

CLIPPINGS FOR APRIL 28, 2024

MANILA BULLETIN:

Clamping down on bureaucratic red tape

BY SENATOR SONNY ANGARA

Apr 28, 2024 00:09 AM

BETTER DAYS



Over the years the country has done a lot to improve its internal processes as part of its efforts to bring in more investments. We continuously introduce new policies and pass new laws to support these efforts, specifically to streamline the procedures for doing business in the country. We constantly make public pronouncements about the Philippines being open for business and this has been echoed by every administration.

This is all well and good but we occasionally shoot ourselves in the foot with the persistent complaints about bureaucratic red tape. This has long been an issue raised by investors in the Philippines, who consistently cite the number of permits required to start a business and the amount of time it takes to secure these permits. We recently heard about the statements made by the German Ambassador to the Philippines Andreas Pfaffernoschke about red tape being the biggest

hindrance for foreign businesses to expand their investments in the Philippines. The Ambassador echoed the frustration of the business community in the Philippines about needing to secure several permits and the multiple layers of government units involved in getting these permits. Worst of all, he said there is corruption in this process.

In the last two decades, we have seen improvements in dealing with the issue of red tape. This includes the passage of Republic Acts 9485 or the Anti-Red Tape Act (ARTA) and 11032 or the Ease of Doing Business (EODB) Act. We were among the authors of both laws, which aimed at speeding up government transactions. ARTA instituted the no-noon break policy, no fixing activities, easy-to-read IDs or nameplates, presence of public assistance and complaints desks, and the implementation of the agency's Citizen's Charter which contains the types of frontline services offered with the step-by-step procedure, the person responsible for each step, time needed to transact, documents required, and fees. The EODB, on the other hand, puts in place the "3-7-20" rule, which requires government offices to complete simple transactions within three days, complex ones within seven days, and highly technical ones within 20 days.

More recently, with the enactment of Republic Act 11981 or the Tatak Pinoy (Proudly Filipino) Act, the efforts to eliminate red tape would be enhanced. This provision covers all of government—from the national government agencies, their regional and provincial offices, government owned and controlled corporations, quasi-judicial bodies, other government instrumentalities, and local government units that are involved in the issuance of permits, licenses, certifications or authorizations for Tatak Pinoy investments. Under the law, green lanes will be established within the concerned offices in order to expedite and streamline the processes and requirements for the issuance of permits and other documents. An export green lane facility will also be established for qualified exporters for advanced processing and clearances of their export requirements, including the importation of critical raw materials and capital equipment under the Bureau of Customs, Food and Drug Administration, and other regulatory authorities.

We welcome the commitment of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to confront the issue of red tape head on. In February of 2023, the President issued Executive Order No. 18, calling for the establishment of green lanes for strategic investments. On April 18, 2024, the President issued Administrative Order No. 20, directing the Department of Agriculture to further streamline administrative procedures and policies on the importation of agricultural products and to remove non-tariff barriers to help ensure food security.

The common goal here in working to reduce or eliminate red tape, is to make it easier for entrepreneurs to invest or do business in the country and to ensure the faster delivery of service to our people. We cannot afford to continue losing out to our ASEAN neighbors, particularly Indonesia and Vietnam, who have seen strong growth over the past decade. A lot of their success in drawing investments is based on their commitment to provide a business-friendly environment that includes streamlined regulations and the provision of incentives.

We have a lot to offer to investors. We have a very skilled and hardworking workforce, an abundance of resources and a strategic location. Some of the biggest companies in the world who have done business with us can attest to this. It's all about encouraging more of them to take a look in our direction and we can only do this by becoming as competitive and welcoming as our

neighbors. Eliminating the tedious processes and requirements for doing business here will go a long way in achieving this. (Email: sonnyangara@yahoo.com| Facebook, Twitter & Instagram: @sonnyangara)

(Senator Sonny Angara has been in public service for 19 years — nine years as representative of the lone district of Aurora, and 10 as senator. He has authored, co-authored, and sponsored more than 330 laws. He is currently serving his second term in the Senate.)

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/4/28/clamping-down-on-bureaucratic-red-tape>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Philippines working with US to thwart threat from weapons of mass destruction

BY MARTIN SADONGDONG

Apr 28, 2024 05:47 AM



Dr. Robert Pope, director of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency's Cooperative Threat Reduction (DTRA-CTR) Program, speaks to the Philippine media in Arlington, Virginia, United States on April 23, 2024. (Photo by Martin A. Sadongdong / MANILA BULLETIN)

The national government is collaborating with the United States defense department to build up its capabilities to prevent, reduce, and counter weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) in case they are used in a crisis or conflict.

