

CLIPPINGS FOR TODAY APRIL 14, 2024

MANILA BULLETIN:

Filipino Food Month: Celebrate the flavors of our culture

BY MANILA BULLETIN

Apr 14, 2024 00:09 AM



Filipino food is a real buffet of flavors as it is a collection of cuisine from 17 regions where flavors have been blended by culture, tradition, and indigenous ingredients.

It's a fiesta every time Filipinos get together for meals with family and friends because it's part of our culture to show hospitality and respectfulness through food. Note that a still practiced respectful gesture by all Filipinos is the open invitation of "kain po tayo" (let's eat!) before one starts a meal, or even when a stranger passes while one is in the middle of a meal. It's a very charming gesture that distinguishes a Filipino anywhere in the world. All the flavors that compose what is known as Filipino food is celebrated every April which had been declared as Filipino Food Month or Buwan ng Kalutong Pilipino by Presidential Proclamation No. 469 signed in 2018.

Leading the celebration are the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) and the Department of Agriculture (DA), in coordination with the Department of Tourism (DOT), and the Philippine Culinary Heritage Movement (PCHM). The government agencies have prepared various activities to present a truly flavorful journey that will promote Philippine culinary heritage and gastronomy around the country.

The month's celebration which focuses on the theme — Kalutong Filipino, Lakas ng Kabataang

Makabago (Filipino Cuisine: Strength of Innovative Youth) – is particularly aimed at the youth, to empower them to be leaders in promoting Philippine culinary heritage and gastronomy.

It opened in Pampanga, regarded as the country’s culinary capital, last April 5, and will close in San Jose de Buenavista, Antique on April 30.

Many food events are now happening in many parts of the country, each one offering the many traditional Filipino delights. In Manila, the DOT has started the Philippine Eatsperience, a fieta-themed food fair offering a wide variety of regional cuisines at Rizal Park (Luneta) and Intramuros. It will be open throughout the year.

A three-day academic research conference – KainCon – will be held starting April 15 hosted by the Far Eastern University, Manila. Students, academics, and industry professionals will gather and learn from the discussions around the theme “All things Filipino Food: Community, Culture, and Economy” which will especially discuss local food cultivation and preservation initiatives.

In several cities around the country, the food month celebration is presented by NCCA’s “Hapag ng Pamana Philippine Food Festival” which promotes regional culinary heritage through trade fairs, cooking demonstrations, food symposiums, conferences, workshops, cultural shows, and food competitions.

In Iloilo City, and Roxas City, Capiz there will be food festivals to explore local cuisine from April 22 to 30. Iloilo City was recently named the UNESCO City of Gastronomy in the UNESCO Creative Network 2023.

The list of food-themed activities is long and these were held in various places to create a deeper awareness and appreciation for Filipino cuisine. After all, that’s the reason why a Presidential proclamation has declared a month to celebrate Filipino food: “To appreciate, conserve, and protect culinary traditions; to establish Filipino culinary traditions as an art form and ensure its transmission to future generations; and to support the farmers and agricultural communities” from where our food comes from.

Do something special today to celebrate Filipino food.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/4/14/filipino-food-month-celebrate-the-flavors-of-our-culture>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Bird flu is spreading to more farm animals. Are milk and eggs safe?

BY ASSOCIATED PRESS

Apr 13, 2024 08:48 PM

A bird flu outbreak in U.S. dairy cows has grown to affect more than two dozen herds in eight states, just weeks after the nation's largest egg producer found the virus in its chickens.



FILE - A line of Holstein dairy cows feed through a fence at a dairy farm in Idaho on March 11, 2009. As of April 11, 2024, a strain of the highly pathogenic avian influenza, or HPAI, that has killed millions of wild birds in recent years has been found in at least 24 dairy cow herds in eight U.S. states: Texas, Kansas, New Mexico, Ohio, Idaho, Michigan and North Carolina and South Dakota. (AP Photo/Charlie Litchfield, File)

Health officials stress that the risk to the public is low and that the U.S. food supply remains safe and stable.

"At this time, there continues to be no concern that this circumstance poses a risk to consumer health, or that it affects the safety of the interstate commercial milk supply," the U.S. Food and Drug Administration said in a statement.

