

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# The trillion-peso Davao regional economy

BY [JOHN TRIA](#)

Apr 29, 2024 04:50 AM

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#MINDANAO



The Philippine Statistics Authority's recent announcement of regional economic performance shows that the Davao region gave Mindanao its first trillion-peso regional economy. The Davao region, composed of the five Davao provinces and the island's most populous city, clocked a 6.7 percent growth rate in 2023 to achieve ₱1.02 trillion in value, higher than the ₱954.23 billion in 2022.

While 2023's growth rates were slightly lower than 2022's 8.2 percent, Davao is the only regional economy in Mindanao that grew faster than the country's 5.5 percent GDP in 2023, and joins NCR, CALABARZON, Central Luzon, Central Visayas and Western Visayas as among the country's trillion-dollar economies. The service sector of Davao took the lion's share of the economy's value at 60.9 percent, with industry coming second at 24.6 percent and agriculture, forestry, and fisheries at 14.5 percent.

This impressive growth is a testament to the high level of partnership between the private and public sectors to continue to push programs to drive investment and trade that increases the size and broadens the base of the economy. The Davao Regional Development Council's efforts to keep the eye on the ball of continuous growth while being cognizant of means to overcome challenges deserves to be acknowledged.

The Davao region is definitely blessed with steady weather, and a resource base and talent pool that can drive growth. How these can be further harnessed are seen in the 2023-2028 regional development plan. Those of you who are interested in investing in this region and the rest of Mindanao would do well to download a copy of this plan.

The challenge is raising this growth further by harnessing opportunities and addressing new challenges. We will need to broaden growth further by encouraging investments in key sectors

that impact the lives of a good number of citizens. Off hand, this includes agriculture, fishery, forestry and minerals where many Davao residents, particularly those living outside its urban centers are directly and indirectly engaged.

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Encouraging innovative, sustainable and responsible growth in these and other sectors through hard investments in manufacturing and processing farm produce and raw minerals will create long term jobs for more people especially the young who will inherit the economy. This will also provide for materials we need and use, such as cement and steel for our housing and transport needs, frozen and processed food items for our own growing local consumption and export demand, even paper for packaging that will reduce our use of single use plastics.

We have recently passed policies to drive innovation, boosting our creative industries, innovative startup legislation, the green lanes for investments in place to make these happen. I have written much about these in past columns. Having private sector engagement will be vital to help push the implementation at the regional level.

Broadening the growth taps the talent and energy of those involved, especially the young so that they can participate in, contribute to and benefit from the growth. After all, they are the future of our economy and will continue the growth beyond today. When everyone grows, we all grow even higher than that P1.02 trillion and even exceed the growth of other regions and countries. Growing continuously over the years builds the future.

In succeeding columns I will take a deeper dive into other sectors to examine perspectives on how to capitalize on opportunities and address challenges to drive the growth further.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/4/29/the-trillion-peso-davao-regional-economy>

# Filipino-owned RE firm NexGen eyeing IPO to raise project funding

BY [MYRNA M. VELASCO](#)

Apr 29, 2024 08:07 AM

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## AT A GLANCE

- The first to take its public float in the local bourse has been NexGen's affiliate firm, Repower Energy Development Corporation (REDC), which is into hydropower development and had concluded its favorable debut in the Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE) in July 2023.

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Filipino firm NexGen Energy Corp., a subsidiary of Tiu-led Pure Energy Holdings Corp. (PEHC) is planning to pursue initial public offering (IPO) to partly raise project funding for its targeted 2,350-megawatt renewable energy (RE) development pipeline.

According to the company, its blueprinted projects will mostly focus on solar and wind farm installations that will be concretized within a decade span; and the added investment target will be on agriculture technology (AgTec) realm.

NexGen emphasized that it is "preparing for initial public offering to raise funds for its renewable energy projects in the pipeline."

The first to take its public float in the local bourse has been NexGen's affiliate firm, Repower Energy Development Corporation (REDC), which is into hydropower development and had concluded its favorable debut in the Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE) in July 2023.

The company vouched that "REDC is the only stock that has held above its IPO price and has attracted several foreign investors that has invested in the company."

Eric Y. Roxas, president of NexGen, noted that beyond the proverbial goal of "helping to secure the country's energy supply needs," the company's bid for RE project developments will be to support the Department of Energy's (DOE) energy transition goals that will be anchored on 35% share of RE in the energy mix by 2030.

There is no definitive timeline, size as well as target pricing that the company can provide for now on its stock offering proposition.

Currently in the company's investment portfolio are eight wind energy service contracts, with it specifying that at least four will be consolidated into Airstream, the subsidiary that will be focusing on onshore and offshore wind projects.

On top of that, NexGen has several applications with the DOE for solar ventures; while also pursuing other big-ticket projects with a number of government agencies.

Its other subsidiary SPARC-Solar Powered Agri-rural Communities Corp. is already operating

three solar farms in Bataan, Bulacan and Zambales; while another subsidiary 5Hour Peak Energy Corp has blueprinted solar project pipeline of 1,000 megawatt-peak. Within the wind development sphere, the company specified that proposed projects will top 1,330MW, with NexGen also joining primarily the league of many aggressive players in the offshore wind space.

[https://mb.com.ph/2024/4/29/filipino-owned-re-firm-nex-gen-eyeing-ipo-to-raise-project-funding#google\\_vignette](https://mb.com.ph/2024/4/29/filipino-owned-re-firm-nex-gen-eyeing-ipo-to-raise-project-funding#google_vignette)

# African farmers look to the past and the future to address climate change

BY [ASSOCIATED PRESS](#)

Apr 28, 2024 10:54 PM

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HARARE, Zimbabwe — From ancient fertilizer methods in Zimbabwe to new greenhouse technology in Somalia, farmers across the heavily agriculture-reliant African continent are looking to the past and future to respond to climate change.

Africa, with the world's youngest population, faces the [worst effects of a warming planet](#) while contributing the least to the problem. Farmers are scrambling to make sure [the booming population](#) is fed.

With over 60% of the world's uncultivated land, Africa should be able to feed itself, some experts say. And yet three in four people across the continent cannot afford a healthy diet, according to a [report last year](#) by the African Union and United Nations agencies. Reasons include conflict and lack of investment.

In Zimbabwe, where the El Nino phenomenon has [worsened a drought](#), small-scale farmer James Tshuma has lost hope of harvesting anything from his fields. It's a familiar story in much of the country, where the government has declared a \$2 billion state of emergency and millions of people face hunger.

But a patch of green vegetables is thriving in a small garden the 65-year-old Tshuma is keeping alive with homemade organic manure and fertilizer. Previously discarded items have again become priceless.

"This is how our fathers and forefathers used to feed the earth and themselves before the introduction of chemicals and inorganic fertilizers," Tshuma said.

He applies livestock droppings, grass, plant residue, remains of small animals, tree leaves and bark, food scraps and other biodegradable items like paper. Even the bones of animals that are [dying in increasing numbers](#) due to the drought are burned before being crushed into ash for their calcium.

