

MANILA BULLETIN:

Philippine sugar output to increase despite El Niño

Crop year 2023-2024

BY **GABRIELL CHRISTEL GALANG**

Apr 21, 2024 08:00 PM

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) said that El Niño did not have a significant impact on the sugarcane harvest in the country.

In a recent report, the USDA-Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) revised its forecast for raw sugar production, increasing it by 50,000 metric tons for the current marketing year from September 2023 to August 2024.

The USDA report stated that sugarcane was not affected as much as anticipated, contrary to earlier projection of a 10 percent to 15 percent drop in production due to El Niño.

The USDA-FAS has now estimated that Philippine sugar production will reach 1.85 million metric tons, up from an earlier projection of 1.80 million metric tons.

If the revised forecast is achieved, it will be slightly higher than the 1.799 million metric tons produced in the 2022-2023 crop year.

As of March 24, 2024, the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) has reported a raw sugar production of 1.7 million metric tons, with an average weekly production of around 50,000 metric tons.

However, the USDA noted that there are still other factors to consider, such as diversion to ethanol production and milling schedules.

The report also stated that facilities that started milling early will also end early when sugarcane supply becomes low.

Milling is expected to end around the second week of May in some areas.

Meanwhile, the USDA said that sugar production for crop year 2024-2025 is expected to remain steady at 1.85 million metric tons, despite the drought that has affected the major sugar-producing region of Negros Occidental.

The ongoing El Niño has also led to stunted sugarcane growth in some farms that lack irrigation facilities.

However, the USDA has noted that the expansion of sugarcane areas by farmers and higher sugar prices in the market would help offset these challenges.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/4/21/philippine-sugar-output-to-increase-despite-el-nino>

Agriculture import barriers eased

[Alexis Romero](#) - The Philippine Star

April 22, 2024 | 12:00am



The Department of Agriculture (DA), in coordination with either the Department of Trade and Industry or the Department of Finance, is tasked with streamlining procedures and requirements in the licensing of importers, minimizing the processing time of application for importation and exempting licensed traders from submission of registration requirements. *Andy Zapat Jr.*

Rice retail prices up by P2 per kilo

MANILA, Philippines — Citing constraints that increase importation costs and limit the supply of farm goods, President Marcos has ordered the removal of non-tariff barriers on the importation of agricultural products and streamlining of administrative procedures to address rising commodity prices.

Non-tariff barriers are policy measures, other than customs tariffs, that restrict trade, including quotas, import licensing systems, regulations and red tape, he said.

Despite existing measures, these barriers and administrative constraints continue to persist, increasing the domestic prices of farm commodities, Marcos noted.

“It is imperative to further streamline administrative procedures to foster transparency and predictability of policies on the importation of agricultural products in order to help ensure food security, maintain sufficient supply of agricultural goods in the domestic market and improve local production,” Marcos said in Administrative Order No. 20, dated April 18.

The order, which took effect immediately, also contained the President’s directives on the processing and issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearance for agricultural products and guidelines for the importation of sugar and fishery products.

The Department of Agriculture (DA), in coordination with either the Department of Trade and Industry or the Department of Finance, is tasked with streamlining

procedures and requirements in the licensing of importers, minimizing the processing time of application for importation and exempting licensed traders from submission of registration requirements.

The DA should also facilitate the importation of certain agricultural products beyond the authorized minimum access volume and reduce or remove administrative fees, subject to consultations with the National Economic and Development Authority's committee on tariff and related matters.

The Sugar Regulatory Administration was directed to streamline and standardize guidelines for sugar importation.

Marcos also called for a faster processing of agricultural imports, directing the Bureau of Customs to prioritize the unloading and release of imported agricultural products.

The President reconstituted a surveillance team comprised of various agencies to ensure the effective implementation of the order.

The team will monitor the importation and distribution of farm goods, prevent illegal acts of price manipulation and other forms of unfair or anti-competitive commercial practices, take appropriate remedial measures to address unlawful acts and craft guidelines on sharing information and enhancing transparency and accountability of concerned agencies.

Meanwhile, Marcos also ordered agencies and local government units to support the implementation of the Enhanced Partnership Against Hunger and Poverty program.

Rice prices up

The retail price of regular and well-milled rice increased between P1 and P2 per kilo in the past few days compared to the prevailing price last week, according to the DA.

“We are still in the harvest season and during this time, the retail price of rice should go down. At present, the prevailing price of regular and well-milled rice ranges between P51 and P52 per kilo. Last week, the prevailing price was P50 to P51 per kilo,” Agriculture Assistant Secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa noted.

The DA is determining the cause of the movement in the retail price of rice, he added.

“We are now checking with the National Food Authority and other concerned government agencies. The increase was not that big but there was an upward trend,” he said.

Based on the DA's monitoring, the retail price of local regular rice ranged between P48 and P52 per kilo; local well-milled rice, between P48 and P55 per kilo; local premium rice, between 51 and P58 per kilo and local special rice, between P57 and 67 per kilo.

Imported regular rice, between P48 and P51; imported well-milled P50 and P58 per kilo; imported premium rice, between P50 and P62 per kilo; and imported special rice, between P56 and P56 and P64 per kilo.

The US Department of Agriculture decreased its forecast on the country's total importation of the staple to 3.9 million metric tons from the previous 4.1 million MT, De Mesa said.

"This only shows that we expect a good harvest despite the El Niño and limited typhoons. This is because we have good irrigation in Central Luzon. We have a good (palay) production," he added.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu-Laurel Jr. is pushing for at least a P250-billion budget in 2025 to implement the four-year plan for the agriculture sector, he noted.

"Our priority is the expansion and improvement of our production areas. A big portion of the budget of the DA for 2025 will be focusing on irrigation systems. We'll also be focusing on modernization of agriculture; we'll also be focusing on improvement in the post-harvest and decrease in post-harvest losses... so our proposal is to double the budget, from P170 to at least 250 billion next year," he said.

Meanwhile, the retail price of pork increased between P5 and P10 per kilo, De Mesa said.

"For pork shoulder, the retail price ranged from P335 to P340. It is higher by P5 to P10 per kilo compared to the previous week. In terms of pork belly, the prevailing price is P380 per kilo but we also monitored P400 per kilo. The farmgate is only a little over P200 per kilo so if the traders will add P100 per kilo as the benchmark, the retail price should only be between P320 and P330 per kilo for shoulder," he noted. — **Bella Carias**

<https://philstar.com/headlines/2024/04/22/2349515/agriculture-import-barriers-eased>

50 farmers finish urban agri training

[Caecent No-ot Magsumbol](#) - The Freeman

April 22, 2024 | 12:00am

CEBU, Philippines — Close to 50 residents from two barangays in Cebu City have completed a 14-week urban agriculture training, the city's news and information office reported over the weekend.

Participants include 27 individuals from Barangay Mambaling and 21 from Barangay Carreta.

The SMFI, the social good arm of the SM Group of Companies, initiated the program specifically to help train urban farmers on technological updates, capacity building, financial literacy, livelihood development, market opportunities, and empowerment as potential agripreneurs.

SM Group founder, the late Henry Sy, started the program in 2007 to create a sustainable program that would update farming skills, food security, and sustainable livelihood know-how of low income farmers to uplift their lives.

Along with SMFI, the program was also initiated alongside the City's Agriculture Department, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Labor and Employment; the Department of Trade and Industry; and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).

A moving up ceremony for the "Kabalikat sa Kabuhayan on Sustainable Agriculture" program was done at the SM Seaside City where participants received a National Certification 2 assessment in Organic Agriculture from TESDA.

During the final day, City Agriculturist Joelito Baclayon told the graduates that their office will provide assistance to the participants to improve their urban gardening skills through the use of the city's South Road Properties farm.

"We will give you a shuttle para pag-transport sa inyo mga participants. And all the rest nga gusto moanha diha pick-up-pon sa inyong lugar and dad-on ta mo sa farm. Pagkahapon mobalik pod mo sa inyo," Baclayon told the participants.

Along with this, CAD said, they will be putting up a bigger nursery at the SRP.

"To ensure pa gyud nga naa gyud moy klaro didto nga supply sa inyong gikinahanglan like the seedlings, the fertilizers, including the technology,

magbutang pod ko didto og dako-dako nga nursery,” Baclayon said. (CEBU NEWS)

<https://www.philstar.com/the-freeman/cebu-news/2024/04/22/2349570/50-farmers-finish-urban-agri-training>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Fish import suspension bodes well for aquaculture

[Jasper Emmanuel Arcalas](#) - The Philippine Star

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“The immediate action of the Department of Agriculture is an indication that they are serious in their objective of developing the agriculture and fisheries sector as a profitable industry for fish farmers, fisherfolk, and all stakeholders in the value chain,” said Norbert Chingcuanco, vice president for corporate planning of Feedmix Specialist Inc. II.

STAR / File

MANILA, Philippines — The suspension of the importation of certain pelagic fishes to avert diversion of stocks to wet markets would allow the local aquaculture industry to grow, fish cage operators said.

“The immediate action of the Department of Agriculture is an indication that they are serious in their objective of developing the agriculture and fisheries sector as a profitable industry for fish farmers, fisherfolk, and all stakeholders in the value chain,” said Norbert Chingcuanco, vice president for corporate planning of Feedmix Specialist Inc. II.

Earlier this month, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. suspended the importation of frozen round scad (galunggong), bonito (tulingan) and mackerel (alumahan) to prevent these stocks from being diverted to wet markets.

Tiu Laurel pointed out that unscrupulous fish importers were diverting the frozen fish stocks to evade paying value added tax.

Philippine Association of Fish Producers Inc. chairman David Villaluz said reducing fish imports would allow the aquaculture industry to expand.

Villaluz said fish producers are reeling from low selling prices while struggling with high production costs.

Villaluz added that aquaculture production can boost domestic fish supply and meet the country's total requirement.

"It is hard for our fish farmers to turn a profit. We only ask that we earn back our investment," Villaluz said.

"Give us four to five months to recover whatever deficiency there is in production. We have so many empty cages. If we can use these cages, we can produce the country's fish requirement in four to five months, even beyond," Villaluz added.

Mario Balazon of Taal Lake Aquaculture Alliance Inc. (TLAAI) said the market diversion of the imported fish stocks have forced farmers to lower their prices and sell at loss to pay their debt.

"There is no reason to import, aquaculture is producing well not only in Taal Lake but everywhere in the Philippines, what we need is a sure buyer and the support of the government in terms of subsidy to lower our production cost," Balazon said.

Adrienne Nera of TLAAI said fish cage operators are holding back on their investments due to stiff competition against fish importation.

Pablo Rosales, president of Pangisda Pilipinas, urged the government to provide support to fishermen that would allow them to sell their catch better in the market.