Here's what you need to know about bird flu and food:

WHICH STATES HAVE FOUND BIRD FLU IN DAIRY COWS?

As of Friday, the strain of bird flu that has killed millions of wild birds in recent years has been found in at least 26 dairy herds in eight U.S. states: Idaho, Kansas, Michigan, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas and South Dakota.

The virus, known as Type A H5N1, has been detected in a range of mammals over the last few years, but this is the first time it has been found in cattle, according to federal health and animal agencies. Genetic analysis of the virus does not show that it has changed to spread more easily in people, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said.

HOW IS BIRD FLU AFFECTING FOOD PRODUCTION?

Agriculture officials in at least 17 states have restricted imports of dairy cattle from states where the virus has been detected, but, so far, government agencies say it's had little effect on commercial milk production. Officials believe cows likely have been infected by exposure to wild birds, but said cow-to-cow spread "cannot be ruled out."

Farmers are testing cows that show symptoms of infection, including sharply reduced milk supply and lethargy. Animals that show signs or test positive for illness are being separated from other animals on the farms. The animals appear to recover within two weeks.

U.S. egg producers are watching the situation closely after bird flu was detected in chickens in Texas and Michigan. Millions of birds have been killed, but the FDA said the risk of affected eggs getting into the retail market or causing infections in humans is low because of federal inspections and other safeguards.

DOES PASTEURIZATION KILL BIRD FLU?

Scientists say there's no evidence to suggest that people can contract the virus by consuming food that's been pasteurized, or heat-treated — or properly cooked.

"It's not a food safety concern," said Lee-Ann Jaykus, an emeritus food microbiologist and virologist at North Carolina State University.

Two people in U.S. have been infected with bird flu to date. A Texas dairy worker who was in close contact with an infected cow recently developed a mild eye infection and has recovered. In 2022, a prison inmate in a work program caught it while killing infected birds at a Colorado poultry farm. His only symptom was fatigue, and he recovered.

IS GROCERY STORE MILK SAFE FROM BIRD FLU?

Yes, according to food safety experts and government officials.

U.S. producers are barred from selling milk from sick cows and must divert and destroy it. In addition, milk sold across state lines is required to be pasteurized, or heat-treated using a process that kills bacteria and viruses, including influenza.

"We firmly believe that pasteurization provides a safe milk supply," Tracey Forfa, director of the FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine told a webinar audience this week.

IS RAW MILK SAFE FROM BIRD FLU?

The FDA and the CDC are less certain about unpasteurized, or raw, milk sold in many states, saying there's limited information about the possible transmission of the H5N1 virus in such products.

So far, no herds linked to raw milk providers have reported cows infected with bird flu, but the agencies recommend that the industry not make or sell raw milk or raw milk cheese products made with milk from cows that show symptoms — or are exposed to infected cows.

U.S. health officials have long warned against the risk of foodborne illness tied to raw milk, which the CDC said caused more than 200 outbreaks that sickened more than 2,600 people between 1998 and 2018.

Still, raw milk proponents like Mark McAfee, owner of Raw Farm USA in Fresno, Calif., said the outbreak of H5N1 in commercial cows appears to have spurred higher sales of the products, despite federal warnings.

CAN YOU CATCH BIRD FLU FROM EGGS OR MEAT?

Only dairy cows, not beef cattle, have been infected or shown signs of illness to date, agriculture officials said.

The largest egg producer in the U.S. temporarily halted operations on April 2 after finding bird flu in its chickens. Cal-Maine Foods culled about 1.6 million laying hens and another 337,000 pullets, or young hens, after the detection.

The company said there was no risk to eggs in the market and that no eggs had been recalled.

Eggs that are handled properly and cooked thoroughly are safe to eat, said Barbara Kowalczyk, director of the Center for Food Safety and Nutrition Security at George Washington University.

"A lot of people like runny eggs. Personally, if I eat an egg, it's very well cooked," she said.

Still, Kowalczyk and others cautioned that the situation could change.

"This is an emerging issue and clearly this pathogen is evolving and there's a lot that we don't know," she said. "I do think that everybody is trying to figure it out as quickly as possible."

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/4/13/bird-flu-is-spreading-to-more-farm-animals-are-milk-and-eggs-safe>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

OPINION

It's getting hot in here!



