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Manila Standard

FOOD PRODUCTION. A woman inspects crops at their family farm to ensure good harvest. Agriculture Secretary **Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.** created three teams to prepare and finalize the feasibility studies of priority infrastructure projects of the Department of Agriculture (DA) to boost food production, particularly of rice and corn.



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PH, Czech Republic eye agricultural cooperation

By GABRIEL CHRISTEL GALANG

The Department of Agriculture (DA) wants to improve the country's livestock production, as well as management in the dairy and irrigation industry through the help of the Czech Republic.

In a statement on Monday, April 1, DA said that several issues on agriculture have been discussed during the recent meeting between Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. and Czech Republic Agriculture Minister Marek Výborný.

According to the DA, the mutual

understanding between the two countries would improve bilateral trade within livestock and dairy production, as well as better water management, as these agricultural aspects were found successful in Czech Republic.

"[We] hope to learn from the Czech Republic's experiences in becoming one of the top dairy producing country in Europe and one of the major suppliers of beef, and to purchase bull sperm for artificial insemination to improve the quality of local herd," Tiu Laurel said.

The DA said that most of the dairy requirements of the country are being

sourced through importation.

Aside from boosting production, the Philippines hopes to upgrade the local online platform to offer accessible and timely agricultural information, while also getting comprehensive technology and machinery solutions.

Additionally, Tiu Laurel is interested in expanding the market of domestic agricultural products to Europe, stating that "we have some products ready for export so market access is also very important to us, especially the European Union which is one of the best markets in the world

for our products."

In response, Minister Výborný is open to negotiating trade and assisting the Philippines in improving the Agriculture sector.

"We're definitely ready to offer cooperation. Your aims and ambitions are very similar to what we have in the Czech Republic, where our agricultural sector is also undergoing dynamic changes towards modern technologies, innovations, science and research, and the application of their outcomes," he replied.

Because of this, Filipinos have been offered training in farming, livestock production, and irrigation by the Czech minister.



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PH, Czech Republic eye agri trade, tech cooperation

THE Philippines and the Czech Republic are exploring collaboration in agriculture to enhance bilateral trade and technology exchange, focusing on livestock, dairy production, and water management, the Agriculture department said.

As a follow up to their meeting during the visit of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in the European Union (EU) member-country, officials of the Department of Agriculture led by Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. met with the delegation from the Czech Republic headed by Agriculture Minister Marek Výborný in Manila.

In a statement on Monday, Tiu Laurel said that he is eyeing to ex-

pand the market for Philippine agricultural products within the EU.

"We have some products ready for export so market access is also very important to us, especially the European Union, which is one of the best markets in the world for our products," he said.

The Agriculture chief also expressed interest in the Czech Republic's advancements in the dairy sector, as well as its expertise in water and irrigation management and livestock production.

He also highlighted the Czech Republic's online platform that provides comprehensive agricultural-based information and solutions, covering technology,

equipment, and direct communication with machinery producers.

Tiu Laurel said the DA hopes to learn from the Czech Republic's experiences as one of the top dairy producing countries in Europe and one of the major suppliers of beef. He is also eyeing bull sperm for artificial insemination to improve the quality of the local herd.

A big part of the country's dairy requirements are imported from overseas parent stocks for cattle and other livestock, the Agriculture department said.

For his part, Výborný said that they are ready to provide assistance to Philippine agriculture, including trade negotiations, training

for Filipinos on farming, livestock production, and irrigation and water management.

"We're definitely ready to offer cooperation. Your aims and ambitions are very similar to what we have in the Czech Republic, where our agricultural sector is also undergoing dynamic changes toward modern technologies, innovations, science and research, and the application of their outcomes," said Výborný.

The Czech minister also said that his country needs more Filipino workers to further develop its agricultural sector and increase food output.

JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL



EDITORIAL

A member of the
PPI Philippine
Press
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Infrastructure teams at DA

IT may be late in the day but the Department of Agriculture (DA) just has to take steps needed to increase the nation's food production, or be perpetually tied to the unstable policy of importation. These steps would require the building of agricultural infrastructure, both permanent and sturdy to last for years to come. Previous administrations recognized the need for these engineering interventions, and had in fact tried to provide them, without success.

Now, the DA under Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. is renewing efforts to construct these projects that are badly needed by our farmers if they are to provide the nation's food requirements, let alone compete with agricultural producers abroad.