A weapon of mass destruction is a nuclear, radiological, chemical, biological, or other device that is intended to harm a large number of people, according to the US Department of Homeland Security.

Through the US Department of Defense (DoD), the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) seeks to work with foreign partners to "consolidate, secure, and eliminate WMD-related systems and materials; and detect and interdict WMD-related trafficking or outbreaks of high threat pathogens."

“We want to do things that will deter weapons of mass destruction attacks against the United States and our allies like the Philippines. We work to prevent, reduce, powder weapons of mass destruction threats around the world, and we help our partners to be prepared to prevail in the case that weapons of mass destruction are used in a crisis or conflict,” Dr. Robert Pope, director of the

DTR Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) Program, said in an interview with Filipino journalists in Arlington, Virginia last week.

Pope sounded alarm over the increased vulnerability of the Philippines to WMD attacks, including potential exposure to biological threats due to its hot weather.

“My sense in the Philippines is, [having] a tropical climate, there are a lot of diseases, both human and zoonotic that can go from animals to humans,” he said.

To build up the capabilities of the Philippines to address biosecurity risks, the DTRA has conducted a live agent training for members of the Bureau of Fire Protection’s (BFP) Special Rescue Unit in Czech Republic in 2019 where the participants were trained how to prepare for and respond to chemical, biological, radiological/nuclear (CBRN) incidents.

The DTRA has also been holding international training workshops and courses for different Philippine government agencies such as the Department of Health (DOH) and Department of Agriculture (DA) in Manila to prevent, detect, and prepare for outbreaks caused by disease-causing pathogens.

The DTRA also built a Regional Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory facility in Cagayan Valley (Region 2) which was used in the early detection of an anthrax outbreak in late 2020 to early 2023, preventing the spread of the disease to the region’s carabao population and possibly to the human population.

Cory Erff, project manager of the DTRA’s Biological Threat Reduction Program, said that a biological threat to the Philippines can come in the form of a biological weapon from an accidental leak of a disease-causing pathogen out of a laboratory, or from a natural outbreak “like we've all experienced with COVID-19.”

“It's important to the Philippines, in the region, and us back here, to be able to have that effective capability across the Philippines, to see those diseases that circulate in a tropical climate and be able to do that accurate and early diagnosis and reporting so we can see outbreaks,” he said.

“Whether it's swine fever, influenza, anthrax, we need to help each other and detect it early so they don't become a large pandemic,” he added.

Chemical security, proliferation prevention

Aside from this, the DTRA is also helping the Philippines in securing and eliminating chemical weapons, precursors, and toxic industrial chemicals.

In April last year, the DTRA, through the Chemical Security and Elimination (CSE) Program, conducted several workshops on chemical transportation security with the Philippines where they completed a handbook on how to conduct security risk assessments and mitigation processes.

The DTRA worked with the Department of Trade and Industry to develop a strategic trade e-licensing platform that manages the registration and authorization of dual-use and other strategic goods. The tool helps strengthen the country’s export trade controls.

It also assists the Philippines in improving the government's capacity to prevent the trafficking of WMDs and WMD-related materials into the country through its Proliferation Prevention Program (PPP), an initiative that started in 2012.

The DTRA also installed equipment, radars, and cameras to enhance the surveillance capabilities of the National Coast Watch System (NCWS) and National Maritime Center (NMC), two inter-agency mechanisms focused on the establishment of a coordinated and coherent approach on maritime issues and maritime security operations in the country.

“It's important for all of us to care about security in the Southeast Asia region,” Pope concluded.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/4/28/philippines-working-with-us-to-thwart-threat-from-weapons-of-mass-destruction>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Overhauling DA agencies unnecessary following NFA, BFAR suspensions—Laurel

BY JEL SANTOS

Apr 28, 2024 03:36 PM



There is no need for a significant overhaul within the agencies of the Department of Agriculture (DA) following recent rulings by the Office of the Ombudsman that resulted in the removal of heads of the National Food Authority (NFA) and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR).

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DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said on Sunday, April 28, that the effect of the Ombudsman order are “isolated” cases.