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Climate change is compounding much of sub-Saharan Africa's longstanding problem of poor soil fertility, said Wonder Ngezimana, an associate professor of crop science at Zimbabwe's Marondera University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology.

"The combination is forcing people to re-look at how things were done in the past like nutrient recycling, but also blending these with modern methods," said Ngezimana, whose institution is researching the combination of traditional practices with new technologies.

Apart from being rich in nitrogen, organic fertilizers help increase the soil's carbon and ability to retain moisture, Ngezimana said. "Even if a farmer puts synthetic fertilizer into the soil, they are likely to suffer the consequences of poor moisture as long as there is a drought," he said.

Other moves to traditional practices are under way. Drought-resistant [millets](#), sorghum and legumes, staples until the early 20th century when they were overtaken by exotic white corn, have been taking up more land space in recent years.

Leaves of drought-resistant plants that were once a regular dish before being cast off as weeds are returning to dinner tables. They even appear on elite supermarket shelves and are served at classy restaurants, as are millet and sorghum.

This could create markets for the crops even beyond drought years, Ngezimana said.

## A GREENHOUSE REVOLUTION IN SOMALIA

In [conflict-prone Somalia](#) in East Africa, greenhouses are changing the way some people live, with shoppers filling up carts with locally produced vegetables and traditionally nomadic pastoralists under pressure to settle down and grow crops.

“They are organic, fresh and healthy,” shopper Sucdi Hassan said in the capital, Mogadishu. “Knowing that they come from our local farms makes us feel secure.”

Her new shopping experience is a sign of relative calm after three decades of conflict and the climate shocks of [drought and flooding](#).

Urban customers are now assured of year-round supplies, with more than 250 greenhouses dotted across Mogadishu and its outskirts producing fruit and vegetables. It is a huge leap.

“In the past, even basic vegetables like cucumbers and tomatoes were imported, causing logistical problems and added expenses,” said Somalia’s minister of youth and sports, Mohamed Barre.

The greenhouses also create employment in a country where about 75% of the population is people under 30 years old, many of them jobless.

About 15 kilometers (9 miles) from the capital, Mohamed Mahdi, an agriculture graduate, inspected produce in a greenhouse where he works.

“Given the high unemployment rate, we are grateful for the chance to work in our chosen field of expertise,” the 25-year-old said.

Meanwhile, some pastoralist herders are being forced to change their traditional ways after watching livestock die by the thousands.

“Transitioning to greenhouse farming provides pastoralists with a more resilient and sustainable livelihood option,” said Mohamed Okash, director of the Institute of Climate and Environment at SIMAD University in Mogadishu.

He called for larger investments in smart farming to combat food insecurity.

## A MORE RESILIENT BEAN IN KENYA

In Kenya, a new climate-smart bean variety is bringing hope to farmers in a region that had recorded reduced rainfall in [six consecutive rainy seasons](#).

The variety, called “Nyota” or “star” in Swahili, is the result of a collaboration between scientists from the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization, the Alliance of Bioversity International and research organization International Center for Tropical Agriculture.

The new bean variety is tailored for Kenya's diverse climatic conditions. One focus is to make sure drought doesn't kill them off before they have time to flourish.

The bean variety flowers and matures so quickly that it is ready for harvesting by the time rains disappear, said David Karanja, a bean breeder and national coordinator for grains and legumes at KALRO.

Hopes are that these varieties could bolster national bean production. The annual production of 600,000 metric tons falls short of meeting annual demand of 755,000 metric tons, Karanja said.

Farmer Benson Gitonga said his yield and profits are increasing because of the new bean variety. He harvests between nine and 12 bags from an acre of land, up from the previous five to seven bags.

One side benefit of the variety is a breath of fresh air.

"Customers particularly appreciate its qualities, as it boasts low flatulence levels, making it an appealing choice," Gitonga said.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/4/28/african-farmers-look-to-the-past-and-the-future-to-address-climate-change>

# No revamp, says DA chief amid NFA, BFAR cases

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

April 29, 2024 | 12:00am

MANILA, Philippines — Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. on Sunday ruled out a major revamp in various agencies under the Department of Agriculture (DA), in the wake of the Office of the Ombudsman's orders against the heads of the National Food Authority (NFA) and Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR).

“I think these are isolated incidents. The former NFA administrator's case happened early this year, while the case of (former BFAR director Demosthenes) Escoto happened in 2017. It's just unfortunate that the orders of the Ombudsman were issued one after the other,” Tiu Laurel said.

At the same time, Tiu Laurel gave assurance that the removal of Escoto, who was previously tasked to head the review of the disposition of NFA rice buffer stocks in recent years, will not affect the ongoing investigation, adding that he expects the probe to be completed in the coming weeks.

The DA chief added that the operations of both the NFA and BFAR will not be affected with the appointment of NFA acting administrator Larry Lacson, and assistant director for technical services Isidro Velayo Jr. as officer-in-charge of BFAR.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/04/29/2351200/no-revamp-says-da-chief-amid-nfa-bfar-cases>



## Cloud seeding or rain dance?



[COMMONSENSE](#) - [Marichu A. Villanueva](#) - The Philippine Star

April 29, 2024 | 12:00am

The effects of El Niño phenomenon, or the long dry spell in our country continue to wreak havoc in our normal daily living. Our neighboring countries Thailand and Bangladesh are likewise not spared from this climate change phenomenon. In the particular situation of the Philippines, the prolonged dry period is precariously affecting both our food and energy security.

As of last estimates of the Department of Agriculture, as much as P4 billion worth of crop losses have been recorded todate. Much of our agriculture sector depends on irrigated farms that have reportedly been drying up. It has also been causing the yellow and red alerts in the power supply of Luzon and Visayas. And last week, Mindanao was placed on yellow alert even when several of the country's biggest hydroelectric power plants are located in the island. Their hydroelectric plants failed to augment the power supply shortage after several baseload power plants have been conking out the past two weeks.

According to reports reaching him, Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian disclosed as many as 21 hydroelectric plants all around the country are not functioning due to low water dam level. Since there were not enough water in the river system supporting these dams of the hydroelectric power plants, Gatchalian renewed his call to the Department of Energy (DOE) to check their contingency plans on their El Niño "worst case scenario" to the power sector. As the vice chairman of the Senate committee on energy, Gatchalian reminded DOE Secretary Raphael Lotilla about "cloud-seeding operations" as among the immediate stop-gap measure to replenish water dams with rainwaters. Gatchalian cited the recent cloud-seeding done in Dubai.

While this may save the day for us, cloud seeding might be a hit-and-miss operation if the rainfall does not reach the dam. As what recently happened to Dubai that suffered the unexpected severe flooding in the capital city of the oil-rich United Arab Emirates.

This brought to mind the “rain dance” offer of Energy Secretary Lotilla.

“If I had the power to bring on the rains by doing a rain dance, I will be the first to do so,” the DOE chief philosophically retorted. He was obviously smarting from the tirades on him by Sen. Risa Hontiveros over DOE’s ill-preparedness to ensure a stable power supply during the El Niño period. Lotilla hastened to add though that his agency is “taking seriously the concerns” expressed by the Senator.