"We are all against importation that leads to smuggling. Our government should help us, small and artisan fishermen to process the sardines and bring our catch to the markets," Rosales said.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/04/22/2349413/fish-import-suspension-bodes-well-aquaculture>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Ample stocks to keep Philippines from importing sugar

[Jasper Emmanuel Arcalas](#) - The Philippine Star

April 22, 2024 | 12:00am



The United States Department of Agriculture-Foreign Agricultural Service (USDA-FAS) in Manila projected that the Philippines will not import raw sugar in MY 2025 as the government “seeks to protect local producers.”

Pixabay

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippines may not import sugar in the next market year (MY) 2025 as stocks remain ample from carryover of previous import programs, an international agency said.

The United States Department of Agriculture-Foreign Agricultural Service (USDA-FAS) in Manila projected that the Philippines will not import raw sugar in MY 2025 as the government “seeks to protect local producers.”

The market year for sugar begins on Sept. 1, aligned with the domestic cropping calendar being followed by the sugar industry.

USDA-FAS Manila added that it does not see the country importing refined sugar as well given the huge importations made in previous market years, resulting in high carryover stocks.

“There remain ample supplies of both raw and refined sugar in the market,” the USDA-FAS Manila said in its recent Global Agricultural Inform Network (Gain) report.

The Philippines imported about 730,000 metric tons (MT) of refined sugar in the previous market/crop year 2022-2023 to plug the shortfall in supply.

The USDA-FAS Manila estimated that the country will begin the next market year with 1.19 million MT of combined raw and refined sugar stocks.

In terms of production, the USDA-FAS Manila projected that the country's raw sugar output would remain flat in MY 2025 at 1.85 million MT as ill effects of El Niño would negate the foreseen expansion in sugarcane areas.

The country's sugarcane output would inch up to 21.6 million MT next year from the current market year's projected volume of 21.5 million MT. Total area planted with sugarcane would expand to 387,000 hectares from 385,000 hectares.

"With high prices, farmers expanded sugarcane area, but some farms with no irrigation are suffering from the ongoing El Niño, which stunted sugarcane growth," it said.

"Some new plantings in the past three months with no irrigation suffered from stunting due to El Niño and will produce lower yields in MY 2025," it added.

The international agency aligned its projected output for the current market year with the initial 1.85 million MT production forecast of the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA).

"Sugarcane was not affected as much as expected compared to earlier predictions of a 10 to 15 percent drop in production due to El Niño," the USDA-FAS Manila said, referring to raw sugar output in MY 2024.

Latest SRA data showed that raw sugar production as of March 31 stood at 1.779 million MT, almost 12 percent higher than the 1.59 million MT recorded in the same period last year.

SRA administrator Pablo Luis Azcona told The STAR that they are maintaining their 1.85 million MT raw sugar output estimate for the current crop year.

The USDA-FAS Manila expects total sugar demand in MY 2025 to remain flat as well at 2.2 million MT. The international agency does not see the Philippines exporting sugar again to the world market except fulfillment of its tariff rate quota allocation to the United States.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/04/22/2349429/ample-stocks-keep-philippines-importing-sugar>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

MVP seeks more investments in agribusiness

[Richmond Mercurio](#) - The Philippine Star

April 22, 2024 | 12:00am



MVP Group Chairman Manuel V. Pangilinan

STAR / File

MANILA, Philippines — Business titan Manuel V. Pangilinan remains on the hunt for new investments in companies that will bolster his group's presence in the agriculture space.

Pangilinan said his group currently has its sights set on several local companies engaged in agribusiness for potential investments.

“We’re looking at several already,” Pangilinan said. “One is related to coconuts.”

According to Pangilinan, the target is to get a significant stake in the company and close the transaction within the year.

Pangilinan-led Metro Pacific Investment Corp. made its entry into the agribusiness sector in 2022 through a partnership with the Carmen's Best Group, which was followed by another agri venture last year with the acquisition of 34.76 percent ownership in Axelum Resources Corp., a manufacturer and exporter globally of high-quality coconut products.

“For Carmen's Best, we're running out of milk so we're looking at investing in other dairy farms. So we're looking at at least two more,” Pangilinan said.

He said their greenhouse project is also set to be operational by the fourth quarter this year.

“The first phase is seven hectares. So we’ll proceed to double that in 2025. That’s in San Rafael, Bulacan,” Pangilinan said.

“We’re also looking at 3,000 hectares in Mindoro to plant corn for silage for the cows and several others,” he said.

For Axelum, Pangilinan said his group is satisfied with its investment in the company and has no plans of raising further its stake at the moment.

“If they need more funding for expansion, we’re prepared to do that to help out,” he said.

Pangilinan said he is bullish on the growth of Axelum this year.

Axelum has programmed a capital spending of between P350 million and P400 million this year to deploy additional capacity and undertake equipment modernization and facility upgrade.

Last week, Axelum renewed its supply deal with long-time partner The Vita Coco Company Inc., one of the world’s largest coconut water brands.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/04/22/2349430/mvp-seeks-more-investments-agribusiness>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Taking the first steps towards an Asean Food Security Alliance



[GO NEGOSYO PILIPINAS ANGAT LAHAT!](#) - [Joey Concepcion](#) - The Philippine

Star

April 22, 2024 | 12:00am

In the face of climate change and the realization of how fragile our global food supply chains are, I think it is high time we took the first steps to ensure food security not just for our country but also for our neighbors in the ASEAN.

No doubt the agriculture sector is already a challenge. Some of the ASEAN countries are doing well in one crop, but have challenges in others; this is true for all our neighbors. That is why as I leave today for Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, I have high hopes for the formation of what I foresee as an ASEAN Food Security Alliance.

Coming with me are the leaders of some of the Philippines' largest agriculture companies, and waiting for us in Malaysia are their counterparts. This is a landmark event because the meeting is a direct outcome of our efforts to forge partnerships between the agriculture companies of the ASEAN member-states. I am particularly proud because this project can trace its beginnings to the Go Negosyo program KALAP, or Kapatid Angat Lahat Program.

We launched KALAP more than a year ago. The intent was to leverage private sector's expertise and resources to help small farmers become more productive. What we've learned is that it is possible to scale up KALAP to benefit the entire region. What if we could harness the resources of the region's private sector to cooperate in our agricultural commodities? As we fully realize the benefits of economic integration, it makes perfect sense that our agricultural industries are in sync and in cooperation with each other.

Imagine if we were to reach such a level of agricultural productivity that we can trade with each other and still provide for our respective populations? This will benefit not just the agriculture industries of the ASEAN countries but also put us on a path toward developing cooperative relationships within the public and private sectors to ensure food security for the entire region – an ASEAN Food Security Alliance, if you will. We will learn from each other and facilitate market linkages to be a more productive, food-producing, self-reliant region. Starting with Malaysia, we intend to build partnerships with the agri companies of the other ASEAN member-states.

Public-private partnerships are essential as we move toward regional economic integration and make our agriculture industries productive and competitive. We have already several of these big-brother models in the Philippines covering prime commodities like tobacco, coconut and rice, with large Philippine companies like Universal Leaf, Lionheart Farms and Yovel East successfully implementing their inclusive models in the communities where they operate.

Furthermore, we have already achieved it with the ASEAN Mentorship for Entrepreneurs Network, which is a scaled-up version of Kapatid Mentor ME, our program with the Department of Trade and Industry.

In both programs, we partner with what we call “big brothers” from the private sector to lend their resources, time and expertise to help mentor small and medium entrepreneurs. In KALAP, this has even extended to creating an environment in which farmers can break free from the cycle of living hand-to-mouth, using policy changes and cooperative systems to integrate into the value chain of the big companies.

The Malaysian private sector was the first on board with our regional initiative, thanks to a meeting of minds with ABAC Malaysia chairman Tan Sri Nazir Razak and B2B Connect Initiative (BCI) chairman and former Malaysia trade minister Dato’ Sri Mustapa Mohamed. We signed an MOU with them last July in Kuala Lumpur, with no less than the President as witness. In it, we identified the specific commodities where we can cooperate. We have a lot to learn from Malaysia’s success with palm oil and rubber, while the Philippines can share its technologies and best practices with crops like rice, coconut and banana.

Specifically, the MOU covered the joint conduct of studies and mentorship channels for potential agriculture, agriculture technology, food security, agriprenurship business models and value chain development. These are long-term and impactful exchanges that, I believe, will have lasting benefits for both our countries.

The MOU signing in July was followed by a visit led by Dato’ Sri Mustapa Mohamed in September and, after months of planning, we are finally here on the ground, fleshing out how we can put into action the ideals of this cooperation.

What we've learned is this: cooperative programs like KALAP work best when all aspects are covered. Our first step in KALAP was to find and invite agri companies with proven inclusive business models. Next, we looped in the government agencies which can help us create a more conducive environment to make sustainable, productive, profitable farming possible. And as we expand it to the regional level with the MOUs we've signed with our neighbors in the ASEAN, I have high hopes that we are looking at a potential win-win for everybody involved.

Former agriculture secretary Dr. William Dar, who is now a senior adviser for Go Negosyo, is lending his immense well of knowledge to help shape KALAP. I am also grateful to our Ambassador to Malaysia Ma. Angela Ponce, for lending her support.

With hope, this will be followed by similar trade visits to the rest of the countries that signed with us. I look forward to the potential collaborations we can form with the agriculture companies in Indonesia, Singapore, Cambodia, Myanmar, Brunei, Laos and Thailand.

It's one small step at a time. What is important is we do it together, as one ASEAN.

<https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2024/04/22/2349437/taking-first-steps-towards-asean-food-security-alliance>

Dismissed BFAR chief, others to face graft raps

[Neil Jayson Servallos](#) - The Philippine Star

April 22, 2024 | 12:00am

MANILA, Philippines — The Office of the Ombudsman has ordered graft charges filed against former Department of Agriculture (DA) officials over the alleged irregularities in the awarding of a P2.097-billion contract to British company SRT Marine Systems Solutions Ltd. – United Kingdom (SRT-UK) in 2018.

In a 25-page resolution made public yesterday, the ombudsman said it found probable cause to indict former DA undersecretary for fisheries Eduardo Gongona, former Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) national director Demosthenes Escoto and SRT-UK chief executive officer Simon Tucker.

Escoto was ordered dismissed as BFAR director last April 11 over the same matter.

The three will be charged with two counts, each of violation of Section 3 (e) of Republic Act 3019 or the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act for allegedly causing undue injury to the government and giving unwarranted benefit, advantage, and preference to a private firm.

They were also ordered charged with one count each of violation of Sections 3 (g) and 3(j) of RA 3019 for allegedly entering into a contract manifestly and grossly disadvantageous to the government and for supposedly granting license, permit, benefit or privilege to an unqualified person or entity.

