said this week. - Reuters



A file photo shows combines harvest wheat in a field of a local agricultural enterprise in the Cherlaksy district of the Omsk region. (Reuters Photo)



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Cocoa futures hit record highs; robusta coffee also up

NEW YORK — Cocoa futures in both New York and London climbed to record highs on Tuesday with the market's relentless rise fueled by a supply shortage, while coffee prices also closed higher.

COCOA: May New York cocoa settled up \$321 or 4.8% to \$7,049 a metric ton after setting a record high of \$7,096.

Dealers said poor crops in Ivory Coast and Ghana had left buyers scrambling to get hold of supplies with a large global deficit expected in the current 2023/2024 season.

"The availability of cocoa from West Africa remains restricted and projections for another production deficit against demand for the coming year are increasing," said a US-based broker.

Top cocoa grower Ivory Coast's market regulator warned exporters on Tuesday against paying above the mandated price for beans delivered to their facilities at the country's ports, threatening offenders with fines and the loss of their licenses.

May London cocoa rose 5.7% to £5,829 per ton after setting a record high of £5,861.

COFFEE: May robusta coffee settled up \$28 or 0.9% to \$3,307 a ton.

Dealers said supplies in top robusta producer Vietnam remained tight and there had been strong buying interest in supplies from Brazil where the conillon (robusta) harvest is due to start next month.

Agricultural prices' researcher Cepea-Esalq said prices for robusta beans in Brazil were very close to those for arabica beans, and at the highest since it started tracking that data.

May arabica coffee rose 0.5% to \$1.859 per pound (lb).

Arabica stocks at ICE continued their climb on Tuesday, rising to over 450,000 bags, the highest level since October. There are more than 180,000 bags pending grading.

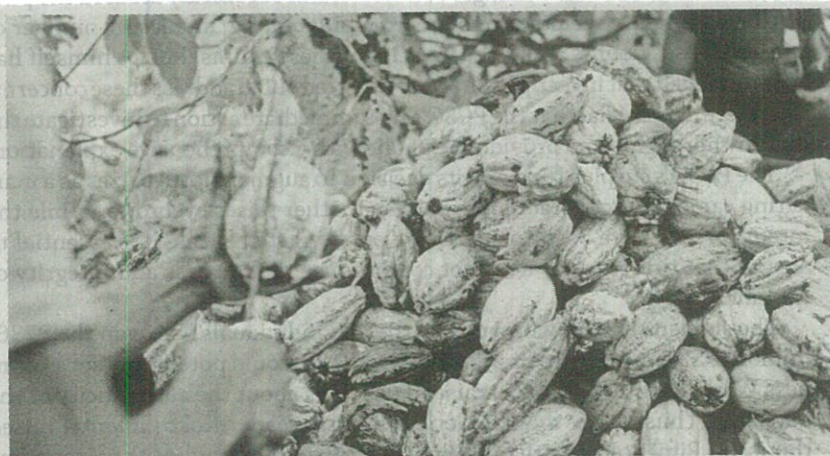
SUGAR: May raw sugar settled down 0.06 cent or 0.3% at 21.89 cents per lb.

Dealers said there continued to be concerns that dry conditions will reduce the size of the cane crop in the Centre-South Brazil region during the upcoming 2024/2025 season.

May white sugar fell 0.2% to \$615.70 a ton. — **Reuters**



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A PILE of cocoa pods, showing signs of black pod disease, during a harvest at a farm in the town of Kwabeng, Ghana, on, October 22, 2023. BLOOMBERG NEWS

Cocoa tops \$7,000 a ton as chocolate makers hike prices, shrink packages

COCOA futures rose to a fresh intraday record, topping \$7,000 in New York for the first time, as supply concerns drive a rally that shows no sign of offering relief for chocolate makers.

The most-active contract jumped as much as 5.5 percent to \$7,096 on Tuesday, bringing gains for the year so far to about 68 percent. Higher costs have placed pressure on chocolate makers, as output in top growers Ivory Coast and Ghana continues to buckle amid adverse weather conditions and structural concerns like aging, diseased trees.

Arrivals at Ivory Coast ports are still about 30 percent below year-ago levels, and the grower's mid-crop harvest starting in April isn't expected to provide enough relief. The country's regulator sees the mid-crop harvest totaling 400,000 to 500,000 tons, Bloomberg reported last Thursday. That compares with 600,000 to 620,000 tons a year earlier.

Citi Research analysts including Aakash Doshi said in February that New York cocoa futures could trade in a range between \$7,000 and \$10,000 a ton if West African supply continues to deteriorate without any meaningful contraction in demand. In that scenario, a retreat in prices may not come until the second half of 2025, the analysts said.

The situation has prompted chocolate makers like Hershey Corp. to hike prices, shrink packages and push new products that use less cocoa.

While hedging and physical stockpiles currently provide a buffer, chocolatiers' costs—and then consumer prices—are “set to inflate” over the next six to 12 months, according to Bloomberg Intelligence analysts Diana Gomes and Ignacio Canals

Polo. Volume losses could continue into 2025, the analysts wrote in a note last week.

So far, though, the significant supply shortages are overshadowing chocolate demand concerns. The International Cocoa Organization sees demand outpacing supply by 374,000 tons for the current October-September year, while Swiss chocolatier Barry Callebaut AG anticipates a 500,000 ton deficit this season.

Demand fears have been subdued in the face of poor growing weather, low production and slow arrivals, analysts at the Hightower Report wrote in a Tuesday note, adding that slight improvements in West African weather and the pace of arrivals haven't been “enough to get the bulls concerned.”

Structural issues in West Africa including disease and an aging tree stock are also stoking fears that deficits will continue next season.

Higher farmer incomes could boost investments in production, but growers in Ivory Coast and Ghana are not yet reaping the full rewards of the cocoa rally as prices are set by governments based on sales made a year earlier. Other countries like Ecuador and Brazil are ramping up production, but trees take at least three years to produce pods.

Expanding acreage for cocoa trees is also limited, as impending European Union regulations are soon to prevent the trade of products linked to deforestation in the bloc.

“Beyond the largely weather-related short-term supply side issues behind recent price increases, solutions to long-term concerns are urgently required,” BMI Research analysts wrote in a note last week.

Bloomberg News