[Best Practices](#) - [Brian Poe Llamanzares](#) - The Philippine Star

April 14, 2024 | 12:00am

The heat lately has been impossible to ignore. El Niño looms over the Philippines. It brings with it a host of extreme weather events, such as drought drastically decreasing rainfall by up to 60 percent and scorching heat waves that are projected to persist across the entire archipelago until May 2024. We are all witnesses to its terrible inescapable effects. Sweltering heat surpassing 42 degrees Celsius in certain places, for instance, has suspended classes across 5,000 Philippine schools in April 2024's first week, interrupting the education of our 3.6 million students. Cebu City declared a state of water crisis. Government agencies state that water rationing in Metro Manila is not yet needed as supplies remain sufficient for now, but nonetheless forewarn it may be on our horizon. If we fail to formulate sustainable solutions and bungle implementation, then we necessarily compromise Philippine economic, energy, food and water security.

El Niño economics must be carefully considered as its effects are pervasive and potent. Like the temperature, March 2024 inflation rate similarly rose. Government agencies highlight that the 3.7 percent inflation rate is far lower than last year's 7.6 percent in March 2023, and falls within our 2 percent to 4 percent inflation target range. The devils, however, are in the details.

While the March 2024 inflation rate is at 3.7 percent overall, the Philippine Statistics Authority-reported inflation rate for the bottom 30 percent of income

households is at a painful 4.6 percent. Filipinos are hurting, and the poorest are bearing the worst of it. It is thus no wonder that recent surveys reveal that Filipinos' top concern right now is perceived uncontrolled inflation. "Food and alcoholic beverages" continue to be the main contributor to overall inflation, contributing 80.6 percent.

Among the food groups, 103.2 percent share was attributable to "cereals and cereal products" which includes bread, flour and – most importantly – rice. Currently, Department of Agriculture Secretary Laurel himself admits that rice prices are not expected to go down due to El Niño's effects, estimated at a staggering P2.76 billion. At such a critical juncture, it must be recognized that the single most crucial element of sustainable rice production is water.

As a multi-purpose dam for irrigation, hydroelectric power, flood control and Southeast Asia's largest, Pantabangan Dam's role cannot be overstated. PAGASA cautions that El Niño may cause Pantabangan to drop to its critical level by the end of April 2024. Pantabangan supplies the irrigation needs of Nueva Ecija, which our out-of-school-due-to-sweltering-heat Filipino school children know in their textbooks as the "Rice Bowl of the Philippines." Less than optimal levels of irrigation for agriculture augurs lower quality and/or less yield.

No less than President Marcos himself recognized the Philippines' water crisis – and its extent. In 2023, acknowledging inter alia "the fragmented water and sanitation sector, increasing demand for water due to population and economic growth, impacts of climate change," the President by executive fiat created a Water Resource Management Office, under the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources.

Our Senate office hailed it as a "timely intervention" and hoped that it would prepare the institutionalization of our nation's efforts to ensure water security for all through, among others, a Department of Water. In this regard, our Senate office reiterates our assertion for the urgent need to pass Senate Bill No. 102 filed on July 7, 2022 during the 19th Congress or the "National Water Resource Management Act" into law.

It is also hoped that learnings from our experiences in the President's newly reactivated and reconstituted Task Force El Niño, an inter-agency body tasked to lead the revision, coordination and implementation of the Strategic El Niño National Action Plan, can be integrated into legislative debates and be part of our national statutory solutions to the water crisis.

The El Niño Online Platform under the President's Executive Order No. 53 (Series of 2024), envisioned to serve as a "centralized repository" for relevant data, is a welcome innovation. While still in its starting stages, it sets the stage for a truly open, technological and evidence-based approach towards water security. It can help in spreading issue awareness, conservation efforts, data sets and planning. It is a step in the right direction.

Water service providers' intensified operations on deep wells all over Metro Manila and Rizal province, to meet the burgeoning daily needs of millions of Filipinos, are timely interventions as well. Deep well operations ease the pressure off Angat Dam and augments water sources for consumers. Angat Dam's role is incredibly important since it supplies more than 90 percent of Metro Manila's potable water requirements and over 27,000 hectares of rice farms in Bulacan and Pampanga Provinces. El Niño has decreased Angat Dam's reserves to below normal high water level, barely hovering above the minimum operating level of 180 meters. While such deep well operations help, it alone is not enough to solve our heightening water woes.