Actually, the short-term solutions to our extreme problems on severe drought and flooding are no brainer. What needs a lot of thinking is how to integrate the medium and long-term plans for water resource management that could work very well for an archipelagic country, like ours, surrounded by large bodies of water.

Since it was created exactly a year ago by President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. (PBBM), we have yet to hear from the Water Resource Management Office (WRMO) on what it has been able to do so far in addressing El Niño. And not to mention the drinking water that we all need to survive: Hello WRMO, how are you?

While the 19th Congress have yet to come out with the enabling law to create the proposed Department of Water Resources, PBBM created this transitory body called the WRMO under Executive Order (EO) No. 22. Issued on April 27 last year, EO 22 mandated the following agencies be attached to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and to work closely with the WRMO “to the extent allowed by their respective mandates.”

These are the: National Water Resources Board (NWRB); the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS Corporate and Regulatory Offices); the Local Water Utilities Administration (LWUA); and the network of local water districts; and the Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA).

In a speech last year before a water convention body, PBBM specifically cited the need to build dikes and dams as part of flood control measures. “These are the kinds of stratagems that we have to employ, that we have to bring down to the grassroots level because the water crisis in the Philippines – and I call it a water crisis because it is,” PBBM admitted.

Fast forward. During our Kapihan sa Manila Bay news forum last Wednesday, Metro Pacific Water Corp. (MPWC) president and chief executive officer Rogelio “Babes” Singson strongly recommended to impound the rainwater for more effective management of our country’s annual rainfall volume. Singson urged the Marcos

administration to prioritize the establishment of water impounding systems instead of dredging as flood control measure to ensure the country's water security.

Impounding the rainwater, Singson explained, would benefit the country in multiple ways: There would be available irrigation for farmers during the dry season. There would be available bulk water supply for treatment; And, it would reduce flooding.

“Once you impound the water at the top then it would reduce the water at the downstream, resulting in fewer flooding,” Singson pointed out. He calls upon the government to converge its flood control projects and irrigation programs to have a synchronized program in managing the country's water resources.

For starters, Singson cited that the funds of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) must be integrated to lead to a better water control program. Singson once served as DPWH Secretary during the administration of the late president Benigno Simeon “Noynoy” Aquino III. Singson is currently one of the members of PBBM's Private Sector Advisory Council (PSAC) representing the water sector utility companies.

Singson believes that public funds are better used for water impounding in several locations around river systems than dredging as a more effective flood control-cum-water recycling measure.

There are at least, 20 to 22 typhoons that visit our country each year, including “super typhoons” when we get abnormal amount of rainfall. So we might as well impound the rainwaters rather than having these recyclable water resource go down to damage our lowlands with flood.

Whether it is cloud-seeding, or rain dance to save us from our El Niño woes, let common sense prevail.

<https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2024/04/29/2351130/cloud-seeding-or-rain-dance>

## **No chicken, no joy?/Dr. Dilemma**



[CTALK](#) - [Cito Beltran](#) - The Philippine Star

April 29, 2024 | 12:00am

Remember one Christmas when you couldn't buy enough two-piece Chicken Joy? Then news spread that there was a "chicken shortage" in Metro Manila? A lot of kids nearly suffered withdrawal symptoms that Christmas not so long ago.

Well, Lolos and Lolas, better prepare because that nightmare may once again visit your apos VERY SOON. To make matters worse, even Lolo and Lola's bacon, tocino, longganisa and pork chops may disappear altogether, or you pay a pound of flesh for a kilo of liempo!

It seems that the Court of Appeals recently decided concerning the importation of Golden Rice and BT Eggplant based on the arguments about genetically modified organisms or GMOs. In response, the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) immediately stopped processing import permits for Golden Rice and BT Eggplant. But they did not stop there, the BPI also stopped processing import permits for other GMO products such as soybean and corn.

Soybean and corn were not part of the CA decision, but the BPI may have opted to simplify matters and play it safe by including soybean and corn until the GMO issue is fully decided on. What the bureaucrats at the BPI failed to consider, or may have intentionally decided, was that their decision would limit the available supply of soybean and corn only within the Philippines.

It would be good for local farmers, or so they think, but the question is, do we have enough reliable supply of soybean and corn since these are subject to cyclical challenges in production? Is the overall quality of the soybean and corn stable and consistent enough not to disrupt production processes for feed mills and livestock

producers? Corn and soybean are the key ingredients for feeds and many other products, and disruptions cause shortages and price increases.

A common criticism is the high or erratic moisture content of local corn and soybean that are generally traded from farm to silo with very little processing to extrude moisture and safeguard from bacteria and molds because all these involve time and costs a lot of money.

Does the Department of Agriculture or national government have the capacity and police power to regulate the expected price war that often happens among stakeholders, corporations and farms that will now have to compete against each other for what's available locally?

Any form of price war for any product always results in hoarding, shortages and consumers paying the inflated value of the end product. Every time such things happen, congressmen talk about inspections and investigations but not failure of policy and management of government. The price war will not be profitable for farmers, and definitely not for lovers of Chicken Joy and Mang Inasal or Aristocrat's pork barbecue.

Such a situation destabilizes the predictability of supply or availability of corn and soybean. Beyond potential price wars and initial shortages, producers lose whatever backup plan is available and this effectively torpedoes any plans for expansion or creation of more production plants for feeds and farms for livestock. Instead of building up on food security, we now have additional reasons to be insecure!

Aside from the middlemen for corn and soybean, the people who will be happiest about the impending non-importation of corn and soybean will be the importers of chicken, pork and beef, who now benefit from the very recent presidential order to lift all non-tariff requirements for "agricultural products" a.k.a. meats.

The timing is uncanny that non-tariff restrictions are lifted and importation of crucial feed ingredients are blocked within 10 or 15 days of each other. The coincidence is beyond normal but undeniably, it is the "win and win some more" situation for importers.

No feed ingredients, therefore reduced or no production of animal feeds that become very expensive which, in turn, means reduced production of pork and chicken. Therefore, more reason to flood the Philippines with imported chicken, pork and beef from abroad!

\* \* \*

I recently got hold of several prescriptions issued by several Philippine Heart Center MDs, presumably cardiologists who prescribed different maintenance medicines

(average of six to eight) to their patients. I compared them to the Rx of friends, and they were similar.

What caught my attention was the fact that they all prescribed a minimum of 100 pieces, up to 200-plus per medicine, consumable in three to four months. Why so much? Here are some of them: #100 Kenzar #120 Provasc #240 TMZ #120 Ecospirin #120 Teldra #120 Cardipress #120 Coumadin etc. etc.

Such high numbers not only mean sales but force drug stores to stock up on those medicines which effectively displaces competitors. The prescriptions and sales are recorded/collected by the drug stores, so manufacturers can actually monitor doctors' prescriptions.

When I Googled the meds, the info showed the manufacturer of many of the meds prescribed as BEL-KENZ, the same company now being singled out by the DOH and senators for alleged MLM marketing practices.