“The former NFA administrator’s case happened early this year while the case of director Escoto happened in 2017,” Laurel said in a statement.

In March, the Ombudsman directed the preventive suspension of former NFA administrator Roderico Bioco and several other officials of the grains agency, citing alleged detrimental transactions involving the sale of rice buffer stocks. Similarly, BFAR Director Demosthenes

Escoto faced dismissal over purported "grave misconduct" linked to the bidding process for a vessel monitoring systems contract.

Laurel characterized the timing of the Ombudsman's directives as unfortunate, given their consecutive issuance.

According to Laurel, the order removing Escoto, who was earlier assigned to head the review of the disposition of NFA rice buffer stocks in recent years, shouldn't have a major impact on the investigation which should be completed in the coming weeks.

Assuring continuity in operations, the DA chief said that both the NFA and BFAR are functioning normally. He highlighted the appointment of Larry Lacson as the acting NFA administrator and the designation of Isidro Velayo Jr. as the officer-in-charge of BFAR's technical services as evidence of the agencies' continued functionality.

Lacson, who served as director of the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) from July 2009 to August 2010, has been appointed as officer-in-charge of the NFA following a controversy that hit the agency over rice buffer stock. He was unanimously chosen by the NFA Council.

It is worth noting that Lacson is the second OIC appointed by the NFA Council this year after the Ombudsman suspended former NFA OIC Piolito Santos on March 12. He was suspended over his alleged links to the "improper sale" of NFA rice buffer stocks.

On April 17, Laurel announced that he had appointed Velayo as the OIC of the BFAR after the Ombudsman dismissed Escoto.

Laurel's marching order to Velayo is to ensure that the operations of the agency "will not be affected by this legal development."

Citing the order of the Ombudsman, the DA said Escoto was found guilty of grave misconduct in a graft case arising from BFAR's procurement of communications equipment in 2018.

https://mb.com.ph/2024/4/28/overhauling-da-agencies-unnecessary-following-nfa-bfar-suspensions-laurel#google_vignette

MANILA BULLETIN:

After extreme hot weather, Escudero urges gov't to prepare for La Niña

BY HANNAH TORREGOZA

Apr 28, 2024 02:02 PM

Senator Francis “Chiz” Escudero on Sunday, April 28 called on the government to start preparations for the impending shift to La Niña.

Escudero said it is imperative that the government starts taking proactive measures in anticipation of the weather phenomenon to safeguard vulnerable communities and mitigate potential risks.

Earlier, the country’s weather bureau, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA), raised an “increasing probability” of La Niña developing later this year.

The La Niña phenomenon, characterized by cooler sea surface temperatures and above-normal rainfall, demands comprehensive programs and early interventions to protect vulnerable sectors and ensure climate resilience, the senator noted.

“By acting now, we can better navigate the challenges posed by changing climate patterns and protect vulnerable communities and sectors, especially our farmers and fisherfolk,” Escudero said.

According to PAGASA, La Niña has a 55-percent chance of developing in the next six months. The last La Niña in the country lasted for three straight years, from September 2020 until early 2023, according to the weather bureau.

In this regard, Escudero reiterated his call for a responsible allocation of calamity funds as the nation grapples currently with El Niño and preparing for the impending La Niña weather phenomenon.

"Since the calamity funds can be legally spent to prepare for a calamity and not just for the actual calamity when it is there, let's prepare for La Niña. Apart from that, we will still be hit by several more typhoons that PAGASA estimates will be five to 10 more typhoons within the year," he stressed.

At the same time, Escudero said the Department of Agriculture (DA) should ensure the provision of aid to farmers and fisherfolk whose livelihood had been affected by the El Niño disturbance.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/4/28/after-extreme-hot-weather-escudero-urges-gov-t-to-prepare-for-la-nina-1>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Philippines aggressively pushing free trade deal with US

[Iris Gonzales](#) - The Philippine Star

April 28, 2024 | 12:00am



Ceferino Rodolfo

STAR / File

Despite Washington's focus on November's presidential elections

NEW YORK – The Philippines continues to aggressively push for a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) with the US, according to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

Manila wants to be the first in line when Washington is ready to return to the negotiating table to discuss traditional FTAs again.

While the FTA may not be a priority of the US this year because of its upcoming presidential elections in November, Trade Undersecretary Ceferino Rodolfo said the Philippines continues to lobby for such an agreement.