“Escoto, Gongona and Tucker had apparently schemed to ultimately award a contract to SRT-UK that is disadvantageous to the government. The series of events that came prior to the award are circumstantial evidence proving that an irregularity had been committed and they are probably guilty thereof,” the resolution read.

Meanwhile, the Ombudsman dismissed the complaints against DA Assistant Secretary Hansel Didulo and Richard Hurd of SRT due to the lack of probable cause.

The complaint was filed by lawyer James Mier Victoriano after the contract to supply vessel monitoring system transmitters and transceivers for BFAR’s Integrated Marine Environment Monitoring System Project Phase II (PHILO Project) was awarded to SRT-UK.

The PHILO project aimed to strengthen BFAR's capability to monitor the country's maritime resources by requiring all commercial fishing vessels to install a monitoring system showing their location at sea.

The supply contract was initially awarded to an unqualified bidder, SRT-France, before it was cancelled and awarded to parent company SRT-UK.

“The sudden creation of SRT-France a month before the second bidding; the permission to SRT-France to participate in the bidding despite knowledge that will have to depend on SRT-UK's technical, professional and financial capabilities; the sudden termination of the award to SRT-France for some baseless reason; and the immediate request for the cancellation of the French loan by DA-BFAR in order to remove the French-related conditions – all these paved the way for SRT-UK to participate in the bidding – a bidding for a project with an expanded scope and increased project cost,” the resolution explained.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/04/22/2349507/dismissed-bfar-chief-others-face-graft-raps>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Marcos orders rules on agriculture imports eased

By: [Melvin Gascon](#) - Reporter / [@melvingasconINQ](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 05:25 AM April 22, 2024



INQUIRER PHOTO/EDWIN BACASMAS

MANILA, Philippines — President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has ordered the Department of Agriculture (DA) to relax its policies and procedures and remove other nontariff barriers on the importation of farm products to boost local supply and bring down prices of items such as rice and pork.

The President issued Administrative Order No. 20, signed by Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin on April 18, due to the persistence of administrative and nontariff constraints that have caused the continued increase of domestic prices of agricultural commodities.

Marcos directed the DA, in coordination with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and Department of Finance, to streamline procedures and requirements in the licensing of importers, minimize the processing time of application for importation, and exempt licensed trades from the submission of registration requirements.

Sugar, fish products covered

AO 20 also authorizes the DA to allow the importation of agricultural products beyond the authorized minimum access volume, or the quantity of an agricultural product that is allowed to be imported at a lower tariff as committed by the country to the World

Trade Organization, and remove the corresponding fees related to the increased importation.

The DA was directed to streamline procedures and requirements for the issuance of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Import Clearance (SPSIC) and take concrete steps to improve logistics, transport, distribution and storage of imported agricultural products.

The President also ordered the DA and its attached agencies to process, approve and release SPSIC applications within 15 days; otherwise, applications with completed documents would be deemed approved.

Marcos directed as well the Sugar Regulatory Administration to simplify the importation of sugar by allowing direct importation by the agency's accredited importers and accepting more traders to participate in the importation program.

The order also covered the importation of fishery products and directed the DA to review and revise guidelines on the importation of frozen fish and other marine products.

Marcos ordered the Bureau of Customs (BOC) to prioritize the unloading and release of imported agricultural products, subject to the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act and other applicable laws, rules and regulations of the agency.

Under AO 20, the President created a surveillance team to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of his directive. It will be made up of representatives from the DA, DTI, BOC, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of Justice, Philippine Competition Commission, National Bureau of Investigation and Philippine National Police.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1931991/marcos-orders-rules-on-agriculture-imports-eased>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

MPIC to add dairy farms to agriculture portfolio

By: [Meg J. Adonis](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 02:03 AM April 22, 2024



Manuel V. Pangilinan

Metro Pacific Investments Corp. (MPIC) is looking to invest in at least two dairy farms this year and open its vegetable greenhouse complex in Bulacan province by the fourth quarter as the Manuel Pangilinan-led firm intensifies its expansion in the agribusiness space.

MPIC chair and CEO Pangilinan told reporters last week that they wanted to invest a significant stake in the local dairy companies. He did not disclose the total investment capital.

“We’re running out of milk so we’re looking at investing in other dairy farms. We’re looking at at least two more, so this is a good sign,” he said on the sidelines of the renewal of a multiyear supply deal between coconut product manufacturer Axelum Resources Corp., in which MPIC has a 34.76-percent stake, and international coconut water brand Vita Coco.

MPIC in 2022 acquired a controlling stake in the Magsaysay family’s premium ice cream maker Carmen’s Best, also known as The Laguna Creamery Inc., for nearly P200 million.

Pangilinan had said that they hoped to further expand the homegrown company before exporting products.

Corn farm

To support this expansion, Pangilinan said they planned to acquire 3,000 hectares of land on Mindoro Island to serve as a corn farm to feed cows.

Corn may be fed to cows as an energy supplement, allowing them to produce more milk.

The Philippines currently imports 99 percent of its dairy products, according to the US Department of Agriculture.

In December, the Board of Investments endorsed P3.4 billion worth of agriculture projects of MPIC, including a dairy farm project in Bay, Laguna, under Metro Pacific Dairy Farms Inc.

MPIC's vegetable greenhouse complex in San Rafael, Bulacan, under Metro Pacific Fresh Farms Inc. was likewise endorsed.

According to Pangilinan, the first phase of the greenhouse will span 7 hectares and is scheduled for operations by the fourth quarter of the year. They plan on doubling this to 14 hectares by 2025.

Pangilinan previously said they wanted more exposure in the agriculture sector to reduce food imports "amid ongoing global supply chain disruptions and high inflation."

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority show that agricultural imports totaled \$17.92 billion last year. This is 73.6 percent of total agricultural trade. INQ

<https://business.inquirer.net/455649/mpic-to-add-dairy-farms-to-agriculture-portfolio>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

PH sugar farmers confront El Niño despite bittersweet yields

By: [Jordeene B. Lagare](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 02:07 AM April 22, 2024



A farmer harvest sugarcane. (File photo from Philippine Daily Inquirer)

Sugar production in the Philippines is projected to remain flat next year, with the rise in prices encouraging many farmers to cultivate this commodity even as the El Niño phenomenon continues to loom over the industry.

In a report, the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) pegged raw sugar production at 1.85 million metric tons (MT) for marketing year 2025, which would begin in September this year. "With high prices, farmers expanded sugarcane area, but some farms with no irrigation are suffering from the ongoing El Niño, which stunted sugarcane growth," the report said.

"Some new plantings in the past three months with no irrigation suffered from stunting due to El Niño and will produce lower yields in MY (marketing year) 2025," it added. The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration had said Negros Occidental, a major sugar producing province, was among those suffering from droughts.

The foreign agency pegged raw sugar production at 1.85 million MT for marketing year 2024, up by 50,000 MT from the USDA's official projection of 1.8 million MT. "Sugarcane was not affected as much as expected compared to earlier predictions of a 10 to 15 percent drop in production due to El Niño," it said.

The USDA-FAS estimated a marginal increase in sugarcane area in marketing year 2024 as the prevailing high prices prompted farmers to plant sugarcane instead of shifting to other crops including corn, cassava and bananas.

However, the report noted the marginal increase expected for next year "is not enough to recover the areas previously planted with sugarcane" as some of these were converted for other uses such as residential and industrial, crop shifting in some instances, and urbanization.

So far, the volume of raw sugar produced reached 1.78 million MT as of March 31 this year, up by 11.88 percent from 1.59 million MT recorded in the same period last year, based on data from the Sugar Regulatory Administration. Sugar prices declined by 12.76 percent to P2,775.99 per 50-kilo bag from P3,182.09 per 50-kilo bag, although the current level was fair for farmers, the agency said earlier.

"There are, however, other factors to consider such as diversion to ethanol production and milling schedules. Those facilities which started milling early will also end early when sugarcane supply becomes low," the USDA said, adding that milling in some areas would end around the second week of May. Amid a flat output, the USDA-FAS said it sees no importation for the comparative period. It said the country still has ample supply and the government was ready to protect local producers. INQ

<https://business.inquirer.net/455652/ph-sugar-farmers-confront-el-nino-despite-bittersweet-yields>

BUSINESS WORLD:

DA told to ease agri import process

April 22, 2024 | 12:35 am



A vendor places sugar in plastic bags for sale. — PHILIPPINE STAR/EDD GUMBAN
PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. ordered the Department of Agriculture (DA) to ease the importation process of agricultural products, including allowing industrial users to directly import sugar.

Signed by Mr. Marcos on April 18, Administrative Order (AO)No. 20, directed the DA, in coordination with the departments of Finance and Trade, to “undertake measures to further streamline administrative procedures and policies on the importation of agricultural products and remove non-tariff barriers.”

Non-tariff barriers are policy measures that restrict trade such as quotas, import licensing systems, regulations and red tape, among others.

“It is imperative to further streamline administrative procedures to foster transparency and predictability of policies on the importation of agricultural products in order to help ensure food security, maintain sufficient supply of agricultural products in the domestic market and improve local production,” Mr. Marcos said in the order.

Mr. Marcos ordered the DA and departments of Trade and Finance to streamline procedures and requirements in the licensing of importers. Licensed traders will be exempted from the submission of these requirements.

The departments should also facilitate importation of “certain agricultural products” beyond the authorized minimum access volume, and remove or reduce administrative fees, in consultation with the National Economic and Development Authority Committee on Tariff and Related Matters.

ADVERTISING

The Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) was also ordered to streamline and standardize existing guidelines within 30 days from the order’s effectivity. It was also directed to “allow more traders to participate in the sugar import program.”

“The guidelines shall provide for, among others, rules and regulations on the classification or automatic classification of imported sugar, as well as direct importation of sugar by SRA-registered industrial users,” the order stated.

House Ways and Means Committee Chair Jose Ma. Clemente S. Salceda said the order, if implemented fully, will “open sugar imports to direct industrial users.”

“That could end the stagnation of the food manufacturing sector,” he said in a press release. “Right now, sugar prices in the Philippines are the highest in ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations).”

Under the order, the DA and its bureaus were to streamline the requirements for the issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances (SPSIC). All SPSIC applications not acted on within the prescribed period “shall be deemed approved,” the order read.

The DA was also tasked to review and revise rules and regulations on imports of frozen fish and fishery/aquatic products for wet markets during closed and off-fishing seasons or during calamities, “particularly the provisions that impose quantitative restrictions on fish imports, limit competition and participation in international trade, and restrict the species allowed for importation.”

“The AO will also poke holes in speculative bubbles in the price of fish, which has high levels of non-tariff protection, such as the Certificate of Necessity to Import,” Mr. Salceda said.

The Bureau of Customs was also ordered to prioritize the unloading and release of agricultural imports.