I also learned that at least 459 physicians are suspected of being involved in the MLM scheme at the Philippine Heart Center, while another 900-plus MDs were possibly being targeted or recruited inconclusively. Someone claims that many of those suspected have tenure at PHC, a government hospital, or have "plantilla positions," so it may be complicated to just call them in to the "principal's office."

But the problem is apparently not limited to the PHC but has "infected" other government and private hospital physicians in Metro Manila as well as nationwide. In the meantime, doctors with integrity are furious about the state of affairs!

President Marcos should personally act on this serious public health issue and call in the DOH, DOJ and BIR even the LTO to investigate all the claims about pay-offs and luxury cars and malpractice?

<https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2024/04/29/2351133/no-chicken-no-joydr-dilemma>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Scientists hit CA ruling vs Bt eggplant, GMO

[Rainier Allan Ronda](#) - The Philippine Star

April 29, 2024 | 12:00am



This file photo shows the Court of Appeals in Manila.

MANILA, Philippines — A legal victory for militant group Greenpeace, a regrettable loss for Filipinos.

This was how the country's respected academicians and agricultural scientists described the Court of Appeals' April 17 ruling that granted a petition by Greenpeace and its local allies to impose a moratorium on research and development of genetically modified organisms (GMO), and the commercial propagation of Bt eggplant and Golden Rice.

Bt eggplant was genetically engineered to protect the plant from a destructive insect pest. Golden Rice has been fortified with beta carotene to address Vitamin A deficiency in humans.

“The court proceedings that led to this decision are just the latest of very expensive legal struggles initiated by the same group for more than 20 years, not only in the Philippines, to stop the use of modern methods to solve the problems of poverty, hunger and degradation of the environment through plant breeding,” the National Academy of Science and Technology - Agricultural Sciences Division (NAST-ASD) said in a position paper issued last Friday.

“The same issues used by Greenpeace to convince the court were earlier dismissed by the Department of Agriculture and repudiated by 129 Nobel Prize Laureates and millions of farmers,” the NAST agricultural scientists and academicians added.

For them, the court decision amounts to the weaponization of the law to favor an extreme ideology about nature — that a pristine environment must be preserved and modern biological technology is working against this goal.

“This is contrary to our knowledge that nature is characterized by constant change — some of them man-made, but most of the apocalyptic changes were through natural forces. Among these are climate change, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes,” they said.

Composed of the country’s most respected and awarded scientists and researchers, the NAST, which is under the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), is the country’s highest recognition and scientific advisory body.

“We are alarmed that relatively trivial flaws such as the title of a representative to a local biotechnology regulating body are given undue importance in court deliberations, while insufficiently addressing the bigger question of costs and benefits of the technology to the society,” the NAST-ASD said.

“We are finally concerned that the continuing delay in the use of Bt eggplant and golden rice is causing more harm than good,” it added.

The experts noted that as of 2019, similar products had been used safely by 15 million farmers in 29 countries, including the Philippines.

The NAST academicians and scientists reiterated that agriculture biotechnology has been a big boon to the global effort at greatly reducing the need to use chemical fertilizers in food production, which is becoming an intensifying challenge due to climate change and global warming.

Eggplant and rice farming, especially large-scale rice farming, currently makes use of much fertilizer spray and pellets to assure the harvest of commercial eggplants and rice grains by farmers.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/04/29/2351231/scientists-hit-ca-ruling-vs-bt-eggplant-gmo>



# Philippines to endure scorching heat until mid-May

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

April 29, 2024 | 12:00am



The sunset exudes fiery hues over the horizon of Lingayen, Pangasinan on April 27, 2024.

Cesar Ramirez / The Philippine STAR

MANILA, Philippines — Extreme heat will persist until the second week of May amid the impact of El Niño and the dry season as Metro Manila’s temperature reached 38.8 degrees Celsius on Saturday, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA).

The “danger” high heat index will still be experienced in many parts of the country, PAGASA weather forecaster Anna Clauren said in a radio interview.

“We are still in the peak of the dry season and it is possible that temperatures will further increase especially during the second half of May,” Clauren said.

The easterlies or hot temperatures from the Pacific Ocean are currently affecting the country, she noted.

“For the next four to five days, we should expect that the current temperatures will be maintained in Metro Manila and many parts of the country. We expect a high heat index or danger level. We advise the public to take extra precaution and, if necessary, avoid extreme activities, especially at noon,” she added.

Mindanao can expect rains brought by the intertropical convergence zone, Clauren said.

At least 32 areas could experience a danger heat index (between 42 and 51 degrees Celsius) today: Aparri, Cagayan; Dagupan City; Coron and Aborlan, Palawan; Virac, Catanduanes; San Jose, Occidental Mindoro; Roxas City, Capiz; Laoag City and Batac, Ilocos Norte; Bacnotan, La Union; Echague, Isabela; Sangley Point, Cavite; Puerto Princesa, Palawan; Iloilo City and Dumangas, Iloilo; and Guiuan, Eastern Samar.

Other areas that could experience danger heat index today are Sinait, Ilocos Sur; Pili, Camarines Sur; Mambusao, Capiz; La Carlota, Negros Occidental; Dipolog, Zamboanga del Sur; Ninoy Aquino International Airport in Pasay City; Science Garden in Quezon City; Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya; Tayabas City, Quezon; Legazpi City, Albay; Maasin, Southern Leyte; Zamboanga City; and Butuan City, Agusan del Norte.

An “extreme danger” heat index, 52 degrees Celsius and up, could also be experienced, PAGASA warned.

Iba, Zambales yesterday recorded an extreme danger heat index of 53 degrees Celsius, the highest so far this year, PAGASA said.

On Saturday, the highest heat index was recorded in Aparri, Cagayan at 48 degrees Celsius followed by Virac, Catanduanes at 47 degrees Celsius and Tuguegarao City, Cagayan and Pili, Camarines Sur at 46 degrees Celsius.

## State of calamity

All regional directors of the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) have been directed to ensure their quick response funds are available to areas under a state of calamity, Interior Secretary Benhur Abalos said over the weekend.

At least 103 cities and towns have been placed under a state of calamity due to El Niño while persons affected have reached 2.1 million, according to Task Force El Niño spokesman Presidential Communications Assistant Secretary Joey Villarama.

Abalos cited Belison, Antique’s case after its local executive asked for support. They have been referred to the Presidential Management Staff and the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council.

Abalos did not comment on whether the government plans to declare a nationwide state of calamity amid the growing number of areas affected by El Niño.

Agricultural damage in 11 regions due to El Niño has ballooned to P4.39 billion, affecting 85,232 farmers and fisherfolk covering 77,731 hectares of agricultural lands, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Rice production incurred P2.71 billion in damage, totaling 113,446 metric tons, followed by high-value crops with P869.34 million or a total volume loss of 24,306 MT; corn, with P769.68 million covering 45,995 MT; fisheries, P33.83 million affecting 2,261 fisherfolk; livestock and poultry, P7.75 million affecting 381 heads; and cassava, P561,000 covering 41 MT, the DA said.