“We have not seen the US embark on an FTA during or close to an election year but despite that historical record, we continue to push for it,” Rodolfo said during a press briefing at the Philippine Center New York.

But the Philippines isn’t giving up and remains very hopeful on having an FTA with the US, said Rodolfo.

“It’s just that (with) their political dynamics, it will be difficult (for now),” he said.

Nonetheless, there is strong support for the FTA from American businesses including members of the US Chamber of Commerce, the world’s largest business organization, Rodolfo said.

“Even (among) congressional delegations that have been visiting the Philippines, who are members of Congress and who have been discussing it, there is strong support for the FTA,” he told visiting Filipino journalists who are part of the US State Department’s inaugural Friends, Partners, Allies program for journalists.

Philippine products exported to the US such as garments, electronics and agriculture will significantly benefit from having an FTA with the US.

The Biden administration, however, has recently been more focused on the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) instead of the traditional FTAs.

Just the same, the Philippines is also looking forward to the full implementation of the IPEF, Rodolfo said.

The IPEF, launched in 2022, provides a framework for trade in the Indo-Pacific region, which is a key source of raw materials for US manufacturers as well as a key export market for American-made products.

In April 2023, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said an FTA between the Philippines and the US was not on the table as the Biden administration deemed the IPEF as more appropriate for the prevailing challenges and opportunities in the trade arena.

Tai said then that simply liberalizing trade made the environment vulnerable even though it made trade easier.

The IPEF aims to address specific trade challenges compared to the traditional FTA, which liberalized trade but had created vulnerabilities in the supply chain.

The program has four pillars namely: connected economy (select trade issues), resilient economy (supply chains), clean economy (clean energy, decarbonization), infrastructure and fair economy (tax, anti-corruption issues).

IPEF has made significant progress since its launch with the entry into force of the supply chains agreement and the conclusion of the clean economy and fair economy agreements.

Aside from the US, other partners under IPEF are Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines.

While waiting for the FTA, Rodolfo said the Philippines is pushing for the renewal of the US Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), the largest and oldest US trade preference program.

The GSP expired in 2020 but Philippine Ambassador to the US Jose Manuel Romualdez said a bill to renew the GSP would likely hurdle US Congress before the end of the year.

Rodolfo said the revival of the US GSP is important for the Philippines given that the US is the country's top export market, and is an important market across many industries.

Export Market Bureau director Bianca Sykimte said the Philippines' utilization of the GSP is at 70 percent.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/04/28/2350900/philippines-aggressively-pushing-free-trade-deal-us>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

CA ruling vs GMOs may impact food security – DA

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

April 28, 2024 | 12:00am



“The government’s legal team, led by the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG), is exploring legal remedies in relation to the subject CA order, which could have significant implications for the country’s food security,” the DA said.

Photo courtesy of Sibalom Municipal Agriculture Office

MANILA, Philippines — The decision of the Court of Appeal (CA) against the propagation of Bt talong and golden rice would have “significant” implications on the country’s food security, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

“The government’s legal team, led by the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG), is exploring legal remedies in relation to the subject CA order, which could have significant implications for the country’s food security,” the DA said.

Pending the insights from the OSG, the DA opted to refrain from commenting and providing further details regarding the ruling of the appellate court.

The CA recently granted a writ of kalikasan to the Magsasaka at Siyentipiko para sa Pag-unlad Agrikultura, Greenpeace Southeast Asia-Philippines and other environmental groups, citing potential risks of the two genetically modified crops to the environment and public health.

A writ of kalikasan is a legal remedy that safeguards people from environmental hazards that threaten life, health or property across two or more municipalities.

The CA issued a cease and desist order and directed the University of the Philippines-Los Baños and the Philippine Rice Research Institute to stop the commercial propagation of golden rice and Bt eggplant.

Bruce Tolentino, a member of the Monetary Board of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, earlier said the CA decision is a “step backward for the Philippines.”

Tolentino said the appellate court’s decision would have “serious negative impact” on the country’s efforts to attain nutrition security and improve domestic crops.

He said the judiciary should not overstep its authority on genetically modified organisms or GMOs as regulations on biotechnology must be left to scientists and pertinent regulators.

“In the same way as scientists ought not to venture into matters of law, then the judiciary should respect scientists and their work,” Tolentino, former DA undersecretary and deputy director-general of the International Rice Research Institute, said.