A “surveillance team” was also created to monitor the import and distribution of agricultural imports and prevent price manipulation, among others. The team will be led by the DA, and include members from the departments of Finance, Interior and Local Government, and Justice as well as the Philippine National Police, National Bureau of Investigation, and Philippine Competition Commission.

Mr. Salceda said the Philippines has among the highest rates of protection for its domestic goods, with a protection level of around 27% as a share of farm receipts across all agricultural goods.

Inflation accelerated to 3.7% year on year in March from 3.4% in February but slower than the 7.6% clip in the same month last year.

Food inflation rose to 5.7% in March, its fastest print in four months or since the 5.8% recorded in November 2023. Rice inflation climbed to 24.4% in March, also the fastest since the 24.4% print in February 2009. — **K.A.T.Atienza**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/top-stories/2024/04/22/589521/da-told-to-ease-agri-import-process/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Tree replanting singled out as priority use of coco trust fund

April 22, 2024 | 12:04 am



PHILSTAR FILE PHOTO

By **Adrian H. Halili**, *Reporter*

THE GOVERNMENT needs to fully utilize the coconut levy asset fund to revitalize the industry by mounting a major replanting effort, according to coconut products manufacturer Axelum Resources Corp.

“There’s a lot of money for replanting. If there is political will to utilize that money to replant and to implement all the programs of (the Philippine Coconut Authority [PCA]), we’ll be in a good place,” Romeo I. Chan, Axelum Chairman and Chief Executive Officer told *BusinessWorld*.

Republic Act No. 11524, or the Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund Act, ordered the placement of coconut levy assets into a trust fund aimed at rehabilitating and modernizing the industry.

Last year, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. ordered the PCA to draft a plan for the rehabilitation of the coconut industry, including the planting of 100 million coconut trees by 2028. The rehabilitation plan aims to address the advancing age of the nut bearing trees.

In January, the PCA said that it was planning to plant 8.5 million coconut seedlings this year.

“On our part in the private sector, we are doing our share of replanting,” Mr. Chan added.

He said that in a partnership with The Vita Coco Company, Inc., it is planning to replant one million coconut trees in the next five years.

Meanwhile, Mr. Chan said that the impact of El Niño on the coconut industry may manifest itself after 12 months.

“If you look at the total coconut landscape, it’s not going to be a great deal. Our food industry only occupies 10% of the total market. The rest of the coconuts go to copra,” he told reporters.

According to the US Department of Agriculture, about 80% of copra produced in the Philippines is used for coconut oil production.

He said that the company also looking at using the unused coconut water thrown out during copra production.

“The copra farmers throw away the water as well, so that is another area for use to increase our supply base,” Mr. Chan said.

The company last week renewed a coconut water supply deal with Vita Coco. The deal has an initial 10-year period, with an optional five-year extension.

“But you can gauge from the last 15 years, we did P15 billion, which is average of P1 billion a year. But we’re going to do much more than that in the next years,” Mr. Chan said.

<https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2024/04/22/589481/tree-replanting-singled-out-as-priority-use-of-coco-trust-fund/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

CA revokes biosafety permits for Golden Rice, Bt Eggplant

April 22, 2024 | 12:03 am



IRRI

THE Court of Appeals (CA) has revoked the biosafety permits for the commercial propagation of Golden Rice and Bt Eggplant, citing their potential risks to the environment and the health of consumers.

In a 143-page decision issued on April 17, the appellate court also stopped the field testing and use, as well as imports of, genetically modified organisms (GMO) until all measures have been to ensure they are safe.

The appellate court's Fourth Division granted the privilege of the Writ of Kalikasan to the Magsasaka at Siyentipiko para sa Pag-unlad Agrikultura (MASIPAG), Greenpeace Southeast Asia – Philippines (Greenpeace), and others, "citing the constitutional right to health and maintaining environmental integrity."

It also issued a cease and desist order, halting the commercial propagation of the Bt Eggplant and Golden Rice.

"Considering the unmistakable importance of the constitutional right to a balanced and healthful ecology, especially in these times, we remind the government of its eminent duty to assiduously protect said right," according to the decision, written by Associate Justice Jennifer Joy C. Ong.

The appellate court found that the petitioners proved the adverse health and ecological effects of the Golden Rice and Bt eggplant projects are scientifically plausible but uncertain.

“Under the circumstances, applying the ‘precautionary principle,’ steps should be taken to avoid or diminish any possible adverse effect to health and ecology,” National Union of Peoples’ Lawyers President Ephraim B. Cortez said.

Mr. Cortez added that “once proof of compliance with safety, health, and legal requirements are submitted by concerned government agencies, the respondents may resume activities relative to the commercial propagation of Golden Rice and Bt Eggplant.”

“The conflicting scientific views (are) compounded by the lack of administrative monitoring for which the regulators were unable to determine whether or not there were health and safety issues during the process,” he added.

The Supreme Court, sitting en banc, had granted the petitioners the Writ of Kalikasan, referring the case to the appellate court for “acceptance of the following returns on the Writ of Kalikasan, and for hearing reception of evidence, and rendition of judgment.”

MASIPAG, a coalition of farmers and scientists, requested a temporary environmental protection order against the DA to halt the commercial cultivation of Golden Rice and Bt Eggplant until evidence of safety and compliance with legal requirements is provided.

A Writ of Kalikasan is a legal recourse aimed at safeguarding individuals from environmental harm that jeopardizes life, health, or property across two or more municipalities. — **Chloe Mari A. Hufana**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2024/04/22/589480/ca-revokes-biosafety-permits-for-golden-rice-bt-eggplant/>

Australia pushing farm chemicals regulator reforms

April 22, 2024 | 12:02 am



REUTERS

CANBERRA — The Australian government will push the country's farm chemicals regulator to improve the quality and integrity of its decision-making and reduce its focus on approving pesticides at a consistent pace, it said.

A review of the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) last year questioned its corporate culture and standard of oversight, suggesting it may have been too accommodating of industry interests.

However, farm and industry groups say turmoil at the regulator due to the review and government reaction to it has resulted in the APVMA taking too long to approve new products and that this is leading to preventable crop losses worth billions of dollars.

Agriculture Minister Murray Watt said that under previous governments, the regulator had a disproportionate focus on approving chemicals within statutory time frames and not enough attention was paid to compliance and enforcement.

He said the APVMA should take a more balanced approach that would elevate environmental and public health considerations, stakeholder engagement and compliance alongside time frames.

“We want to ensure that we have the world’s best chemical regulator, so that consumers and our overseas customers can have confidence in the food and fiber we produce,” Mr. Watt said. “At the same time, the APVMA needs to be structured so that it can independently and efficiently approve new, safe chemicals that help farmers do their job.”

The agriculture ministry said the APVMA would not be moved back to Canberra, the capital. Its removal to the regional town of Armidale in 2019 caused huge staff turnover that damaged its performance, the review of the regulator found.

The review was sparked by accusations that a senior staff member urinated on colleagues at a staff Christmas party in 2021. The APVMA’s CEO and board chair both resigned last year. — **Reuters**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2024/04/22/589478/australia-pushing-farm-chemicals-regulator-reforms/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

US to spend \$1 billion on food aid abroad amid global hunger crisis

April 22, 2024 | 12:01 am



REUTERS

THE US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) will distribute \$1 billion in US commodities to countries with high hunger rates, the agencies said.

The countries that will receive the aid — including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Yemen, South Sudan, Sudan, and Haiti — are among the most stricken by hunger, according to the United Nations' World Food Program.

Global hunger is getting worse, with 745 million more people moderately to severely hungry worldwide in 2023 than in 2015, leaving the world offtrack to meet a sustainable development goal of ending hunger by 2030, according to the United Nations.

The causes of expanded hunger are global conflict, climate change, and the long tail of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic for the world's poor, the UN says. Hunger is rising the most in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The US-grown commodities to be purchased and sent abroad include grains and beans, the USDA said. The USDA will buy the commodities and USAID will distribute them, the agencies said.

The US is also facing high hunger rates in the wake of the pandemic, and USDA in 2022 spent \$2.3 billion on food purchases for schools and food banks.

“With many millions of people in dire need worldwide, the US agricultural sector is well positioned to provide lifesaving food assistance,” Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said in a statement. — **Reuters**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2024/04/22/589482/us-to-spend-1-billion-on-food-aid-abroad-amid-global-hunger-crisis/>

ABANTE:

Atas ni PBBM sa DA: Proseso ng importasyon ng agri product padaliin pa

April 22, 2024 07:39



MANILA, Philippines – Ipinag-utos ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. sa Department of Agriculture (DA) na higit pang i-streamline o pasimplehan ang mga administrative procedures at mga patakaran sa pag-aangkat ng mga produktong pang-agrikultura at alisin ang mga non-tariff barriers upang makatulong na matiyak ang food security.

Sa ilalim ng Administrative Order (AO) No. 20, binigyang-diin ni Marcos na ang mga hadlang sa administratibo at mga non-tariff barriers ay patuloy na nagpapatuloy, na nagdulot ng patuloy na pagtaas ng mga lokal na presyo ng mga produktong pang-agrikultura sa kabila ng mga kasalukuyang hakbang.

Ang mga non-tariff barriers ay mga hakbang sa patakaran, maliban sa taripa sa customs, na naghihigpit sa kalakalan, kabilang ang ngunit hindi limitado sa mga quota, mga sistema ng paglilisensya sa pag-import, mga regulasyon at red tape.

“Kailangan na higit pang i-streamline ang mga pamamaraang pang-administratibo upang mapaunlad ang transparency at predictability ng mga patakaran sa pag-aangkat ng mga produktong pang-agrikultura upang makatulong na matiyak ang seguridad sa pagkain, mapanatili ang sapat na supply ng mga produktong pang-agrikultura sa domestic market, at mapabuti ang lokal na produksyon,” ani Marcos kanyang AO 20.

Ang kautusan, na nilagdaan ni Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin noong Abril 18, ay magkakabisa kaagad.

Inatasan ni Marcos ang DA, sa pakikipagtulungan sa Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) o Department of Finance (DOF), na i-streamline ang mga pamamaraan at mga kinakailangan sa paglilisensya ng mga importer, bawasan ang oras ng pagproseso ng aplikasyon para sa pag-aangkat, at i-exempt ang mga lisensyadong kalakalan. mula sa pagsusumite ng mga kinakailangan sa pagpaparehistro.

Iniutos din ng Pangulo sa DA na pabilisin ang pag-aangkat ng ilang produktong agrikultural na lampas sa awtorisadong Minimum Access Volume (MAV) at bawasan o tanggalin ang mga administrative fees.

Ang MAV ay ang dami ng isang partikular na produktong pang-agrikultura na pinapayagang ma-import na may mas mababang taripa na ibinigay ng bansa sa World Trade Organization.