Assistance worth P637.21 million has been provided by the regional field offices in the Cordillera Administrative Region and Regions 1, 4-B and 6, the DA noted.

“At least P1.065 million worth of financial assistance were given in Regions 2 and 4-B under the Rice Farmers Financial Assistance program and P8 million worth of rice machinery and equipment from the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization,” the DA said.

To dispel any notion their engagement is military-focused, Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel III challenged the United States, Japan and Western European countries to extend their support beyond military cooperation and aid the Philippines amid El Niño. — **Cecille Suerte Felipe**

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/04/29/2351236/philippines-endure-scorching-heat-until-mid-may>

## An alliance for prosperity and food security



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

April 29, 2024 | 12:00am

What a fruitful meeting that was in Kuala Lumpur. In the space of a few days, we were shown the potential of region-wide agriculture cooperation.

The agri companies we assembled for this visit covered so much ground. They visited a tissue culture lab at KLK Bhd in Selangor, then met with Aerodyne in Cyberjaya to see how AI can aid farming, then to the Sime Darby plantation in Carey Island and Farm Fresh in UPM Sendang. We were wholeheartedly received by Malaysia's Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security and given much support by our Malaysian private sector counterparts, led by ABAC Malaysia chairman Tan Sri Nazir Razak and B2B Connect Initiative chairman and former Malaysia trade minister Dato' Sri Mustapa Mohamed. Our Ambassador to Malaysia, Ma. Angela Ponce, was there with us every step of the way. With her help, we will be able to follow through on all the amazing groundwork we have done these past few days.

This was the icing on the cake of my visit to KL last week, which was to attend the 100th meeting of the ASEAN Business Advisory Council. ASEAN-BAC focuses on assessing and pinpointing matters that facilitate and advance economic cooperation and integration. Our activities these past few years, and these past few days particularly, showcase the actions we are taking to create a future of prosperity for the ASEAN.

Taking pride of place is the fact that we are starting work on Phase 3 of our ASEAN Mentorship for Entrepreneurs Network, or AMEN, the legacy project of our chairmanship in 2017. AMEN uses mentorship as a tool for building capacity and establishing sustainable value chains, ultimately contributing to prosperity in the ASEAN by boosting trade and market and economic linkages.

We've produced nearly 200 AMEN graduates coming from all the ASEAN member-states, all of them MSEs who will now benefit from the mentoring they received from the network of entrepreneurship mentors that we developed over the past few years.

Our target now is to have more than a thousand MSE graduates by 2027. By that time our network of entrepreneurship mentors and coaches would have grown to 600, all spread out across the ASEAN and sharing their expertise and experiences to help grow and scale up the small and medium entrepreneurs of the ten ASEAN member-states.

An exciting prospect is the online learning platform we are putting together as part of AMEN's Phase 3. Imagine an online learning platform that can multiply exponentially the access of ASEAN MSEs to entrepreneurship mentoring. With hope, we can have this up and running soon.

The 100th ASEAN BAC meeting was also an opportunity to take the first steps to fulfilling the objectives of several MOUs we signed last year to harness the private sector's resources and expertise in agriculture in a cooperative network throughout the region.

As I mentioned in my column last week, I was accompanied to Malaysia by the leaders of some of the Philippines' largest agriculture companies. One of these was Ben Mead from Iba Botanicals.

During the visit, Iba Botanicals and the Malaysian startup Synbion signed an MOU on OUDino, a Malaysia-developed biotechnology that accelerates the production of high-quality agarwood. Agarwood is the source of oud, one of the most expensive oils in the world. This is important because you need an inoculant to extract the valuable resin from agarwood. Synbion, a spin-off company of Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al Sultan Abdullah (UMPSA) and a subsidiary of UMP Technology Sdn Bhd, specializes in agarwood inoculant solutions.

Oud can be a potential earner for the Philippines once local growers have this technology. Fortunately, Ben said he plans to offer Synbion's OUDino to other agarwood planters in the Philippines and help them produce exceptionally high-quality agarwood.

This is but one example of how science-driven innovation and sustainable commercialization can be amplified through cooperation between nations, ultimately benefitting farmers and businesses from both countries.

With hope, our visit to the Malaysian multinational KLK, whose success is rooted in the development of palm oil and rubber, will bear fruit. In the very good technical

discussions were the possibility of partnerships in the Philippines, maybe even supplying palm planting materials to the Philippines.

I imagine the other primary commodities we are focusing on – such as rice, coconut, poultry, tropical fruits and rubber, among many others – will find successful partnerships as we go and conduct trade visits to other countries that signed our MOU for agricultural partnership, namely Indonesia, Singapore, Cambodia, Myanmar, Brunei, Laos and Thailand.

The vision now is to create an ASEAN Food Security Alliance through the sharing of knowledge and resources, and establish market cooperation. By harnessing the strengths of the private sector, we are fulfilling our mandate of boosting ASEAN's efforts towards economic integration and promoting economic cooperation.

ASEAN BAC Philippines is committed to upskilling the MSEs of the region and creating prosperity for all, while futureproofing our region against threats to our food security. Our values as ONE ASEAN should guide our business practices and ensure that our decision-making incorporates perspectives that benefit our region's society and economy.

The actions we have taken over the past few days exemplify our dedication to creating a more prosperous and sustainable future for the ASEAN region. While there is indeed still a long way to go, I believe that by taking these first steps, we will have a chance at creating greater and lasting impact. We are encouraged by the knowledge that these efforts not only build resilience for our businesses but also for our countries.

<https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2024/04/29/2351132/alliance-prosperity-and-food-security>

# Villar: Expand economic opportunities for small farmers, fisherfolk

[Cecille Suerte Felipe](#) - The Philippine Star

April 29, 2024 | 12:00am



Senator. Cynthia Villar

MANILA, Philippines — Economic opportunities should be expanded for those engaged in agriculture like small farmers and fisherfolk, as they are the ones providing Filipinos with food, according to Sen. Cynthia Villar.

Villar, who chairs the Senate committee on agriculture and food, has acknowledged the Philippine Society of Agricultural Engineers in their initiatives to reach their goals to achieve a food-secure Philippines.

“Your help and expertise will go a long way in moving our agriculture sector forward,” the senator said.

“We have to expand economic opportunities for those who are engaged in agriculture such as our small farmers and fisherfolk as they are the ones providing us with food on our tables,” she added.

Villar emphasized that the demand for agricultural production is vital for food security, citing the need for Filipinos to continue helping the country’s agricultural production in order for it to flourish.

The senator was guest speaker at the opening of the 73rd Philippine Society of Agricultural and Biosystems Engineers’ Annual National Convention, the 35th Philippine Agricultural Engineering Week Celebration and the 19th International

Agricultural Engineering Conference in Legazpi City, which was held from April 22 to 27.

She noted that the country's agriculture sector is challenged, and that the agricultural and biosystems engineers' new approach and determination can help solve perennial problems confronting the sector.

She said that among the problems are wasted agricultural products for their being perishable, limited connection like roads, bridges and logistics between the production areas and markets, and lack of post-harvest technology, which are mostly imported.