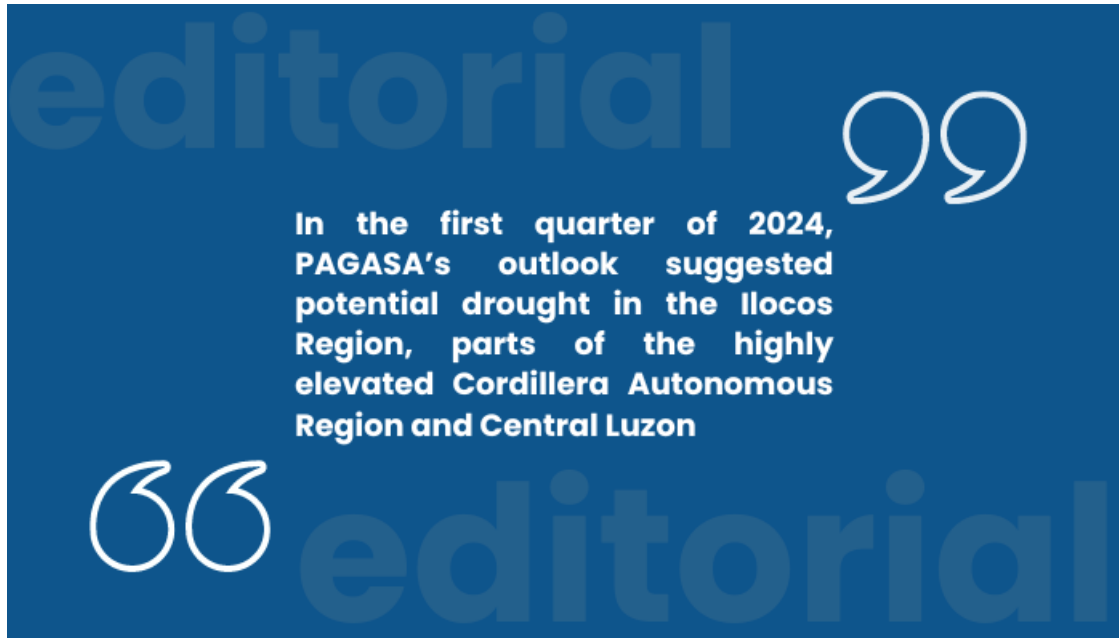
On top of it all, it bears emphasis that an estimated 11 million Filipino families still lack access to clean water. It is one of the great paradoxes in our Philippines; an archipelago surrounded by boundless water but still falling short of bringing clean water to all Filipinos.

National water management is inextricably intertwined with national wealth management. El Niño reminds us of such indubitable fact. Due to the adverse consequences of climate change on the Philippines, managing our water resources prudently, systematically and sustainably can mean either the ceaseless continuation of a vicious cycle of descent to insecurity or the charting of a better course towards a virtuous cycle for Philippine economic, energy, food and water security.

It's clear that the most effective interventions of our government so far are those which take a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. It's clear that much has yet to be done. It's clear that it's getting hot in here!

<https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2024/04/14/2347558/its-getting-hot-here>

On the alert with El Niño



By Manila Standard

April 13, 2024, 12:15 am

All that may illustrate the impact of the El Niño weather phenomenon is the sustained heat index across the country in April – ranging from 35 degrees Celsius in Manila's outskirts to 42 degrees C in Ilocos Norte.

El Niño has been underway since July last year, with the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration reminding the public that a strong El Niño would likely persist until February 2024, and that global climate models predict it would continue until May this year.

El Niño has historically impacted livelihood and health by causing extreme droughts and severe flooding in parts of the world.

In an agricultural country like the Philippines (population 114 million), where dry spells and droughts are expected, this could mean crop failures affecting food production.

If it is any consolation, as early as last December President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said in Nueva Ecija, a rice granary north of Manila, that securing water for farmers was the administration's top priority during the 2023-2024 El Niño.

“We’re making sure that our farmers have water, first and foremost, so we will have food supply that’s good and will continue to increase our production of agricultural products,” the President said.