The DA has formed three teams within the department to oversee the undertaking of infrastructure projects that would hopefully boost food production nationwide. The teams will draft the framework and plans for the proposed post-harvest program for rice and corn, solar-powered cold storages, and proposed solar-powered irrigation systems.

Laurel estimated that the government needs to spend about P93 billion to build the post-harvest facilities for rice and corn needed to minimize wastage, and at least P1 billion to build cold storages for vegetables.

'Never has the DA been so lucky to receive this kind of support from Congress and the President, until now.'

The DA, which used to be headed by President Bongbong himself, has been receiving significant increases in its budget for operations and its sub-programs since the start of the Marcos administration. For the fiscal year 2024, it has an allocation of P197.84 billion, which represents a 6 percent increase from the previous year's budget allocation of P186.54 billion. Never has the DA been so lucky to receive this kind of support from Congress and the President, until now. Thus, the department must show palpable results in terms of genuine agricultural growth, not just top efficiency in spending.

It is incumbent on the Department of Agriculture to flesh out President Marcos' objective of continuing "the upward trajectory of agricultural output and meet our Philippine Development Plan (PDP) goal of increasing the Philippines' food security index." He said this may be achieved by increasing funding for the national programs of the DA on rice, corn, livestock, and high-value crops, among others.

Even the Department of Budget and Management headed by Secretary Amenah Pangandaman is very much supportive of the President's food security objective. She said, "In our quest for food security and proper nutrition for Filipino families, the FY 2024 NEP (National Expenditure Program) will continue to support programs that boost the local production of major agricultural commodities."

She added that the NEP focuses on enhancing productivity and sustainability, ensuring soil resource management, providing agricultural support services, constructing farm-to-market roads, and mitigating El Niño risks through the buffer stocking program.

Recognizing the importance of synergy in government programs, Secretary Laurel promised that they will ensure the projects are compliant with the requirements of the DA-wide project clearing house system and the National Economic and Development Authority-Investment Coordination Committee. Laurel also instructed the solar-powered irrigation project team to ensure that the proposed sites are consistent with the database of the National Irrigation Administration and with the Bureau of Soil and Water Management irrigation masterplan.

The DA's National Rice Program has P30.9 billion in its disposal to boost rice production nationwide, while P10 billion is allocated for the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund which provides assistance to farmers through rice seed development, loan provision, and the procurement of agricultural equipment. With these funds, coupled with the coming infrastructure projects, there should be no reason for the DA to fail in attaining self-sufficiency in rice, the staple food of Filipinos.



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PH ready for anthrax outbreak – DA

By JEL SANTOS

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has assured the public that the country prepared for the possibility of an anthrax outbreak, and ensured that the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) can produce vaccines against the infectious disease.

Thailand had earlier ordered a close watch on livestock after an anthrax outbreak in its neighbor country Laos wherein at least 50 people reportedly contracted anthrax.

“Ang Bureau of Animal Industry ay may

nakahandang anthrax vaccine, at importante lang na mabakunahan para ma-prevent ang pagkalat ng anthrax (The Bureau of Animal Industry has available anthrax vaccine. What’s important is inoculation to stop its spread),” Dr. Constante Palabrica, DA assistant secretary for livestock, said on Monday, April 1, in an ambush interview.

The BAI has a “seed virus” that makes it possible for the Philippines to produce its own anthrax vaccine, he said.

“Itong seed virus na ito ay Philippine seed virus so hindi ito nanggaling ▶ 5



PH ready for anthrax outbreak – DA

kung saan (This seed virus is Philippine seed virus so it did not come from anywhere else). We're ready for that—the Department of Agriculture is ready," he said.

Meanwhile, the DA official urged farmers to immediately report to provincial veterinarians suspected cases of anthrax infection as the government provides free testing.

He said some of the signs that an animal is possibly positive for anthrax are if it doesn't want to eat, has a fever, and develops vesicles.

"Our government gives free tests on this, and actually the anthrax vaccine is given for free. Lahat nang ito ay (All of these are) subsidized by the DA's budget," said Palabrica.

Anthrax could be fatal to people with comorbidity

Because anthrax can be transferred to humans as it is zoonotic in nature, he said anthrax can be fatal to people with comorbidity.