Villar also mentioned the country's vulnerability to extreme weather events such as drought and typhoons.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/04/29/2351203/villarexpand-economic-opportunities-small-farmers-fisherfolk>



**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Imee Marcos calls for ‘urgent’ probe into El Niño’s ill-effects

By: [Joey Gabieta](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

[Inquirer Visayas](#) / 09:27 PM April 28, 2024



Senator Imee Marcos answers query from the members of the Senate media during a press conference on March 6, 2024 at the Senate of the Philippine office. INQUIRER.net file photo / NOY MORCOSO

TACLOBAN CITY – Senator Imee Marcos is calling for an “urgent investigation” into the Senate on the government’s preparations for the El Niño phenomenon considering its adverse impacts, particularly on agriculture.

The senator, who was here last Saturday to attend a gathering of the Commission on Higher Education’s scholarship program, said there is a need to address the concerns of those in the agriculture and fisherfolk sectors as they were hard-hit by the dry spell.

“We will convene on Monday and I will request an urgent investigation into the government’s El Niño plans because the impact on us is too severe. It’s really serious,” Marcos said.

According to the senator, because of the dry spell, those in the agriculture and fishing sectors were badly affected.

“I think we have to hasten the giving of assistance to them. The Department of Agriculture (DA) is supposed to be giving P5,000 to the rice farmers. There is a subsidy for transport of P3,000 for our fisherfolks,” said Marcos, the sister of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

According to her, the farmers and fishermen have been waiting for their stipend or financial assistance from the government due to the destruction of their crops in the aftermath of the El Niño phenomenon.

“I think a lot of rice farmers, for example, are still waiting for their stipends because so much of their crops have been destroyed. It’s really heartbreaking,” she said.

The DA earlier reported that due to the prolonged dry spell, losses to the agriculture sector have already exceeded P4 billion, prompting several affected local governments to declare a state of calamity.

Asked if she finds the performance of Agriculture Sec. Francisco Laurel Jr. wanting amid the situation, Marcos said “He is very new (to the post).”

Laurel was appointed as DA chief in November last year, succeeding the President who held the same portfolio after he assumed the presidency.

Marcos, meanwhile, chided the government for resorting to importation every time there was a shortage of supplies.

“It has been our reaction to import whenever we encounter problems. The problem is prices in the market do not go down. So there seems to be some disconnect in the supply chain,” she said.

The government, she added, must provide more assistance to local farmers and help them increase their yield and income.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1934600/imee-marcos-calls-for-urgent-probe-into-el-ninos-ill-effects>

# **Be more adaptive, break siloed approach to climate crisis**

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 04:05 AM April 29, 2024

Record-high temperatures affecting the country's agriculture and water resources, local governments declaring a state of calamity in their areas, and schools implementing remote learning arrangements—this is the reality Filipinos face today.

In the wake of the advisory of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) on the current El Niño issued on April 5, we have been cautioned that this anomalous warming in the tropical Pacific will continue to set the path to sweltering heat and dryness, and reduction in rainfall. Pagasa further emphasized that these El Niño conditions could lead to reduced water supply, leading to rising water costs, and increased cases of pulmonary, and food- and waterborne diseases.

The Department of Agriculture had reported losses reaching P3.94 billion due to the impacts of this current El Niño. This evidence presents important implications for government policies on climate change adaptation and disaster risk management alongside the long-term agricultural productivity enhancing program. The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council also reiterated that dry spells, dry conditions, and drought caused by El Niño pose threats to the country's water supply, agriculture, electricity, health, and public safety, which are already felt by communities across the country. In addition, a recent report from the Institute for Climate and Sustainable Cities warned of power supply shortages from April to June this year, as El Niño threatens the capacity of the country's hydroelectric power plants.

Reducing climate-related loss and damage (L&D) is an urgent action continuously discussed in climate negotiations. The Philippines has secured seats in two L&D-related climate finance mechanisms: the Global Shield Against Climate Risk, jointly established by the Group of Seven countries and the Vulnerable 20 Group of Finance Ministers; and the recently established Loss and Damage Fund of the United Nations. Both mechanisms provide developing countries with funding to address economic and noneconomic loss and damage due to the impacts of slow onset and extreme weather

events. These funds aim to support adaptation strategies through pre-arranged protection, such as risk insurance mechanisms, grants, or concessional financing. Blending these innovative mechanisms with existing climate finance and national and local funding can help countries like the Philippines address potential climate impacts.

Climate-related policies and programs in the country are well-crafted and can complement international policy mechanisms, although criticized for their siloed approaches. By adapting to the changing response measures needed to address current and emerging issues, climate policies and programs should complement other areas such as sustainable development and humanitarian emergency management especially when contextualized, at the socioeconomic level. We have to look at climate action holistically, breaking the perceived siloed approaches.

*Lourdes Tibig and Danica Marie Supnet,*

<https://opinion.inquirer.net/173288/be-more-adaptive-break-siloed-approach-to-climate-crisis>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# **UPLB: Bt eggplant research complied with standards**

By: [Dempsey Reyes](#) - Reporter / [@dempseyreyesINQ](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 05:05 AM April 29, 2024



University of the Philippines Los Baños campus. **PHOTO FROM FACEBOOK.COM**

LOS BAÑOS, LAGUNA, Philippines — While it respects the decision of the Court of Appeals (CA) that halted the commercial growing of genetically modified crops, the University of the Philippines in Los Baños (UPLB) has maintained that it complied with all standards in proceeding with the development of their Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) eggplant.

The UPLB's Bt Eggplant was among the two genetically modified organisms (GMO) covered by the cease-and-desist order by the CA that stops their commercial propagation. The other product was the Golden Rice of the Philippine Rice Research Institute.

In a statement last week, the UPLB confirmed that it was notified of the CA's decision in issuing a writ of kalikasan, through the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG).

The appellate court, in its April 17 decision, granted the petitioners the privilege of the writ. It also ordered concerned government agencies such as the Department of Agriculture to submit their enhanced risk assessment and procedures in monitoring activities related to the development of GMOs.

The UPLB, for its part, insisted that it "consistently complied" with all government standards and protocols under the National Biodiversity Framework and all "related guidelines in the development of Bt eggplant technology."

'Safe innovation'

"This innovation is UPLB's response to the urgent need to make eggplant production safer for farmers and the consuming public, increase farmers' productivity and income, and improve the environment of the Philippines' eggplant-producing communities," the state university said in a statement.

"UPLB respects the decision and coordinates with the OSG for the proper course of action," it said.

It also pointed out that as a national university, UP is "mandated to pursue innovations in science and technology," which they said includes the use of modern biotechnology.

"[This is] to help the Philippines attain its development goals in agriculture while advocating sustainability and environmental safety," the university said.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1934637/uplb-bt-eggplant-research-complied-with-standards>

# Hope for lower food prices

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 04:35 AM April 29, 2024

As expected, President Marcos' latest decision to relax the rules on the importation of agricultural products is being opposed by traders and middlemen who have been unduly enriching themselves by buying low from farmers and fishermen and selling high to consumers.