“Unfortunately, the (CA’s) decision was based on fear of science and misplaced populism,” he added.

Greenpeace earlier welcomed the CA’s decision, noting it was a “monumental win” for Filipinos, including farmers, who opposed GMOs.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/04/28/2350897/ca-ruling-vs-gmos-may-impact-food-security-da>

MANILA STANDARD

Romualdez, Tingog solons distribute cash to farmers

By Maricel Cruz

April 27, 2024, 10:30 pm

A total of 2,044 farmers from the municipality of San Miguel, Leyte were given cash aid worth more than P10 million Friday as part of a program seeking to aid struggling farmers under the Marcos administration.

Officials of the offices from Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez and Tingog Partylist of Reps. Yedda K. Romualdez and Jude Acidre, and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) led the distribution of financial aid worth P5,000 for each of the farmer-beneficiaries in San Miguel under the Farmers' Assistance for Recovery and Modernization (FARM) Program.

“This program is part of the directive of our beloved President Bongbong Marcos Jr. for the government to reach out to sectors that need support especially if many of them are poor,” said Romualdez, leader of the 300-plus-strong House of Representatives.

“Your government knows the hardship you are facing, especially this El Niño season where all crops are affected. So may this aid ease your suffering and help you recover in the coming seasons,” he added.

The distribution was undertaken at the San Miguel Municipal Gymnasium, with Mayor Norman Sabdao and SB Leticia Asis Espos present during the ceremony.

The FARM program is an initiative of Speaker Romualdez designed to lower the price of rice by utilizing and maximizing existing government interventions available to farmers.

The financial aid to San Miguel farmers, which totaled P10.22 million, was sourced from the Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situations (AICS) of the DSWD.

Romualdez said that based on studies, prices of basic commodities increase if the price of rice increases.

The FARM Program not only provides assistance to farmers, but also to address the National Food Authority's (NFA) predicament in accomplishing its mandate to increase its buffer stock, which can be used in case of emergencies as the farmer-beneficiaries are encouraged to sell at least 100 kilos of their rice harvest to the NFA.

“We established this program so the government can reciprocate your heroism in helping millions of Filipino families put food on the table. Para kay Pangulong Marcos Jr., mahalaga po ang bawat Pilipino at kasama kayong lahat doon (For President Marcos Jr., every Filipino is important and that includes all of you),” Romualdez said.

<https://www.manilastandard.net/news/314440473/romualdez-tingog-solons-distribute-cash-to-farmers.html>

MANILA STANDARD

Senate on track to pass 20 priority laws before 2nd regular session ends

By Macon Ramos-Araneta April 28, 2024, 11:24 am

Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri is confident that his chamber will pass 20 new laws before the second regular session of the 19th Congress concludes in June, with the possibility of delivering all their legislative commitments by the end of the year.

Zubiri said the Senate is right on track in its approval of President Marcos' priority measures, as indicated in the Legislative Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC) and in his last State of the Nation Address (SONA).

“We will focus all our energies on these 20 measures before we adjourn for the 3rd Regular Session,” according to the Senate chief. “But we are confident we can fulfill all of our legislative commitments to the President and to the people before this year ends,” he added.

“Rest assured, all of the measures that passed Senate scrutiny have been carefully considered and thoroughly deliberated upon so that the resulting law is as near-perfect as humanly possible,” Zubiri said further.

Zubiri disclosed that one of the priority legislations—the Philippine Ecosystem and Natural Capital Accounting System (PENCAS) Act—is already for signature by the President when the sessions resume this Monday, April 29.

PENCAS Act is a framework that accounts for the country's natural capital and its economic impact.

Zubiri also related that the bicameral report on two measures have already been ratified and now in the process of enrolment. These are the Philippine Maritime Zones Act and the law establishing the Negros Island Region.

Another bicameral report, the one on the Real Property Valuation and Assessment Reform Act, has also been ratified by the Senate.

“Four of the 20 measures are nearing enactment into law already. The rest are for bicameral committee approval, for second and final reading approval, or awaiting committee approval. We are confident we can finish deliberations on these bills in its final stages before we adjourn sine die on May 24,” Zubiri said.

Two priority measures—the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act and the Self-Reliant Defense Posture Act (SRDP)—are both awaiting bicameral conference committee approval, while the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program Act is already approved on final reading and was transmitted to the House of Representatives for action.