"Kailangan tawagan agad ang provincial veterinarian para ma-test agad, kasi zoonotic ito, pwede itong i-transfer sa tao. Any disease na zoonotic, especially kapag may have comorbidity, it can be fatal (The provincial veterinarian must be called so a test can be conducted immediately, because it is zoonotic, it can be transferred to humans. Any zoonotic disease, especially when a person has comorbidity, can be fatal)," the assistant secretary said.

Palabrica said the animals positive for the infectious disease must not be consumed.

"Huwag nilang kakatayin iyon dahil nga zoonotic pwedeng ilipat sa tao, tumawag sa beteryaryo at nang ma-check nang husto. Mahirap naman na hindi na kumain 'yung baka, anthrax na kaagad. Kailangan ng scientific and science-based analysis dito (They should not slaughter the animal because anthrax is zoonotic, meaning it can be transferred to humans. They must call the veterinarian and have it checked thoroughly. If a cow stops eating, it doesn't immediately mean that it has anthrax. Scientific and science-based analysis is needed here)," he said.

Palabrica said the Philippines currently

only has one vaccine for anthrax.

"Well, as of now, there is only one vaccine for anthrax, kasi kailangan homologous, meaning kung ano ang tumama 'yun din ang dapat ang i-produce, hindi tayo pwedeng kumuha ng ibang anthrax vaccine sa labas ng Pilipinas. Ang maganda [ay] mayroon tayong seed virus (Well, as of now, there is only one vaccine for anthrax, because it needs to be homologous, meaning what strikes must be the one to be produced. We cannot get another anthrax vaccine outside of the Philippines. The good thing is we have a seed virus)," he explained.

Vaccination the only way to prevent spread

The DA's assistant secretary for livestock noted vaccination is the only way to prevent the spread of anthrax.

Anthrax, he said, does not spread as fast as African Swine Fever (ASF), a highly contagious and deadly viral disease affecting domestic and feral swine of all ages.

Palabrica said ruminants, a large group of herbivores with a four-chambered stomach, are the ones usually affected by anthrax.

"Kaya nga kapag namatay [due to anthrax] kailangan ibaon sa lupa kasi spores 'to, eh. Spores na madaling maka-transfer sa ibang animals kaya kailangan ibaon ang mga namamatay ng anthrax (That's why when they die due to anthrax, you have to bury them in the ground because it's transferred through spores and that can easily be transferred to other animals, so those who die of anthrax must be buried)," he said.

"This [anthrax] is an infectious disease so you will see viremia, kapag sinabing viremia sa veterinarian, umiikot sa buong katawan ng animal (when we say viremia in veterinarian, it means that it circulates in the body of the animal)," the official added.

The DA noted that it monitored anthrax in Northern Luzon several months ago, but Palabrica said the situation is now under control. He said the agency already sent vaccines to the affected areas.

According to the website of the Center for Disease Control (CDC), anthrax is a serious infectious disease caused by gram-positive, rod-shaped bacteria known as *Bacillus anthracis*.

"It occurs naturally in soil and commonly affects domestic and wild animals around the world. People can get sick with anthrax if they come in contact with infected animals or contaminated animal products," it stated.



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New, healthier rice variant to replace current varieties

By GABRIEL CHRISTEL GALANG

Dinorado, sinandomeng, and other varieties in the market may soon have a healthier form as the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) is developing a new rice variant that could lower the

risk of developing diabetes, as well as lessen the demand for unlimited rice strategies in food establishments.

The institute recently shared a new variety called the ultra-low glycemic index (GI) rice, which is said to bring healthier benefits and

boost farmers' productivity with its yield.

In a recent discussion with IRRI scientists at Los Baños, Laguna, Rhowell Tiozon, a rice researcher, said this current study is expected to appeal to the market which would drive ► 8

New, healthier rice variant to replace current varieties

the domestic demand for this variety when released to farmers and traders.

"The ultra-low GI has the same [planting] requirements, fertilizers, etc... Ideally, it should not change or increase the price in the market," he told reporters. "But it would increase the demand when farmers begin selling this to consumers because of the health benefits for diabetic people."

Associate scientist Reuben James Buenafe explained that they plan to replace existing rice in the market after extensive research and testing.

"We plan to convert any rice varieties into low GI; one that provides a higher yield for farmers, a good texture for consumers, and a better nutritional value," he said.

According to the Department of

Agriculture (DA), the recent price for imported well-milled and regular-milled rice as of late March is at ₱53 and ₱49.46 respectively.

Locally well-milled rice stands at ₱52, while regular domestic milled rice is at ₱49.66.