The President has directed the Department of Agriculture (DA) to simplify its policies and procedures on the importation of farm products and remove other nontariff barriers that restrict or delay their entry to the country. These include quotas, import licensing schemes and bureaucratic regulations that have the net effect of increasing the cost of imports. Their removal or easing will therefore boost supply in local markets and ultimately bring down prices of essential farm products. It should be noted that this will not come at a loss to the government in terms of foregone revenues.

Under Administrative Order No. 20, signed by Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin on April 18, the DA was directed to coordinate with the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Finance to streamline procedures and requirements in the licensing of importers, minimize the processing time of applications for importation, and exempt licensed traders from the submission of registration requirements.

## Unscrupulous middlemen

The DA was also ordered to streamline procedures and requirements for the issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearance, which needs to be released within 15 days, otherwise, applications with completed documents will be deemed approved. The Sugar Regulatory Administration was also told to simplify the importation of sugar by allowing direct purchases by the agency's accredited importers and accepting more traders to participate. The DA was tasked to similarly review and revise guidelines on the importation of frozen fish and other marine products while the Bureau of Customs, where many complaints of delayed releases are raised by the private sector, was ordered to prioritize the unloading and release of imported agricultural products.

By addressing the delays that lead to additional costs for importers, the entry and availability of imported agricultural products will hopefully be timely and cover the supply shortages of farm products. However, the success of this order will depend in large part on the surveillance team created under AO 20. Made up of representatives from several departments and law enforcement agencies, it is hoped that the body will be able to pinpoint snags and other potential roadblocks early on and immediately find solutions to them. The team can also focus on unscrupulous middlemen who have often been blamed for the high prices of farm produce—even during times of abundant supply. Perhaps the President already had this in mind when he included the police and other law enforcement bodies in the surveillance team to go after these scalawags.

### Reliance on imports

AO 20 is indeed a very timely measure that, if implemented correctly, could really help lower the prices of agricultural products. However, the implementation of AO 20 should go hand in hand with the timely implementation of the DA's three-year plan for the country's agricultural sector. The "Para sa Masaganang Bagong Pilipinas" program presented to the President last January outlines measures, many of them long-term, that will increase the productivity of the agriculture sector and eventually reduce the country's reliance on imports. Part of this is the "data-driven information system" that the DA needs to develop to address shortages or even overproduction of agricultural products that often lead to wastage. Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. knows that special attention needs to be given to post-harvest facilities, the lack of which causes up to 15 percent of wastage in rice production that is equivalent to about 450,000 tons a year, or 23 days of rice supply for the whole nation. Another is the addition of more cold storage facilities to address the yearly problem of an oversupply of vegetables and fruits. For the long term, the DA needs to build a lot of infrastructure such as irrigation facilities, agro-industrial ports, and farm-to-market roads to address logistic problems, and water-collecting dams to prepare for the dry months.

### Sweeping order

The President's sweeping order to remove and address all issues hindering the timely entry of imported farm products, once implemented correctly and speedily, will redound to the benefit of the millions of hard-pressed consumers reeling from unnecessarily high prices of farm products. Groups opposing the measure can have a



valid argument only if local farmers and fishermen can actually meet the shortages in supply that have caused prices to stay elevated. From the looks of it, this is unlikely, especially with the El Niño dry spell, which has already resulted in agricultural damage of P4.3 billion as of last week, and there's still the summer month of May.

<https://opinion.inquirer.net/173290/hope-for-lower-food-prices>

**BUSINESS WORLD:**

# Non-rice allocations sought in infra-heavy DA proposed budget

April 29, 2024 | 12:03 am



PHILSTAR FILE PHOTO

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

THE infrastructure-heavy budget proposed by the Department of Agriculture (DA) for next year should accommodate crops other than rice, analysts said.

The DA is proposing a budget of P513.81 billion for 2025 to support the construction of new irrigation and postharvest facilities.

The DA said that the national rice program will get P294.21 billion of the proposed budget.

“It can be noted that even as the government resources are going to be spent on domestic rice production, they are also easing import procedures for the same products,” Ateneo de Manila economics professor Leonardo A. Lanzona said via messenger chat.

He added that the impact of the increased budget for post-harvest facilities for rice may be undone by imports.

“It would then be better to develop other products that are not going to be affected by the easier import regulations. It is better to keep those rice imports and place more support on other products,” he added.

The US Department of Agriculture has estimated that rice shipments will increase to 3.9 million metric tons (MT) this year, with the Philippines continuing to rely on imports.

The estimate, if realized, would exceed the 3.58 million MT actually imported in 2023.

As of April 18, rice imports have amounted to 1.42 million MT, according to the Bureau of Plant Industry.

“The government needs to invest in post-harvest and marketing facilities that will reduce losses and costs in storing, handling and transporting goods,” Federation of Free Farmers National Manager Raul Q. Montemayor said in a Viber message.

If approved, the budget would be more than double the DA budget of P208.58 billion in 2023.

“It does not make sense for the DA to support our farmers to produce more only to see their production wasted or farmers suffering low prices due to poor marketing infrastructure,” Mr. Montemayor added.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. has said that the DA would need about P93 billion over the next three years to significantly reduce post-harvest losses of about P10.7 billion.

Part of the DA’s plan to reduce food waste is to build more cold storage facilities to stockpile vegetables and high-value crops, with which it hopes to smooth out supply in periods of shortage or take excess produce off the market during bumper harvests.

“In developing reforms and programs, it is necessary to have complementary reforms in order to ensure their full impact,” Mr. Lanzona said.

The DA said its proposed expenditures for next year prioritize the National Irrigation Administration, National Food Authority, Philippine Coconut Authority, Philippine Fisheries Development Authority, and the National Dairy Authority, receiving a combined P287.98 billion.

<https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2024/04/29/591370/non-rice-allocations-sought-in-infra-heavy-da-proposed-budget/>

**BUSINESS WORLD:**

# Hybrid seed proposals added to campaign for RCEF extension

April 28, 2024 | 8:18 pm



PHILIPPINE STAR/ MICHAEL VARCAS

By **Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**, *Reporter*

THE GOVERNMENT must extend the life of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) while adding programs promoting the use of hybrid seed to enhance productivity, analysts said.

“We support the move to extend RCEF given that it has clearly not achieved its objective of enhancing the competitiveness of rice farmers vis-à-vis imports and ensuring their profitability following the liberalization of the rice market,” Federation of Free Farmers National Manager Raul Q. Montemayor said in a Viber message.

Monetary Board member V. Bruce J. Tolentino also backed an RCEF extension and cited the need to fund and distribute hybrid seed.

“Over the past few years, the Philippines has been reaping record rice harvests. Fundamentally this is because of the increased access by farmers to good seed, distributed by PhilRice (Philippine Rice Research Institute) and funded by RCEF,” he said in a Viber message.

“This is very important to continue and even expand the seed development, improvement, and distribution program under RCEF,” he added.

On Monday, the Department of Agriculture (DA) will present to the House of Representatives Agriculture and Food panel its status report on the implementation of Republic Act No. 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law of 2019, committee chairman and Quezon Rep. Wilfrido Mark M. Enverga said.