Gayundin, inutusan ang DA na i-streamline ang mga pamamaraan at mga kinakailangan para sa pag-iisyu ng Sanitary and Phytosanitary Import Clearance (SPSIC), at gumawa ng mga kongkretong hakbang upang mapabuti ang logistik, transportasyon, pamamahagi at pag-iimbak ng mga imported na produktong agrikultura.

Samantala, inaatasan ang Bureau of Customs (BOC) na unahin ang pagbabawas at pagpapalabas ng mga imported agricultural products, na napapailalim sa Customs Modernization and Tariff Act, at iba pang naaangkop na batas, panuntunan, at regulasyon ng kawanihan.

Si Pangulong Marcos ay lumikha din ng isang surveillance team sa pamamagitan ng AO 20 upang matiyak ang epektibo at mahusay na pagpapatupad ng Kautusan.

Inaatasan din ang mga kinauukulang ahensya na sama-samang magsumite ng quarterly report sa status ng pagpapatupad ng AO sa Pangulo sa pamamagitan ng Office of the Executive Secretary at Inter-Agency Committee on Inflation and Market Outlook (IAC-IMO). *RNT*

<https://remate.ph/atas-ni-pbbm-sa-da-proseso-ng-importasyon-ng-agri-product-padaliin-pa/>

Agriculture chief goes to market

By Jay Morales

April 21, 2024, 10:58 pm



Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. visits the Sentrong Pamilyan ng mga Produktong Agrikultural in Sariaya, Quezon. He cited the importance of extending support to farmers from production to marketing and enhancing the capabilities of the country's trading posts.

<https://www.manilastandard.net/?s=agri+chief+goes+to+market>

DA vows increased investments to support farmers, fisherfolks

By Othel V. Campos April 21, 2024, 9:15 pm

The Department of Agriculture (DA) announced over the weekend increased investments in the agriculture sector to support local farmers and fishermen. Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel underscored the importance of supporting farmers across the production and marketing chain during a visit to the Sentrong Pamilihan ng mga Produktong Agrikultural (Center for Trading Agricultural Products) in Sariaya, Quezon.

“We will link vegetable farmers with the Taguig mega cold storage and continue to provide support and assistance in terms of transport so they can sell their produce at the right price,” he said, emphasizing the need to strengthen the capabilities of the country’s trading posts.

He highlighted the role of facilities like the Sentrong Pamilihan in promoting sustainable farming by allowing farmers to directly sell their produce.

Sentrong Pamilihan, established in 2007, has become a central trading hub for vegetables and other agricultural products in Sariaya and surrounding areas.

Local farmers reported significant improvements in their income since the trading post opened.

Sariaya farmers said the trading center motivated them to expand production areas, contributing to President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr.’s food security agenda.

Tiu Laurel announced the development of a national logistics plan to further enhance agricultural productivity and market access.

This plan aims to create a strong connection between vegetable farms and other food-growing areas with major food hubs like the Food Terminal Inc. in Taguig City.

The DA said the increased investment in agriculture, coupled with the development of a national logistics plan is aligned with the government’s commitment to empowering Filipino farmers and ensuring food security for the nation.

<https://www.manilastandard.net/business/314438253/da-vows-increased-investments-to-support-farmers-fisherfolks.html>

Remove non-tariff barriers

By Manila Standard

April 22, 2024, 12:55 am

Palace order expected to bring down food prices

Food prices will soon be cheaper under Administrative Order 20 (signed by Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin on April 18), ordering the Department of Agriculture, in coordination with the Departments of Trade and Industry and Finance, to remove non-tariff barriers, and to streamline procedures and policies regarding the importation of agricultural products.

“The AO will make food cheaper. Right now, it’s very difficult as an honest exporter to sell food to the Philippines,” Albay Rep. Joey Salceda said.

The Philippines has among the highest rates of protection for its domestic goods, with a protection level of around 27% as a share of farm receipts across all agricultural goods, he cited.

“With such levels of trade protection, we should not be surprised why food is expensive in the country,” Salceda noted. “Such protection levels also do not directly accrue to the agricultural sectors they are supposed to protect. They also incentivize those who can completely disregard the law or corner domestic trade.”

Apart from the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund, there is currently no extant mechanism for directly supporting a domestic sector through tariff revenues.

“We hurt consumers with high trade barriers, but we also do not support farmers directly with tariff revenues,” he said.

He also added that the AO by President Marcos is a step in the right direction.

“If implemented fully by the DA, it will open sugar imports to direct industrial users. This could end the stagnation of the food manufacturing sector. Right now, sugar prices in the Philippines are the highest in ASEAN,” he said.

The AO would also poke holes in speculative bubbles in the price of fish, which has high levels of non-tariff protection, such as the certificate of necessity to import.

“Of course, tariffs still play a key role. The next step is to adopt measures that earmark tariffs directly to domestic producers and consumers,” he said.

Salceda filed House Bill 2471 earmarking all agricultural tariffs directly to their corresponding domestic agricultural sectors. In addition, Salceda is also preparing to submit a technical working group report on the Livestock, Poultry, and Dairy Competitiveness Act.

“The proposal will earmark meat and dairy import tariffs towards the domestic sector. We are doing something similar for corn,” he stressed.

The DA now leads the monitoring team, and is set to craft the guidelines for the implementation of the order together with the Department of Trade and Industry, Department of Finance, Bureau of Customs, and the Sugar Regulatory Administration. They have been instructed to submit a quarterly report.

Meanwhile, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has directed all government agencies and urged all local government units (LGUs) to support the implementation of the Enhanced Partnership Against Hunger and Poverty (EPAHP) program designed to ensure food security and proper nutrition in the country.

This call came under the administration’s Philippine Development Plan 2023-2028 through a two-page Memorandum Circular No. 47 signed by Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin on April 19.

“It is imperative for all government agencies and instrumentalities to support the continued and effective implementation of the EPAHP Program to bolster government efforts towards attaining zero hunger, food and nutrition security, and sustainable agriculture,” President Marcos said.

The EPAHP is one of the banner programs of the Task Force on Zero Hunger, which aims to institutionalize efforts designed to alleviate hunger and endorse food and nutrition security by linking Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to prospective markets. It also aims to provide credit assistance that would support food production, processing and distribution.

The Task Force Hunger’s job, established through Executive Order (EO) No. 10 s. 2020, as amended by EO 27 s. 2023, is to ensure the continued and effective implementation of the EPAHP Program in coordination with the relevant government agencies.

The task force is also mandated to enhance provision of farm production technologies and extension of services to government-assisted family farms and rural based-organizations. Part of this is the sustainability of the EPAHP Program through the

implementation of policies that will engage private sector, and institutionalize mechanisms in LGUs.

It is also directed to adopt Community Participation Procurement that will encourage CBOs to participate in the EPAHP Program. This includes the construction, repair, and improvement of irrigation facilities and appurtenant structures in irrigable areas in the countryside.

<https://www.manilastandard.net/news/top-stories/314438355/remove-non-tariff-barriers.html>

1.7-M Pinoys affected by El Niño, agri damage at P3.9B

By Maricel Cruz

April 21, 2024, 12:00 am

Some 1.7 million individuals have been affected by the El Niño phenomenon, which has resulted in close to P4 billion in damage and losses to the country's agriculture sector.

DSWD spokesperson Irene Dumlao said the affected individuals are in Regions 2, 3, Mimaropa, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12 and the Cordillera Administrative Region.

“The DSWD is distributing family food packs. This is part of the humanitarian response in areas affected by El Niño, especially for families experiencing lack of food due to severe drought,” she said.

DSWD has already distributed more than P58 million worth of family food packs in the affected areas, Dumlao said.

According to the Department of Agriculture, damage on rice crops accounted for more than half of the total losses or at least P2.36 billion.

Damage on high value crops and corn were placed at nearly P868 million and P669 million, respectively while losses in the fisheries sector were valued at P33.83 million and in livestock and poultry at P6.95 million.

Of the 11 regions that sustained agriculture damage, among the hardest hit were MIMAROPA and Western Visayas.

Meanwhile, Dumlao said the DSWD has Project Lawa and Project Binhi which aim to help El Niño-affected communities have access to water and food.

Beneficiaries of the projects are provided with temporary income via the cash-for-training and cash-for-work components.

“They are assisted in building water cisterns or small farm reservoirs, which are sized 20 by 24 square meters and 50 feet deep, that can be used as water sources for their farms. The Department of Agriculture provides technical expertise,” she said.

Under the pilot program of the two projects, small farm reservoirs were already constructed in Ifugao, Antique, and Davao.

The DSWD also has the Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation (AICS) Program for additional support, she said.

<https://www.manilastandard.net/news/top-stories/314437997/1-7-m-pinoys-affected-by-el-nino-agri-damage-at-p3-9b.html>

Villar: Practice urban agriculture

By Macon Ramos-Araneta

April 21, 2024, 11:50 pm

Senator Cynthia Villar has cited urban agriculture and home gardening as the answers to the country's ballooning population and increasing food demand and consumption.

Villar, chairperson of the Senate Agriculture and Food Committee, said she has been practicing urban agriculture and home gardening in her hometown Las Piñas. She has also been espousing these activities in other areas of the country.

The senator noted the significance of developing a "cash crop," or agricultural products that can be grown while waiting for harvest season, and this includes planting vegetables, connecting them to consumers, and subscribing to other good agricultural practices.

She also mentioned that the Villar family has four farm schools located in the Las Piñas – Bacoor area for Metro Manila, Calabarzon, Mimaropa and Bicol; San Jose Del Monte City, Bulacan for Central, Northern Luzon and Cordillera provinces; San Miguel, Iloilo for Visayas and Davao City for Mindanao.

Villar has also been distributing free vegetable seeds nationwide to be used for home gardening. "This will ensure the availability of affordable and nutritious foods for Filipino families," she said.

"This can also provide livelihood since the products are brought to the market," the senator added during the Harvesting Festival and Farmer's Field School Graduation of the Upscaling of the 'Gulayan sa Palayan at Pagnenegosyo' held in Castillejos, Zambales.

Villar added she also practices organic urban farming in Las Piñas City since 2002. To date, there are 89 composting facilities in almost all the barangays in Las Piñas and 50 in Vista Land and Camella communities nationwide.

A composting machine can produce 1,000 kilos of organic fertilizer per month from kitchen and garden wastes from 500 households in Las Piñas City.

The activity called “Villar Las Piñas Kitchen Wastes Composting Project” won the Energy Globe Award, an international award for environmental sustainability, according to the senator.

It was also recognized as the “World’s Best Environmental Project in 2022” during a ceremony in Austria.