"The low and ultra-low GIs are already endorsed for multi-locational trial testing, so we're testing the yield efficiency in different local areas," Buenafe added.

As the new variety is being pushed for development, scientists are waiting for the next step, which is marketing the ultra-low GI rice into a product.

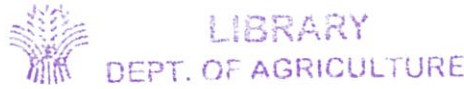
Once released for public consumption, diabetes—one of the leading and fatal conditions in the coun-

try—would decrease. Furthermore, Tiozon also said this could change how Filipinos perceive unlimited rice in establishments.

He explained that the common rice varieties sold in the market have a higher glycemic index that spikes blood sugar, which is why unli-rice or excessive rice consumption would negatively affect the glucose levels of Filipinos which would make them more at risk of diseases.

"If the food has a lower glycemic index and higher protein, the body's insulin will have a slower response and will have a sense of fulfillment," Tiozon shared. "This would lessen the need for unli-rice, because you're already satisfied after eating rice with a lower GI."

At this rate of development, scientists also expect that farmers will receive the new rice varieties by 2025.



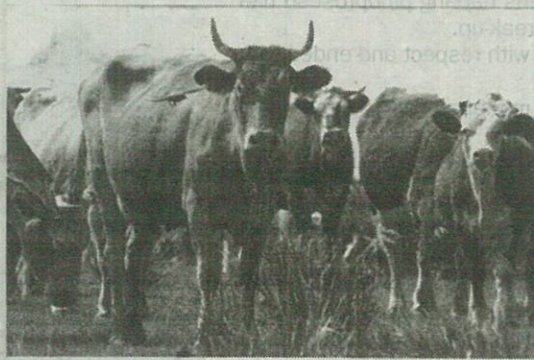
SHIELD VS ANTHRAX

THE Department of Agriculture assured full monitoring and free vaccinations to livestock animals against the threat of anthrax.

This came amid a reported outbreak of anthrax in Laos, with around 50 suspected cases in humans.

In an interview Monday, Agriculture Assistant Secretary Constante Dante Palabrica said measures are in place to protect the livestock industry in the country.

"Walang dapat ipangamba dahil handa ang Department of Agriculture, dahil hindi naman natutulog, mayroon tayong mga bakuna, very active ang Bureau of Animal Industry (There's no need to worry because the Department of Agriculture is ready, because [we're] not sleeping, the Bureau of Animal Industry is very active)," he said.



Farmers were then advised to immediately report suspected cases to local veterinarians in case symptoms are monitored.

Symptoms in affected animals include loss of appetite, fever, and occurrence of vesicles, among others.

"Our government gives a free test on this. Even the anthrax vaccine is given, lahat ito (all of these are) subsidized by the Department of Agriculture... I see that report-

ing is the key here. Now that lumabas ang balitang iyan (Since the news has been released), the Department of Agriculture is now hyperactive," Palabrica said.

Palabrica also urged the public to maintain vigilance in consuming suspected infected animals to avoid human transmission.

According to the World Health Organization, transmission to humans may be through either exposure from infect-

ed animals or consumption of contaminated products.

Palabrica noted that it is harder to monitor infections when symptomatic livestock are already disposed of in markets.

"Huwag nilang kakatayin (Don't slaughter it). As I said zoonotic pwedeng ilipat sa tao, tumawag sa betinaryo para ma-check. Kasi mahirap naman na hindi lang kumainiyong baka anthrax na kaagad, kailangan ng (it can be transmitted to humans, call the veterinarians to check. It's also hard to conclude that it's already a case of anthrax just because the cow did not eat, we need) scientific and science-based analysis," he said.

In case an animal turns out to be positive following testing for anthrax, it shall be isolated and condemned to prevent spreading the disease. PNA



RABIES LUMIPAT SA MGA BAKA

NAKATANGGAP ng ulat ang Department of Agriculture na ang mga alagang baka sa lalawigan ng Marinduque ay nahawaan ng rabies.

Ito ang isiniwalat ni Agriculture Assistant Secretary Dante Palabrica sa ambush interview nitong Lunes.

"The latest ngayon ay sa Marinduque ay pati cattle, natatamaan. Pati wildlife. Kaya natatakot din 'yong mga beterinaryo na taga-Marinduque na nagsasabi na tumalon na sa cattle ang rabies," ani Palabrica.