The following priority measures, meanwhile, are currently pending approval on second reading:

1. Anti-Financial Accounts Scamming Act
2. VAT on Digital Services/Transactions Act
3. Amendments to the Government Procurement Reform Act
4. Blue Economy Act
5. Waste-to-Energy Act
6. Mandatory Reserve Officer’s Training Corps (ROTC) Act
7. Unified System of Separation, Retirement and Pension of MUPs/New Separation, Retirement and Pension System for the Military and Uniformed Personnel
8. Enterprise Based Education and Training (EBET) Program Act
9. Amendments to the Universal Health Care Act

Three of the priority measures—the E-Government/E-Governance Act, the Department of Water Resources Act and the Konektadong Pinoy Act—are all pending committee approval.

The Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises Maximize Opportunities for Reinvigorating the Economy (CREATE MORE) Bill, which was passed on third and final

reading in the House of Representatives, has already been transmitted to the Senate for proper action.

<https://www.manilastandard.net/news/314440573/senate-on-track-to-pass-20-priority-laws-before-2nd-regular-session-ends.html>

MANILA STANDARD

Where a fishpond used to be



A fishpond owner walks on his dried up pond in Laur, Nueva Ecija on Saturday, April 27, 2024, amid the El Niño phenomenon. The scorching heat has resulted in a staggering P4.39 billion in damage to the country's agricultural sector. Danny Pata

By Danny Pata

April 28, 2024, 12:50 am

A fishpond owner walks on his dried up pond in Laur, Nueva Ecija on Saturday, April 27, 2024, amid the El Niño phenomenon. The scorching heat has resulted in a staggering P4.39 billion in damage to the country's agricultural sector.

<https://manilastandard.net/gallery/news-in-photos/314440557/where-a-fishpond-used-to-be.html>

THE MANILA TIMES

Kadiwa ng Pangulo to distribute Piña rice nationwide

By Arlie O. Calalo

April 28, 2024

MANILA, Philippines: The Kadiwa ng Pangulo will start distributing nationwide thousands of bags of Piña rice brand following the arrival of 192,000 25-kilo bags on board the vessel M/V Seagull 09.

Jomerito "Jojo" Soliman, chief executive officer and general manager of Sta. Rosa Farm and PureRice Milling and Processing Corporation, said in a statement that two vessels loaded with the Piña rice have been declared at the Bureau of Customs (BoC) for the payment of duties of about P96 million.



Piña rice sold at P39 per kilo during the Kadiwa ng Pangulo caravan at Quezon City hall recently. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The imported rice was inspected by the Department of Agriculture and security officials.

Soliman lauded the concerned agencies involved in the processing of the rice importation.

"I really appreciate how efficient personnel from the BoC, DA, the PNP and the National Security office are in doing their job," he said.

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"I really appreciate how efficient personnel from the BoC, DA, the PNP and the National Security office are in doing their job," he said.

"We are hoping that from these new shipments, more cities and provinces will be reached by the Kadiwa ng Pangulo project so that more Filipinos can buy rice at a much lower price," Soliman said.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/04/28/news/kadiwa-ng-pangulo-to-distribute-pia-rice-nationwide/1943733>

Catanduanes farmers get training in identifying abaca diseases, viruses to help sustain the industry

- Maradika Ysiaba M. Ramos | S&T Media Service
- April 28, 2024
- Abaca farmers from Catanduanes found renewed hope through a training program about the plant's disease and virus detection.
- Twenty-one farmers attended the training organized by the Department of Science and Technology-National Research Council of the Philippines (DOST-NRCP). It was led by Dr. Leny Galvez, research and development leader (RDL) of the Catanduanes State University (CatSU).
- Hosted by CatSU's Abaca Technology and Innovation Center (CatSu-ATIC), the five-day training equipped the farmers with know-how to identify and combat diseases and viruses that threaten their abaca crops.
- It aimed to provide abaca farmers with innovative techniques to improve the quality of their products and diversify the abaca industry, ensuring its continued success on a national and international scale.
- Abaca, also known as Manila hemp, is a vital commercial crop and a source of pride for Catanduanes.
- However, its future is at stake due to the combined challenges of low market prices and diseases. Sustaining the industry requires ongoing support from the government and the community.
- The financial struggles, combined with the threat of abaca diseases, are devastating the industry.
- These factors discourage farmers to plant the crop, making them shift to a more sustainable livelihood sources, such as fishing and farming of rice and other crops.
- The CatSU-ATIC, a collaborative project between CatSU and DOST V, was established to address these issues.
- The training program provided the farmers essential agricultural practices, such as abaca varietal identification, exploring the plant's germplasm, and characterization.
- It also gave them the ability to identify potential threats that could jeopardize the quality of their hand-stripped abaca fiber production.