<https://www.manilastandard.net/news/national/314438329/villar-practice-urban-agriculture.html>

Non-tariff barriers lifted to lower prices

By [Kristina Maralit](#) and [Ma. Reina Leanne Tolentino](#)

April 22, 2024

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has directed the Department of Agriculture (DA) to remove non-tariff barriers to bring down rising domestic prices of agricultural products.

The directive was contained in Administrative Order 20, signed on behalf of the President by Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin on April 18.

"It is imperative to further streamline administrative procedures to foster transparency and predictability of policies on the importation of agricultural products in order to help ensure food security, maintain sufficient supply of agricultural goods in the domestic market, and improve local production," Marcos said in the AO.

Non-tariff barriers are policy measures, other than customs tariffs, that restrict trade, including but not limited to quotas, import licensing systems, regulations and red tape.

The President ordered the DA to simplify procedures and requirements in licensing importers, minimize the processing time of application for importation, and exempt licensed traders from submission of registration requirements in coordination with other agencies such as the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Finance.

He has also ordered the DA to facilitate the importation of certain agricultural products beyond the authorized Minimum Access Volume and reduce or remove administrative fees.

The DA must also ease the process of issuing Sanitary and Phytosanitary Import Clearance and find ways to improve logistics, transport, distribution and storage of imported agricultural products.

The Bureau of Customs (BoC) was directed to prioritize the unloading and releasing of imported agricultural products.

The DA, DTI, BoC, Philippine Competition Commission, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of Justice, National Bureau of Investigation, and Philippine National Police will also form a surveillance team led by the DA to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of the circular.

The DA, DTI, DoF, BoC and the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) are to jointly submit a quarterly report on the status of the implementation of the AO to the President through the Office of the Executive Secretary and the Inter-Agency Committee on Inflation and Market Outlook (IAC-IMO).

The IAC-IMO, which was established through Executive Order 28 (series of 2023), is an advisory body of the Economic Development Group on measures that would keep inflation, particularly food and energy, within government targets. Albay Rep. Joey Salceda said AO 20 would make food cheaper.

"Right now, it's very difficult as an honest exporter to sell food to the Philippines," Salceda said in a statement on Sunday.

"The Philippines has among the highest rates of protection for its domestic goods, with a protection level of around 27 percent as a share of farm receipts across all agricultural goods. With such levels of trade protection, we should not be surprised why food is expensive in the country," he said. "Such protection levels also do not directly accrue to the agricultural sectors they are supposed to protect. They also incentivize those who can completely disregard the law or corner domestic trade."

If implemented fully by the DA, the circular "will open sugar imports to direct industrial users. That could end the stagnation of the food manufacturing sector. Right now, sugar prices in the Philippines are the highest in Asean," Salceda said.

The AO will "poke holes in speculative bubbles in the price of fish, which has high levels of non-tariff protection, such as the Certificate of Necessity to Import," he said.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/04/22/news/national/non-tariff-barriers-lifted-to-lower-prices/1942689>

Marcos pumps up drive for zero hunger

By Kristina Maralit

April 22, 2024

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has issued a circular calling for a whole-of-government approach to ensure food security and proper nutrition en route to a country with zero hunger as part of his administration's Philippine Development Plan 2023-2028.



Vendors arrange products in their stalls at the Paco Market in Manila on Sunday, April 21, 2024. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has called for a government-wide approach to improve efforts in eradicating hunger and ensuring food security. PHOTO BY MIKE ALQUINTO

Signed by Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin on behalf of the President on April 19, Memorandum Circular 47 enjoined all government agencies and local government units (LGUs) to support the implementation of the Enhanced Partnership Against Hunger and Poverty (EPAHP) program.

The EPAHP is one of the banner programs of the Task Force on Zero Hunger, which aims to institutionalize efforts to mitigate hunger and promote food and nutrition security by linking community-based

organizations (CBOs) to potential markets and providing credit assistance to support food production, processing and distribution.

Established through Executive Order 10 s. 2020 and amended by EO 27 s. 2023, Task Force Hunger aims to ensure the continued and effective implementation of the EPAHP Program.

The task force provides farm production technologies and extension of services to government-assisted family farms and rural-based organizations, as well as enhances the sustainability of the EPAHP program through the implementation of policies that will engage the private sector and institutionalize mechanisms in LGUs.

It is also directed to adopt Community Participation Procurement to encourage CBOs to participate in the EPAHP Program and construct, repair, and improve irrigation facilities and appurtenant structures in irrigable areas in the countryside.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/04/22/news/national/marcos-pumps-up-drive-for-zero-hunger/1942690>

President Marcos takes steps to address rising food prices by easing agricultural import barriers

- Samuel P. Medenilla
- April 22, 2024
- AMID rising food prices, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. wants to ensure the country's food security by removing non-tariff barriers for agricultural products.
- The chief executive has issued Administrative Order (AO) No. 20, which instructed the Department of Agriculture (DA) to take the lead in streamlining administrative procedures and policies on the importation of agricultural products, and remove non-tariff barriers.
- Malacañang said existing non-tariff barriers—policy measures, other than customs tariffs that restrict trade—have “unduly add to the cost of importation,” which led to the continued increase of domestic prices of agricultural commodities.
- “It is imperative to further streamline administrative procedures to foster transparency and predictability of policies on the importation of agricultural products in order to help ensure food security, maintain sufficient supply of agricultural goods in the domestic market, and improve local production,” Marcos said in the four-page AO, which he issued through Executive Secretary Lucas P. Bersamin.

New guidelines

Within 30 days after AO 20 took effect on April 18, 2024, DA must come out with the guidelines to process the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Import Clearance (SPSIC) within the prescribed period in their Citizen's Charter.

“All SPSIC applications not acted upon within the prescribed period shall be deemed approved pursuant to Section 10 of RA [Republic Act] No. 9485, as amended, provided that all documentary requirements have been submitted and all required fees have been paid as indicated in their Citizen's Charter,” Marcos said in AO 20.

During the said period, the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) will issue new guidelines on the classification or automatic classification of imported sugar as well direct importation of sugar by SRA-registered industrial users, subject to existing laws, rules, and regulations.

By next month, DA will also review and revise its existing quantitative restrictions policies on the importation of frozen fish and fishery/aquatic products for wet markets during closed and off-fishing seasons or during calamities.

The agency will also work with the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) Committee on Tariff and Related Matters to facilitate importation of certain agricultural products beyond the authorized minimum access volume (MAV).

It will also take concrete steps to improve logistics, transport, distribution and storage of imported agricultural products.

The new issuance also tasked the Bureau of Customs (BOC) to prioritize the unloading and release of imported agricultural products subject to the provisions of RA 10863 or the “Customs Modernization and Tariff Act.”

Surveillance team

To ensure effective implementation of AO 20, Marcos sought the reconstitution of a surveillance team to be led by the DA, with the Department of Trade and Industry, BOC, Philippine Competition Commission, the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), Department of Justice (DOJ), the National Bureau of Investigation, and the Philippine National Police (PNP).

The team will monitor importation and distribution of imported agricultural products; prevent price manipulation and other forms of unfair or uncompetitive commercial practices; implement remedial measures to address such unlawful acts; and create guidelines to facilitate information sharing among its members.

The DA, DTI, BOC, SRA and Department of Finance (DOF) are required to submit to the Office of the Executive Secretary and the Inter-Agency Committee on Inflation and Market Outlook (IAC-IMO) quarterly updates on the implementation of AO 20.

Earlier this month, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported inflation quickened to 3.7 percent last month from 3.4 percent in February 2024.

State statisticians attributed the trend to Food and Non-Alcoholic Beverages, which contributed to 76.4 percent overall inflation in March.

Government economic managers and economists are keeping a close watch on the impact of the ongoing El Niño and geopolitical developments such as the war in the Middle East, which can worsen the country's inflation in the upcoming months.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/04/22/marcos-wants-non-tariff-curbs-on-farm-products-out/>

Marcos's AO expected to ease burden of high prices

- Jovee Marie N. de la Cruz
- April 22, 2024

HOUSE Committee on Ways and Means Chairman Joey Sarte Salceda on Sunday welcomed the recent issuance by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. of an Administrative Order (AO) he expects would alleviate the burden of high food prices on Filipino consumers and provide much-needed support to the domestic agricultural sector.

In a statement, Salceda emphasized the necessity of addressing the excessive protectionism prevalent in the Philippines, which significantly contributes to the inflated cost of food items.

“The AO will make food cheaper. Right now, it’s very difficult for an honest exporter to sell food to the Philippines,” the solon said.

With tariffs hovering at around 27 percent of farm receipts across agricultural goods, he said the country boasts one of the highest rates of protection for domestic products.

However, the lawmaker said this protection often fails to benefit the intended beneficiaries—the local agricultural sectors—and instead fosters an environment ripe for exploitation and trade manipulation.

“With such levels of trade protection, we should not be surprised why food is expensive in the country. Such protection levels also do not directly accrue to the agricultural sectors they are supposed to protect. They also incentivize those who can completely disregard the law or corner domestic trade,” Salceda said.

According to the lawmaker, if fully enforced by the Department of Agriculture (DA), the AO promises to dismantle barriers to imports, particularly in critical sectors such as sugar and fish.

“Apart from the RCEF [Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund], there is currently no extant mechanism for directly supporting a domestic sector through tariff revenues. We hurt consumers with high trade barriers, but we also do not support farmers directly with tariff revenues.”

By allowing direct access to sugar imports for industrial use, Salceda said the initiative aims to inject dynamism into the stagnant food manufacturing industry.

Salceda said the Marcos’s AO “is a step in the right direction.”

“If implemented fully by the DA, it will open sugar imports to direct industrial users. That could end the stagnation of the food manufacturing sector. Right now, sugar prices in the Philippines are the highest in ASEAN,” he added.

Salceda believes the AO “will also poke holes in speculative bubbles in the price of fish, which has high levels of non-tariff protection, such as the Certificate of Necessity to Import.”

The solon acknowledged that while tariffs remain an essential tool in regulating trade flows, their utilization must evolve to better serve the interests of both consumers and producers.

To this end, Salceda has introduced House Bill (HB) 2471, which proposes the earmarking of all agricultural tariffs to their respective domestic sectors, saying this innovative approach ensures that tariff revenues directly benefit local farmers and incentivize agricultural productivity.

HB 2471 earmarks all agricultural tariffs directly to their corresponding domestic agricultural sectors, according to the solon.

“Apart from that, we are also preparing to submit a technical working group report on the ‘Livestock, Poultry and Dairy Competitiveness Act.’ The proposal will earmark meat and dairy import tariffs for the domestic sector,” Salceda said. “We are doing something similar for corn.”