Aniya, sakaling maibenta ang baka na mayroong rabies, posibleng mailipat din sa mga tao ang virus.

"As a veterinarian, pagka merong infection, we don't talk about lulu-tuin 'yong aso o animal kasi that is against the policy ng government natin. If it is not cooked properly, just like any other diseases, it will move to the human. But as of now, it's not that prevalent," paliwanag pa ng

opisyal.

Dahil dito, umapela ang DA sa publiko na pabakuhan ang mga alaga nitong aso at pusa.

Nakamamatay aniya ang mga rabies pero maiiwasan ito kung mabakunahan kontra rabies ang mga alagang hayop.

Sabi naman ni Agriculture Undersecretary Deogracias Victor Savelano, napakarami nang hayop sa Pilipinas at napapabayaang walang bakuna kontra rabies.

"At least man lang 40-50% of the livestock, of pets will be vaccinated. So DA now is preparing a budget for that. With the help of the LGU, mabakunahan ang dogs and cats," saad naman ni Palabrica.

Sakaling makagat ng aso o pusa ang isang tao, mas makabubuti anyang agad na magpaturok sila dahil buhay nila ang nakataya rito kapag nagpositibo sa rabies ang hayop.

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PHLPost, may Kadiwa Pop Up stores na rin

Magandang balita dahil hindi lamang mga sulat at pakete ang inihahatid ngayon ng Philippine Postal Corporation (PHLPost) kundi maging mga produkto at serbisyo na rin mula sa mga magsasaka.

Ito ay matapos na inilunsad ng PHLPost ang mga Kadiwa Pop Up Stores kung saan naghahatid sila sa mga mamamayan ng mga produkto ng mga magsasaka sa murang halaga lamang.

Ayon kay Postmaster General Luis Carlos, bilang isang government logistics at courier provider, layunin ng PHLPost na maging katuwang ng mga magsasaka at mga small

medium enterprises (SMEs) sa mga rehiyon at mga probinsya sa bansa upang maghatid ng mga produkto na maibebenta ng mura mula sa mga sakahan patungo sa proyektong Kadiwa ng pamahalaan.

"Nakatutuwa na maging bahagi ang PHLPost sa isinusu-long ng Department of Agriculture (DA) at ng administrasyon ng ating mahal na pangulong BBM tulad nitong Kadiwa Pop Up store na patuloy na tinatangkilik ng mga lokal na mamimili dito sa ating Post Office Area," pahayag ni Carlos.

Ani Carlos, noong bago mag-Mahal na Araw ay dinagsa ng

mga mamimili ang murang mga produktong itininda sa mga Kadiwa Pop Store sa PHLPost Olongapo City Post Office tulad ng dried fish, gulay, prutas at maging mga salted egg na may turmeric flavor.

Dumalo sa pagbubukas ng naturang Kadiwa Pop Up Store sina PHLPost Northwest Luzon Area 2 Director Merma Abalos, City Agriculturist Francis Maniago, Olongapo City Post Office Postmaster II Virginia S. Salang at Eugenio S. Patawaran – Marketing Specialist ng Department of Agriculture, gayundin ang iba't ibang grupo ng mga magsasaka at mga SMEs. (Mer Layson)



Nestlé backs special duties to aid local coffee industry

By **JASPER EMMANUEL ARCALAS**

Nestlé Philippines Inc. supports the use of collected special duties on imported coffee products by the government to develop the country's domestic coffee industry, a ranking executive said.

Jose Uy III, senior vice president and head of corporate affairs at Nestlé Philippines, said the implementation of the Competitiveness Enhancement Measures Fund (CEMF) by the government would ensure that local coffee farmers would get "valuable" inputs.

The CEMF is a fund created under Republic Act 8800 or the Safeguards Measures Act of 2000 to improve the competitiveness of domestic industries affected by increased imports.

The fund consists of the 50 percent of the total collected fees, charges and safeguard duties by the government from imported products.

It was created 24 years ago but the Departments of Agriculture and Trade and Industry only issued the joint implementing rules and regulations last year.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. issued the implementing guidelines of the CEMF last February, paving the way for the use of the fund in the agriculture sector.

Government budget documents

showed that the CEMF reached P3.343 billion at the end of 2022.

This year, the DA is spending P250 million from the CEMF.

Agriculture industry stakeholders estimate that the bulk of the CEMF came from poultry and coffee imports.