- This was made when Galvez conducted the training on abaca germplasm collection, conservation, and identification.
- She demonstrated the collection of abaca specimens and the use of IMBL-LAMP kit for disease detection.
- Following the theoretical instruction, the participants engaged in actual testing of abaca samples using the kit. The practical session allowed them to directly observe the color-based results and apply their newly acquired knowledge.
- Galvez provided a detailed explanations of the test results, carefully unpacking the meaning behind each color and the corresponding abaca disease.
- The interpretations helped the participants’—students, farmers and faculty of CatSU—in understanding and equipped them to accurately diagnose future abaca concerns in their respective fields.
- With the new knowledge, the farmers are expected to be able to protect their livelihood and contribute to the sustainability of the province’s abaca industry.
- “They [farmers] no longer provide hand-stripped abaca because the market price is very low. Sometimes they require us to provide a share, and this leads to business loss and abaca wastage, then there is additional factor—abaca diseases. That’s why we’re grateful for this training led by the DOST-NRCP and Dr. Leny [Galvez],” said Gabriel Valenzuela, one of the farmer-participants.
- Valenzuela expressed his gratitude for the training program. He highlighted the challenges faced by abaca farmers. Besides the low market price, the additional costs demanded by some buyers have led to significant losses and discouragement among farmers.
- The training also involved the participation of representatives from DOST V and DOST-NRCP, and Philippine Fiber Industry Development Authority.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/04/28/catanduanes-farmers-get-training-in-identifying-abaca-diseases-viruses-to-help-sustain-the-industry/>

BUSINESS MIRROR

US supports expansion of responsible, sustainable seafood sourcing in Iloilo

- BusinessMirror
- April 28, 2024



USAID Mission Director Ryan Washburn joins local government officials, private sector partners, and members of the fishing community at the event marking USAID's Responsible Seafood Sourcing Program for blue swimming crabs in Iloilo City.

The Philippines is a major exporter of blue swimming crab. It is the second largest exporter of this species to the United States.

However, there is a need for a responsible seafood sourcing to reduce unregulated fishing and promote sustainability.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Philippines, with its Mission Director Ryan Washburn, joined Philippine government and private sector partners for the expansion of the agency's Responsible Seafood Sourcing Program for blue swimming crabs in Iloilo City on April 18.

The program will strengthen the domestic market for responsibly sourced seafood and reduce illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing in the province.

“Through the responsible seafood sourcing program, businesses can consistently provide quality seafood products while ensuring the health of the marine environment

and supporting the livelihoods of local fishing communities,” Washburn said at an event attended by representatives of the local government of Iloilo, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), and the local

Under its Fish Right Program, USAID and BFAR will work with the local community, the private sector, and government partners to develop direct market linkages between fishers, hotels, restaurants, and supermarkets.

This aims to grow the local market for responsibly-caught blue swimming crabs, create livelihoods for fisherfolk, and incentivize sustainable fishing practices.

USAID’s work with BFAR and the private sector to expand responsible seafood sourcing in Iloilo connects fishers to Philippine seafood businesses, buyers, distributors and communities, and improves the transparency of the seafood supply chains.

Through USAID’s support, crab fishers from Igon Island are now able to supply whole chilled crabs to the Courtyard by Marriott Hotel in Iloilo City.

This program will also help small fishers find new local markets to lessen their dependence on the volatile export market.

“Responsible Seafood Sourcing is the way to go as we endeavor to achieve conservation and sustainability of our fisheries resources while ensuring that livelihood and welfare of fishing communities are appropriately taken care of,” said Agriculture Undersecretary for Fisheries Drusila Bayate said in a statement.

For more than three decades, USAID has partnered with the Philippines to support environmental conservation.

Through its P1.8-billion (\$33-million) Fish Right Program, USAID is promoting safe, legal, and responsible fisheries practices in the Visayan Sea, South Negros, Calamianes Island Group, and Zambales.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/04/28/us-supports-expansion-of-responsible-sustainable-seafood-sourcing-in-iloilo/>