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/04/22/marcoss-ao-expected-to-ease-burden-of-high-prices/>

PHL frozen pork inventory declines by 13%

- Rizal Raoul Reyes
- April 22, 2024
- The country's frozen pork inventory fell as deliveries from importers and local hog raisers shrank, according to the latest data from an attached agency of the Department of Agriculture (DA).
- Figures from the National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS) showed that pork in cold storage facilities nationwide as of April 15 slid by 13.5 percent to 51,929.04 metric tons (MT) from last year's 60,060.89 MT.
- The latest pork inventory consisted mostly of imports which dropped by 10 percent to 51,176.09 MT from the previous year's 56,946.74 MT.
- Pig meat from local raisers plunged by 75 percent to 752.95 MT, from the 3,114.15 MT recorded on April 17, 2023.
- On a monthly basis, the latest figure was also lower by more than 13,600 MT from the 65,582.05 MT recorded on March 18.

The Philippines continued to import pork to beef up its supply as African swine fever (ASF) slashed local hog production. The fatal hog disease resulted in the culling of thousands of hogs and crimped output in areas struck by ASF.

From nearly 2.3 million metric tons (MMT) of hogs produced in 2019, when ASF was first detected in the Philippines, data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed that output plunged to 1.696 MMT in 2021, as the disease struck both commercial and backyard farms.

Hog production registered improvements in 2022 and 2023, when it reached 1.737 MMT and 1.793 MMT, respectively. The figures, however, are still lower than the 2019 volume.

Manila had to lower tariffs on pork in its bid to ensure the stable supply of the Filipinos' favorite source of protein.

Aside from the United States and Germany, the country bought imported pork from Spain, which increased its exports to the Philippines by 50 percent last year, according to Euro Pork.

“We are optimistic that it is going to grow this year as Spain is now a major supplier of pork in the Philippines,” Andrea Gonzalez, representative of Euro Pork in the Philippines, told the BusinessMirror in an interview on the sidelines of a recent meat tasting event held at the Bonifacio Global City.

Gonzales also said Portugal is keen on exporting meat products to the Philippines and that EU Pork is now working on making this happen.

NMIS said its latest frozen pork inventory came from accredited commercial and in-house cold storage facilities including slaughterhouses and meat processing plants.

Regions 3, 4-A and the National Capital Region (NCR) accounted for a chunk of the frozen pork inventory during the period.

Data from the NMIS also indicated that the inventory of dressed chicken declined slightly to 51,044.32 MT from the previous year’s 51,130.69 MT.

On a monthly basis, however, dressed chicken inventory fell by nearly 16 percent from the 60,999.33 MT recorded on March 18.

Imports accounted for more than half of the dressed chicken inventory at 34,849.22 MT while deliveries from local raisers reached 16,195.1 MT.

Regions 4-A, 3 and the NCR again accounted for the lion’s share of the dressed chicken inventory recorded on April 15.

NMIS said its data did not include fresh chilled chicken and mechanically deboned meat. Those already in distribution channels were also excluded.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/04/22/phl-frozen-pork-inventory-declines-by-13/>

Davao cacao co-op credits growth to tieup with Landbank

- BusinessMirror
- April 22, 2024
- From its humble beginnings to the success it is now reaping, the growth of the Biao Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Cooperative (Barbco) is deeply rooted in the soil of collective endeavor, resilience, and fruitful partnerships.
- Barbco was established in 1992 by former employees of the defunct Philippine Cocoa States Corp., and initially ventured into the Lakatan banana industry.
- It has since grown into a prominent agriculture player in the region, primarily engaged in cocoa production, marketing, and cocoa liquor and chocolate production. It now has 41 regular members and 215 associate members.
- Their journey, however, was not without challenges. Barbco General Manager Guadalupe Ocial admits that the 200 hectares of land awarded to them as Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs) was a significant opportunity, but needed much work to really establish a productive and sustainable business.
- They needed enough working capital to fuel their growth—and this was where the Land Bank of the Philippines (Landbank) stepped in.

Barbco first turned to Landbank for support during the co-op's early beginnings in the 1992 when they availed funding for Lakatan banana production. This relationship grew over the years and paved the way for their successful venture into the cacao value chain in 2016.

Ocial emphasized the importance of this partnership especially in streamlining the process of securing financial assistance whenever they needed it.

“Because of this long-standing relationship we have with Landbank, it was easier for us to process documents for the assistance we need,” said Ocial.

Today, Barbco's portfolio includes the consolidation and processing of cacao beans into various chocolate products, including tablea, nibs, cacao butter, and powder.

This access to credit and ease of doing business with Landbank has empowered Barbco to expand their reach. What began with cacao bean consolidation solely within Davao City has now extended to Davao del Norte, Davao Occidental, and Davao del Sur.

And the cooperative's success extends beyond financial gains. Barbco serves as a conduit of support from Landbank to its farmer members, ensuring fair compensation for their produce. This commitment to uplifting local farmers has garnered attention even from international food corporations, who now supply cacao beans to Barbco, drawn by the promise of equitable pricing.

“As a cooperative, we are like a channel of the support of Landbank. So whatever we get from Landbank, we provide it to our farmer members by making sure that we give them the best price for their cacao beans,” said Ocial.

Even during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, Barbco stood resilient. Through prudent management and unwavering support, they were able to sustain their workforce, ensuring that employees are properly compensated amid limited operations.

For Ocial, Barbco's success is not measured solely in profits but in the fulfillment of a collective vision. As she reflects on their journey, she underscores the legacy that the co-op aims to leave behind—a legacy of empowerment, shared prosperity, and community upliftment.

“It's a legacy na maiiwan, because I'm not really after my own gain and profit. As long as I can provide for my family, I'm fulfilled. As long as my members and workers are happy and satisfied, then so am I,” she added.

As Barbco continues to sow the seeds of success, their partnership with Landbank remains steadfast—a testament to the transformative power of collaboration in driving inclusive growth and prosperity in the rich agricultural landscape of Davao and beyond.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/04/22/davao-cacao-co-op-credits-growth-to-tieup-with-landbank/>

Lawmaker urges public to practice urban farming

- Butch Fernandez
- April 22, 2024
- Senator Cynthia A. Villar asked Filipino households to turn to “urban agriculture and home gardening” to meet the increasing food demand of a swelling population.
- The senator said she herself had been practicing urban agriculture and home gardening at her residence in Las Piñas City for “instant food supply” at her home.
- As presiding chairperson of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Food, Villar vowed to further “promote urban agriculture and home gardening in the households.”
- *“Mahalaga sa ating mag-papalay ang pagkakaroon ng cash crop habang naghihintay ng pag ani, at ito ay ang pag tatanim ng gulay, pagdikit nito sa mamimili, at pagsunod sa good agricultural practices o GAP.”*
- Moreover, the lawmaker said the Villar family has four farm schools located in Las Piñas-Bacoor; San Jose Del Monte City, Bulacan; San Miguel, Iloilo; and Davao City.

She added that she has also been distributing vegetable seeds nationwide for free to be used for home gardening.

“This will ensure the availability of affordable and nutritious foods for Filipino families. This can also provide livelihood since the products are brought to the market.”

At the same time, the senator recalled that she was also an organic practitioner in Las Piñas City since 2002, noting that “to date, there are 89 composting facilities in almost all the barangays in Las Piñas and 50 in Vista Land and Camella communities nationwide.”

She noted that “a composting machine can produce 1,000 kilos of organic fertilizer per month from kitchen and garden wastes from 500 households in Las Piñas City.”

This activity called “Villar Las Piñas Kitchen Wastes Composting Project” won the Energy Globe Award, an international award for environmental sustainability. She reported it was also recognized as the “World’s Best Environmental Project in 2022” during a ceremony in Austria.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/04/22/lawmaker-urges-public-to-practice-urban-farming/>

World Bank, DA to review rural development projects

- BusinessMirror
- April 22, 2024
- The World Bank (WB) and the Department of Agriculture (DA) will assess the overall implementation performance and progress of two projects that aim to raise agricultural output.
- The DA said in a statement that the 17th WB Implementation Support Mission (ISM) to the Philippine Rural Development Project (PRDP) and the 2nd WB ISM to the PRDP Scale-up will be held from April 22 to May 9.
- Manila initially obtained a loan of \$501.25 million for the PRDP in September 2014. It secured additional funding of \$170 million for the project in March 2018. Last September 2021, the government secured additional financing of \$280 million from WB for the PRDP.
- As for PRDP Scale-up, Manila obtained a loan of \$600 million from the Washington-based multilateral lender last year to finance the project which costs \$818.40 million.
- The DA said the development objective of PRDP is to “increase rural incomes and enhance farm and fishery productivity in targeted areas in all the 16 regions of the country.”

The PRDP will also support reforms in the planning, resource programming and implementation practices of the DA.

For this mission, WB said it will focus on reviewing the projects’ compliance with the agreed actions from the previous mission and evaluate their financial management, disbursement, and procurement.

It also aims to oversee the remaining investments under the Second Additional Financing with European Union Grant and assess the implementation of the Institutional Strengthening Action Plan.

Led by Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. and WB Country Manager Ndiame Diope, the three-week-long mission will commence on April 22 with a kick-off meeting and opening of the DA-PRDP Exhibit at the DA Central Office in

Quezon City. The exhibit will showcase the PRDP's 10-year evolution, major accomplishments, success stories, and the products of its supported rural enterprises.

A series of technical discussions between the WB and the components and units of the PRDP will also take place from April 23 to 26. The discussions will focus on key thematic areas, such as financial management, knowledge management and communication, monitoring and evaluation of subprojects, and mainstreaming of PRDP innovations.

On the second week of the mission, the DA-PRDP and WB will visit I-REAP and I-BUILD subprojects (SPs) in Visayas and Mindanao to inspect their implementation and progress and to engage with the implementing local government units and proponent groups. The team will visit a total of seven subprojects, four in Bohol and three from the Davao Region.

In line with the DA chief's digitization plans for the department, a two-day agriculture digital solutions roundtable discussion with agri-tech and fintech companies will also be held on May 7-8. The activity aims to advance the digitization of the PRDP's enterprise investments and build a robust partnership with the private sector.

The 17th PRDP and 2nd PRDP Scale-Up WB ISM will conclude on May 9 with a wrap-up meeting where the World Bank will present its findings, recommendations, and overall performance rating of the projects.

The WB ISM is conducted semiannually to ensure that all Bank-assisted projects are efficiently implemented and on track to achieving their project development objectives.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/04/22/world-bank-da-to-review-rural-development-projects/>

Ex-BFAR officials face multiple corruption

raps

By **Peter Tabingo**
April 22, 2024

THE Office of the Ombudsman has ordered the filing of multiple graft charges against two former top officials of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and the foreign supplier of P2.1 billion Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) transceivers.

Ombudsman Samuel Martires approved the 25-page resolution for indictment last April 11, the same day that he approved the ruling in a separate administrative case ordering the dismissal from service of BFAR National Director Demosthenes Escoto for grave misconduct relative to the same procurement deal.