"This means that with the CEMF, local coffee farmers can now receive valuable inputs from the government and the private sector by way of more training, data collection, demonstration farms, post-harvest machinery, mechanics for greater access to a ready market, rural credit, and crop insurance," Uy told **The STAR**.

The bulk of the CEMF comes from special safeguard duties (SSG), a trade remedy imposed by the government on imported goods whose values are below the established trigger price to protect local producers injured by increased imports.

The government slaps an additional duty on the imported goods using a formula based on the difference between the value of the imported product and its corresponding trigger price.

The Philippines has been imposing SSG on imported coffee products, including instant coffee, since 2018 following a surge in import volume.

Uy said the SSG "evens out" the competition between local and imported coffee products as it offsets the "undue advan-

tages enjoyed by foreign producers."

Uy added that the SSG benefits local coffee farmers significantly.

First, it ensures the survival of local manufacturers that provide guaranteed market to farmers' produce.

Second, farmers stand to receive billions in government support from the duties collected.

"Minus the SSG, the survival of domestic coffee production would be threatened as cheaper imports from countries where costs are lower would dominate the market," he said.

According to Uy, the CEMF would address the myriad of problems that coffee farmers face – from aging trees, poor farming practices to limited access to certified planting materials, credit and financing.

"The SSG is a crucial means by which the domestic coffee industry can eventually achieve higher production sustainability and competitive advantage in relation to finished imports," Uy said.

Since the imposition of the SSG in 2018, the country's coffee imports dwindled to a seven-year low at about 170,000 metric tons in 2023.

The Philippines is the world's fifth largest consumer of coffee with almost seven million 60-kilogram bags of green coffee beans requirement, according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).



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El Niño may affect 80 provinces by end-April

Regions 1, 2, 3, 4-A, 4-B, 6, 9, 12 closely monitored

By RAYMUND ANTONIO

The number of El Niño-affected provinces may hit 80 by the end of April, Task Force El Niño said on Monday, April 1.

Task Force El Niño spokesperson Joey Villarama said during the Bagong Pilipinas briefing the El Niño phenomenon will have varied impacts on the provinces.

“Pagtungtong po ng pagtatapos ng Abril, baka ‘yung otsenta pong ▶ 8

El Niño may impact 80 provinces by end-April 1

iyon eh apektado in varying degrees. Iyon ‘yung dry conditions, dry spell saka drought (By the end of April, maybe those 80 will be affected in varying degrees. That’s the dry conditions, dry spell, and drought),” he explained.

This number is up from the 67 to 71 provinces that the official said would be affected by the phenomenon in the next three months.

Regions closely monitored

Villarama noted that the task force is keeping a close eye on Regions 1, 2,

3, 4A, 4B, 6, 9, and 12.

So far, 16 towns have already declared a state of calamity due to El Niño, Villarama said, adding that Occidental Mindoro is the most affected province as it has declared a state of calamity for the entire province.

Western Visayas (Region 6) is also being adversely impacted, while Iloilo and Capiz have declared a suspension of classes for April 1 and 2 due to “high heat conditions.”

The task force spokesperson underscored the need to monitor the situation in the next two months because of the onset of the summer season.

“Iyong susunod na dalawang buwan ang binabantayan talaga natin dahil officially pumasok na iyong summer season. As I mentioned, tumataas na konsumo ng tubig (We are really monitoring the next two months because officially, it’s summer season. As I mentioned, water

consumption is also increasing),” he said.

Villarama, however, assured that the government has prepared mitigation measures and interventions to provide financial and other kinds of assistance—providing high-value seeds for high-value crops—to the affected provinces.

The official also revealed that the local government units severely affected by El Niño are requesting for “alternative ways of getting water whether dissecting shallow tube wells or diversion from communal irrigation systems.”

Citing the March 25 data, Villarama said that El Niño’s damage to the agricultural sector has reached ₱1.75 billion.

This translates to roughly 32,231 hectares of farmlands that have been affected, although he said that 79 percent of the area “has a chance to be salvaged or recovered.”

Malaya Business Insight

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Corn, wheat futures fall

JAKARTA- Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) corn inched lower on Monday, weighed by report of multi-year high stocks, despite expectation of lower planting in 2024.

The CBOT corn fell 0.62 percent to \$4.39-1/4 a bushel.