In the first quarter of 2024, PAGASA’s outlook suggested potential drought in the Ilocos Region, parts of the highly elevated Cordillera Autonomous Region and Central Luzon, and other places in Luzon. Metro Manila, Rizal, and Aurora, among others, would have dry spells.

Weather experts have said this trend will culminate in April.

By then, 56 areas from Luzon and parts of the Visayas and Mindanao might face potential drought while Mindanao is expecting mostly dry spells.

Science and Technology Secretary Renato Solidum earlier said, “Based on recent conditions, moderate to severe drought conditions are likely from February to May 2024.

“And by the end of May, 77 percent of the provinces of the country will have potential for drought – that would be around 65 provinces.”

It is encouraging that the national government has “accelerated efforts” to prepare for El Niño.

“We have a good buffer until the end of the first quarter (of 2024),” President Marcos said.

“What we need to do is to prepare further capacity so that should El Niño extend to the second quarter of (2024), we are still able to supply water to urban areas, agriculture and industries.”

<https://manilastandard.net/opinion/314435087/on-the-alert-with-el-nino.html>

MANILA STANDARD

Ombudsman accepts NFA apology over erroneous list

By Rio N. Araja

April 13, 2024, 12:30 am

THE Office of the Ombudsman has accepted the apology of the National Food Authority for the submission of an incomplete or erroneous list of personnel allegedly involved in the sale of rice supply to private traders.

“In fairness to NFA officer-in-charge Larry Lacson, he is doing his best to comply with our subpoena,” lawyer Ronald Chua of the Ombudsman Proper told the Manila Standard.

He believes that it just so happened that the warehouses were located in different areas.

“Maybe the agency has been encountering a gridlock. (But) as soon as the information is available, he sends everything (to us),” Chua said.

Lacson, in a March 25 letter, told Ombudsman Samuel Martires that “the undersigned would also like to take this opportunity to convey his apologies on behalf of the agency in the course of submitting the warehouse library as requested by the Department of Agriculture. The inadvertence in providing the list was mainly due to the urgency of the request, and not for anything else.”

The NFA transmitted to the Ombudsman a list of its personnel “who are already separated from government service (by virtue of death and retirement) and currently on leave (study and maternity).”

“Rest assured of our full cooperation in any conduct of investigation and our prompt submission of any document/s requested from this Office,” Lacson said.

“The natural course of action is to refer it (list) to the investigating team,” Chua said.

The Ombudsman previously issued a preventive suspension order against 139 NFA officials and employees in connection with its investigation on the sale of 75,000 bags of rice to traders without public bidding.

Martires later rescinded the suspension order against 23 NFA officers after finding out the DA provided them with incorrect data.

<https://manilastandard.net/news/314435339/ombudsman-accepts-nfa-apology-over-erroneous-list.html>

Iloilo town under state of calamity

[By Rjay Zuriaga Castor](#)

April 14, 2024

ILOILO CITY: The local government of Sara in the northern part of Iloilo has declared a state of calamity due to the El Niño phenomenon.

The declaration was made following a special session by the Sangguniang Bayan on Friday, April 12.

The Municipal Disaster Risk and Reduction Management Council (MDRRMC), in a resolution approved by the town mayor on April 8, recommended a state of calamity declaration, citing water scarcity and agricultural losses.

The MDRRMC, in its resolution, reported that the dry spell has caused the town to experience prolonged drought which resulted in a "critical water shortage, causing immense damage of 35 percent in rice and 40 percent in corn, affecting 2,251 farmers."

Meanwhile, the Office of the Municipal Agriculturist reported losses totaling P34,137,168 from 1,024 hectares of rice fields and P54,635,850 from 1,715 hectares of corn fields.

"The local government resources are no longer sufficient to [effectively] address the situation and provide the necessary assistance to the affected farmers," the resolution added.

The local government of Sara is the first in Iloilo and fourth in Western Visayas to declare a state of calamity due to El Niño.

Based on the April 9 data of the Regional Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (RDRRMC), Sibalom incurred an agricultural

loss of P46 million, Anini-y with P465,300, and San Enrique with P5.4 million.

The latest RDRRMC report showed over P770 million in agricultural damages and losses to Western Visayas, with Iloilo being the hardest hit at P519 million.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/04/14/regions/iloilo-town-under-state-of-calamity/1941294>