Aside from Escoto, also facing four counts of violations of RA 3019, or the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act, are former BFAR director and Agriculture Undersecretary for Fisheries Eduardo Gongona and Simon Tucker of SRT Marine Systems Solutions Ltd., the UK-based firm that won the supply contract.

Ombudsman investigators however cleared respondents DA Assistant Secretary Hansel Didulo and SRT Marine executive Richard Hurd of any liability citing absence of evidence to show that they had actively participated in the anomaly.

The cases stemmed from a complaint filed on March 1, 2022 by lawyer James Mier Victoriano.

Based on the recommendations of Graft Investigation and Prosecution Officer Cezar Tirol II, Escoto, Gongona and Tucker will be charged with two counts of violation of Section 3 (e), one count of violation of Section 3 (g), and one count of violation of Section 3 (j) of RA 3019.

Section 3 (e) penalizes causing undue injury to the government, Section 3 (g) covers contracts or transactions that are deemed “grossly and manifestly disadvantageous” to the government, while Section 3 (j) prohibits the grant of a permit, license, or privilege to any party who is not qualified or not legally entitled to it.

Based on the complaint, former Finance Secretary Cesar Purisima and French Ambassador to the Philippines Therry Mathou signed a Financial Protocol on December 18, 2015 wherein France granted a loan of €28.52 million (euros) to the Philippines to implement the DA-BFAR’s Integrated Marine Environment Monitoring System Project Phase I (PHILO Project).

The project was supposed to “enhance the (Philippine) government’s capability to safeguard and monitor the country’s marine resources and to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing activities.”

Under the agreement, the loan will be paid in 30 years at an interest rate of 0.115 percent per year subject to a condition that the supplier of the equipment must be a French company.

During a bidding in December 2017, two French firms participated, namely the Collecte Localisation Satellites (CLS) and SRT-France, a subsidiary of SRT-United Kingdom that was incorporated in France on November 15, 2017.

The BFAR's Bids and Awards Committee (BAC) disqualified CLS and the contract was awarded to SRT-France.

However, the Economic Department of the French Embassy in the Philippines declared SRT-France unqualified under the terms of the Financial Protocol due to lack of record of any manufacturing or engineering facilities in France.

While the French government notified the Philippines that it is still willing to discuss alternatives, the DA-BFAR instead recommended the closure of the French loan, to source the project funding from foreign assistance to local, and increasing the budget from P1.676 billion to P2.099 billion.

The contract was eventually awarded to SRT-UK .

“Escoto and Gongona, while in the exercise of their official functions as chairman of the BAC, and as head of the procuring entity, respectively, and in conspiracy with Tucker, clearly gave unwarranted benefit or advantage to SRT-France and SRT-UK,” the Ombudsman said.

Even if the contract awarded to SRT-France was eventually recalled, the investigators said unwarranted benefit was already given to it when the DA-BFAR failed to disqualify the firm “despite its ineligibility.”

It added that the other provisions of RA 3019 prohibiting other criminal acts may still apply since giving unwarranted benefit to a party is an element separate from causing undue injury to the government.

“Escoto, Gongona, and Tucker had apparently schemed to ultimately award a contract to SRT-UK that is disadvantageous to the government. The series of events that came prior to the award are circumstantial evidence proving that an irregularity had been committed and they are probably guilty thereof,” the Ombudsman said.

https://malaya.com.ph/news_news/ex-bfar-officials-face-multiple-corruption-raps/

Ban on imports received positively

By **Jed Macapagal**

April 22, 2024

The suspension of the importation of galunggong, bonito and mackerel has been received positively by advocacy groups.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) recently suspended the issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearance for the importation of said fish species after it uncovered imports were diverted to wet markets.

David Villaluz, chairman of the Philippine Association of Fish Producers Inc., said as much as 111,077 metric tons of fish from importation illegally went to wet markets.

“The reality is that the production cost for fish farming is high while the selling price is low.

It is hard for our fish farmers to turn a profit. We only ask for that we earn back our investment. Give us four to five months to recover whatever deficiency there is in production. We have so many empty cages. If we can use these cages, we can produce the country’s fish requirement in four to five months, even go beyond,” Villaluz said in an online meeting last week.

https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/ban-on-imports-received-positively/

Sugar output seen flat

By **Jed Macapagal**
April 22, 2024

Raw sugar production for the next crop year is expected to be flat as some farms with no irrigation due to El Niño which stunts growth, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) said.

Although more farmers have planted sugarcane due to high prices, USDA in a report dated April 18, 2024 said Philippine production of raw sugar from September 2024 to August 2025 will reach 1.85 million metric tons (MT), same as the estimated production from September 2023 until August 2024.

The USDA said Negros Occidental which is one of the top sugar producers is also among the 25 provinces experiencing drought as reported by the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration.

The USDA said consumption for the coming crop year is about the same, at 2.2 million MT, due to high prices.

The report said the Philippines may not import any raw sugar for the next crop year due to high carryover stocks from importations in previous crop years.

The USDA also expects the Philippines to fulfill its 2024 US sugar exports under the tariff rate quota allocation of 25,300 MT. The Sugar Regulatory Administration has yet to issue a Sugar Order for such exports.

https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/sugar-output-seen-flat/

Soy, corn futures rally

By Reuters

April 22, 2024

CHICAGO- US corn and soybean prices rose on Friday as heightened geopolitical tensions spurred a round of bargain buying after the benchmark contracts in both markets fell to their lowest levels in more than six weeks, traders said.

Corn futures drew additional support from news that the US Environmental Protection Agency will temporarily expand sales of higher-ethanol blends of gasoline this summer.

Chicago Board of Trade July corn settled up 6-3/4 cents at \$4.43 per bushel. July soybeans ended up 16-3/4 cents at \$11.65-3/4 a bushel, rallying after a dip to \$11.45-3/4, the contract's lowest level since Feb. 29. CBOT July wheat finished up 13-3/4 cents at \$5.66-3/4 a bushel.

Analysts said traders were squaring positions ahead of the weekend and after recent declines. Despite Friday's higher close, July corn finished the week down 0.95 percent, July soybeans declined 1.8 percent and July wheat fell 0.7 percent.

Corn drew strength from an announcement by the EPA that it would widen the summertime sales period for gasoline containing higher blends of corn-based ethanol in an effort to reduce potential supply disruptions amid ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East.

https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/soy-corn-futures-rally/

ABANTE TONITE

PBBM pinabilisan import permit sa mga produktong agrikultura

- Abante Tonite
- April 21, 2024

Inatasan ni Pangulong Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. ang tatlong ahensiya ng pamahalaan na alisin ang non-tariff barriers sa importasyon ng mga produktong agrikultura upang masiguro ang suplay nito at matugunan ang patuloy na pagtaas ng presyo ng mga biling sa bansa.

Sa ilalim ng Administrative Order No. 20 na pinirmahan ni Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin, inatasan ang Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) at Department of Finance (DOF) na alisin ang mga balakid sa mga hindi binubuwisang mga produkto at gawing simple ang mga proseso at polisiya para sa importasyon ng mga produktong agrikultura.

“It is imperative to further streamline administrative procedures to foster transparency and predictability of policies on the importation of agricultural products in order to help ensure food security, maintain sufficient supply of agricultural goods in the domestic market, and improve local production,” sabi ng Pangulo.

Alinsunod sa kanyang direktiba, gagawing simple ang mga proseso sa pagkuha ng lisensiya ng mga importer, bawasan ang processing time ng aplikasyon at exempted ang mga lisensiyadong trader sa pagsusumite ng registration requirements.

Inatasan din ang Bureau of Customs (BOC) na bigyan ng prayoridad ang pagdiskarga at pagpapalabas ng imported agricultural products, alinsunod sa mga probisyon ng Customs Modernization and Tariff Act (CMTA).

Nakapaloob din sa AO 20 na muling buhayin ang surveillance team ng gobyerno para subaybayan ang importasyon at distribusyon ng mga imported na agricultural products at mapigilan ang manipulasyon ng presyo at iba pang uri ng panlalamang ng mga negosyante.

Kabilang sa mga bubuo ng surveillance team ay mula sa DA, DTI, BOC, Philippine Competition Commission, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of Justice, National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) at Philippine National Police. (Aileen Taliping/Prince Golez)

<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2024/04/21/pbbm-pinabilisan-import-permit-sa-mga-produktong-agrikultura/>

Presyo ng bigas sumirit sa P2 kada kilo – DA

[Doris Franche-Borja](#)

April 22, 2024 | 12:00am



Rice dealers display rice and their prices at New York Street, Cubao, Quezon City on April 16, 2023.

MANILA, Philippines — Kinumpirma ng Department of Agriculture (DA) ang pagtataas ng P2 kada kilo sa presyo ng regular at well-milled rice.

Ayon kay Agriculture Assistant Secretary at spokesman Arnel De Mesa, kumpara sa nakaraang presyuhang ng bigas na P50-P51 kada kilo, pumapalo na ito ngayon ng P51-P52 kada kilo.

Sinabi ni De Mesa na inaalam na nila ang dahilan ng pagtaas ng presyo dahil nasa harvest season pa rin kaya dapat ay mas mababa ang presyo kada kilo ng bigas.

Ani De Mesa, bagama't hindi malaki ang itinaas, kailangan na matukoy kung bakit nagkakaroon ng pagtataas. Nakikipag-ugnayan na rin sila sa National Food Authority at iba pang ahensiya ng gobyerno upang maresolba ang isyu.

Lumilitaw sa monitoring ng DA, ang retail price ng local regular rice ay nasa P48 at P52 per kilo; local well-milled rice, P48 at P55 per kilo; local premium rice, P51 at P58 per kilo at local special rice, P57 at 67 kada kilo.

Naglalaro naman sa P48 at P51 ang imported regular; P50 at P58 kada kilo sa imported well milled; P50 at 62 kada kilo sa imported premium rice, habang P56 at P64 per kilo ang imported special rice.

Dagdag pa ni De Mesa, sa pagtaya ng United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) posibleng bumaba ang total importation ng Pilipinas sa 3.9 million metric tons (MT) mula sa dating 4.1 million MT.

Indikasyon lamang na inaasahan ang magandang anihan sa kabila ng dinanas na El Niño at pag-ulan sa bansa.

May maayos na irrigation sa Central Luzon at produksiyon ng palay.

Samantala, sinabi pa ni De Mesa na itinutulak ni Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu-Laurel Jr. ang P250 billion budget sa 2025 upang maipatupad ang four-year plan para sa agriculture sector.

<https://www.philstar.com/pilipino-star-ngayon/bansa/2024/04/22/2349485/presyo-ng-bigas-sumirit-sa-p2-kada-kilo-da>