"For corn, despite the reduced acreage, the balance sheet still should be quite heavy," a Singapore-based trader said.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) in a quarterly grain stocks report last week said stocks of US corn as of March 1 swelled to 8.347 billion bushels, the most in five years. A separate report by USDA reported US farmers are planning to cut corn plantings by 5 percent from last year.

Wheat was down 0.36 percent at \$5.58-1/4 a bushel while the most-active soybean contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) rose 0.5 percent to \$11.97-1/2 a bushel.

Soybean stocks rose to a two-year high of 1.845 billion bushels, while wheat stocks rose to 1.087 billion bushels, a three-year high, the USDA report showed.

Meanwhile Ukrainian farmers could increase the area sown with soybeans this year by 23.5 percent to 2.199 million hectares from a year earlier, while reducing the

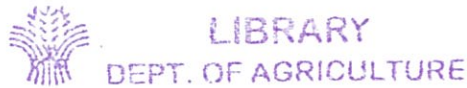
corn sowing area by 4.5 percent to 3.863 million hectares.

Romania, the European Union's fourth-largest wheat producer and the third-largest for maize, reaped 9.6 million metric tons of wheat in 2023, up 11 percent from 8.6 million tons in 2022. Its maize harvest stood at 8.52 million tons, up 6 percent on the year, while sunseed production was 2.02 million tons, down 3.7 percent.

Egypt has targeted procuring 3.5 million tons of local wheat during the 2024 procurement season, the country's supply minister Aly Moselhy said.

Saudi Arabia issued a tender to buy 595,000 metric tons of wheat for June-July arrival, its state wheat buying agency, the General Food Security Authority (GFSA), said.

A vessel that was loaded by TD RIF, one of Russia's key grain exporters, has left a Black Sea port after its cargo was certified as being free of pests and disease. Ros-selkhoz-nadzor, the country's agricultural watchdog previously said there was a jump in applications from importing countries saying cargoes of Russian grain were not meeting quarantine requirements, including a shipment of TD RIF. LSEG data confirmed that the 21,964-dwt vessel had left Russia's Black Sea Port Kaykaz. - Reuters



Indonesians struggle with record high price of rice as El Niño bites

KUALA LUMPUR/SURABAYA, Indonesia — It was still pitch-black outside when Indonesian housewife Sutinah made her way to a local police station early one morning last month, hoping to avoid queues and take advantage of a government scheme offering affordable rice.

Even though dry weather fuelled by El Niño has led to a rice shortage and sent prices to record highs, the 52-year-old from the East Java town of Pasuruan was still shocked to see hundreds of likeminded residents already waiting patiently in line.

"By the time we got here it was already busy, we still had to queue. We had no other choice because the price of rice in the market is very expensive," said Sutinah, who like many Indonesians goes by just one name.

The mother-of-two queued for two hours to buy two five-kilobags of rice for 102,000 Indonesian rupiah (\$6.51) — a saving of about 50,000 rupiah compared to supermarket and market prices.

(About P36.60 per kilo compared with P55 per kilo in supermarket and market prices)

Indonesia was self-sufficient in rice in the 1980s before farmland was used to build housing for the booming population, which now stands at more than 270 million people.

Despite this, more than 90% of Indonesian families still consume rice every day, providing more than half their daily calories.

The Southeast Asian nation's per capita annual rice consumption stands at about 95 kg (210 lb) — much higher than the average yearly consumption of other carbohydrates like corn, sweet potato, potato and cassava, said Rajendra Aryal, the Food and Agriculture Organization's representative in Indonesia and Timor-Leste.

Such is the importance of the staple to Indonesia's economy, culture and society that high food inflation contributed to the downfall of strongman President Suharto in 1998.

Last year was relatively hot due to the El Niño weather pattern, and a prolonged dry season in parts of Indonesia saw rice production fall by around 18%, said Mr. Aryal. The sprawling archipelago is due to enter the dry season again next month.

"These conditions could cause an increase in rice prices and weaken people's purchasing capacity, especially affecting the poorer segment of society, including smallholders," Mr. Aryal said.

NO RICE? NOT EATEN

Indonesians often say if you have not eaten rice, you are yet to eat, and the staple grain is not just a relatively low-cost source of sustenance for most households, but part of the country's cultural identity.

Rice has been an integral part of Indonesian history and culture since ancient times, and its cultivation can even be seen in the famous 9th century Borobudur temple complex in central Java, said Ika Krishnayanti, international relations officer at farmers' group the Indonesian Peasants' Alliance.

"Rice is one of the most important agricultural commodities in Indonesia ... a symbol of culture and tradition," Krishnayanti told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Rice paddies are also a distinctive part of Indonesia's landscape, especially in regions popular with tourists, like Bali and Central Java, said Jongsoo Shin, Asia director at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI).

"Rising rice prices and reduced availability can lead to food insecurity, particularly for

low-income households. This can create feelings of hunger, anxiety, and frustration, increasing the risk of social unrest and protests," he said.

"Farmers experiencing crop failures lose income and may face debt, further contributing to economic hardship and social instability," Mr. Shin said, adding that Indonesia is set to import up to five million tons of rice in 2024.

But an increased reliance on rice imports can make Indonesia more vulnerable to price fluctuations and supply chain disruptions in exporting countries, he said.

"Importing large quantities of rice can put a strain on the government's budget and weaken the agricultural sector, which is crucial for rural employment and food security," Mr. Shin added.

TECH CAN HELP FARMERS FACING SOARING TEMPERATURES

To combat the rice shortfall, Indonesian President Joko Widodo last year drafted in the military to help with planting and subsidized fertilizer distribution.

Acknowledging the pressures from rising rice prices to consumers and the more than 15 million households that grow food, the Indonesian government has also begun to sell discounted rice and provide cash handouts to families worst hit.

Romauli Panggabean, environmental economist for sustainable food systems at think-tank the World Resources Institute Indonesia called for more diversification of sources of carbohydrates to help Indonesians be more resilient to rice price fluctuations.

She noted that the country's National Food Agency was encouraging people to eat other locally available sources of carbohydrates such as corn,

cassava, potatoes, banana, sorghum, and sago.

Distributing drought-tolerant rice seed varieties to farmers in affected regions was also important, said IRRI's Mr. Shin.

In the longer term, the government should continue to invest in improving irrigation infrastructure, including rehabilitating existing canals and building new ones, to enhance water management and reduce dependence on rainfall, he added.

Early warning systems to monitor weather conditions and provide timely information to farmers about potential droughts, also allow them to take preventative measures.

This should go hand-in-hand with providing training to farmers on drought-tolerant agricultural practices, water conservation techniques and post-harvest storage, Shin said, adding that crop insurance schemes and diversifying crops offered greater security.

Technology is very much part of the solution, analysts said, with drones and sensors able to monitor crops, soil moisture, weather conditions and irrigation systems, and digital platforms enabling farmers to share information and best practices.

Apps can also help consumers find the best deals for rice.

In East Java's Lamongan, one of Indonesia's rice producing regions, 70-year-old farmer Sallimah said extreme weather had made life more difficult.

Longer droughts had forced her to grow more crops that are resistant to dry weather, such as corn or sesame, even though they are often more expensive.

"I plant green beans to keep my income ... most farmers leave their land empty because the weather is too hot," she said. — Reuters



Cocoa global prices nearly double on supply concerns

BERLIN – Cocoa prices have nearly doubled in three months to record highs, influenced by the decline in global supply.

Prices hit a historic high as weather conditions in West Africa put chocolate producers in a difficult position, with the price per ton for May-dated cocoa traded on the New York Mercantile Exchange reaching an all-time high of more than USD9,600.

Cocoa supply is estimated to fall 8 percent in the 2023-2024 season compared to the previous 12 months, with the main reason for the losses cited as problems in the Ivory Coast and Ghana, according to data analytics and consulting firm, GlobalData.

Prices continued to reach new peaks as major cocoa mills in the Ivory Coast and Ghana decided to cut or halt production as they could not cover seed costs.

A significantly lower cocoa harvest is expected in the Ivory Coast.

The Ivory Coast accounts for 45 percent of the global cocoa supply, however, harvests in other cocoa-producing countries, such as Nigeria and Ghana, are also well below expectations.

The intermediate harvest, which starts in April, is also expected to be lower than last year due to heat and drought affecting the development of cocoa beans.

Cocoa bean prices hit all-time highs Monday on the New York and London cocoa futures markets, as limited supplies and skyrocketing prices caused uncertainty.

Prices rose more than 150 percent in New York in the last three months, and since March 2023, have climbed 255 percent.

The market condition is called "backwardation," which is when spot prices trade at higher levels than futures, and it indicates a supply shortage.

PNA