“We have requested a complete briefing on the efficacy of the law and the RCEF program five years running,” Mr. Enverga said in a Viber chat.

RCEF receives P10 billion a year from rice import tariffs as a component of the Rice Tariffication Act, which liberalized rice imports but made traders pay tariffs on their rice shipments.

RCEF supports the distribution of machinery, seed, credit, and fertilizer for a six-year period. RCEF is set to expire in June.

“Improved yields not only increase production and domestic supply, but also decrease farm production costs and improve farmer incomes, enabling farmers to be more competitive with Vietnam or Thailand,” Mr. Tolentino said.

University of Asia and the Pacific Senior Economist Cid L. Terosa said a review of the RCEF would help determine the “best use” of the funding.

“The RCEF has achieved some gains, but, in my opinion, much can still be done to maximize benefits from it,” he said in an e-mail.

In its review, policymakers should look into RCEF as an “additional funding source for the whole DA rice program,” and not a “separate program.”

“RCEF funds should logically be coursed through the DA instead of being released directly to implementing agencies, to ensure that RCEF programs complement and do not duplicate or compete with DA rice program activities,” Mr. Montemayor said.

He also expressed skepticism about the “pre-allocation” of funds for farming activities, which is “based on what legislators think farmers need and not what farmers think they need for themselves.”

Last week, the National Economic and Development Authority backed a “well-targeted” RCEF, amid President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.’s call to reduce unnecessary barriers to agricultural imports.

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/04/28/591466/hybrid-seed-proposals-added-to-campaign-for-rcef-extension/>

## BUSINESS WORLD:

# Consumer gulf widens as demand for premium and budget foods grows

April 29, 2024 | 12:01 am



REUTERS

LONDON — From Nestlé to Danone, food companies are seeing shoppers that want either premium or cheaper products, with less interest in items in the middle, particularly in developed markets like North America.

The packaged goods industry has for over two years hit shoppers with higher prices, citing higher costs that started with the pandemic and exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Everything from sunflower oil to freight has become more expensive, taking a toll on global supply chains and consumers struggling to make ends meet.

Executives have in recent quarters reported that costs are rising at a slower pace, and have eased up on price hikes. In some cases, prices are still rising because companies say they are innovating to create better products that are helping them win over wealthy shoppers.

At the same time, though, they say hard-up shoppers are more focused than ever on bargains, particularly in the US. Nestlé, the world's biggest packaged food company, on Thursday highlighted growth for pricier varieties of its Purina pet food and Perrier bottled water, as well as for cheaper Maggi noodles.

“Regarding the US, it’s important to keep in mind something that you’ve also heard from other consumer companies and that’s the state of, what I call, the bifurcated consumer,” Nestlé CEO Mark Schneider told journalists on a call to discuss first quarter sales. “We’re seeing significant pressure at the lower income consumer level,” Mr. Schneider said, pointing to consumers in the US still feeling the hit of price increases

from the last two years, and the reduction in US Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) food stamp payments.

“But don’t forget there’s also the thriving premium (shoppers), where I think there are consumers that are very interested in a continuous stream of premium products,” he added.

Other consumer-facing industries, including luxury and fashion, have also seen a trend of affluent shoppers flocking to the most expensive brands while those that are struggling look for low prices, with the mid-market squeezed.

“We see the same development in the luxury goods industry,” Vontobel analyst Jean-Phillipe Bertschy said. “For Nestlé, this is corroborated by the ongoing weakness in the frozen food in the United States.”

Nestlé’s sales volumes in North America — where frozen foods tend to be mid-range products — fell 5.8% in the first quarter, mainly due to a decline in the freezer section. That contributed to the company missing quarterly sales growth estimates.

Nestlé shares were down 3.8% in early trading.

French dairy giant Danone said last week it was winning both cash-strapped and wealthy shoppers, recouping some of the market share it lost to retailers’ private label brands. “The low-price segment in Danone’s categories is growing fast, but the high price segment is also growing fast — but the middle segment is a bit squeezed,” finance chief Juergen Esser said in an interview following a sales update.

Consumers are hunting for value either via price, or quality and innovation, he added.

Unilever, maker of Knorr stock cubes and Hellmann’s condiments, also noted “premiumization” when describing first quarter results for four of its five product categories — including ice cream — in a trading update on Thursday.

Its first-quarter sales rose by a better than expected 4.4% as it also won back shoppers who had traded down to cheaper products, sending its share more than 4% higher. — **Reuters**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2024/04/29/591368/consumer-gulf-widens-as-demand-for-premium-and-budget-foods-grows/>

## BUSINESS WORLD:

# US regulator gathering data on spices from India after alleged contamination

April 29, 2024 | 12:02 am



REUTERS

HYDERABAD — The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is gathering information on products of Indian spice makers MDH and Everest after Hong Kong halted sales of some of their products for allegedly containing high levels of a cancer-causing pesticide.

“The FDA is aware of the reports and is gathering additional information about the situation,” an FDA spokesperson told Reuters on Friday.

Hong Kong this month suspended sales of three MDH spice blends and an Everest spice mix for fish curries.

Singapore ordered a recall of the Everest spice mix as well, saying it contains high levels of ethylene oxide, which is unfit for human consumption and a cancer risk with long exposure.

MDH and Everest did not immediately respond to Reuters requests for comment. Everest has said its spices are safe for consumption. MDH has not responded to queries about its products so far.

MDH and Everest spices are among the most popular in India and are also sold in Europe, Asia and North America. India’s food regulator, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, is now checking the quality standards of the two companies, following the moves in Hong Kong and Singapore.

India’s Spices Board, the government’s regulator for spice exports, said it had sought data on MDH and Everest exports from authorities in Hong Kong and Singapore, and was working with the companies to find the “root cause” of the quality issues as inspections started at their plants.

In 2019, a few batches of MDH’s products were recalled in the US for salmonella contamination. — **Reuters**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2024/04/29/591369/us-regulator-gathering-data-on-spices-from-india-after-alleged-contamination/>



**ABANTE:**

## **Pimentel hinamon US, Japan: Tumulong sa El Niño crisis sa Pilipinas**



- April 28, 2024

Sa gitna na nararanasang matinding tagtuyot sa bansa, hinamon ni Senate Minority Leader Aquilino “Koko” Pimentel III ang United States, Japan at mga bansa sa Western Europe na paabutin ang kanilang suporta hindi lamang sa military cooperation kundi sa epekto ng El Niño crisis sa Pilipinas.

“It is high time for them to show their sincere concern for our welfare.,”: sabi ni Pimentel.

“To dispel any notion their engagement is solely military-focused, it is crucial for them to showcase to the world, especially the critics, that they are really concerned about Filipinos. Show that our relationship and partnership is not confined to military matters alone,” dagag pa niya.

Ginawa ni Pimentel ang panawagan kasunod ng apela ng United Nations na dagdagan ang internal support sa Pilipinas sa pagharap sa malalang kahihinatnan ng isa mga pinakamatinding El Niño phenomenon sa kasaysayan ng bansa na nakapinsal ng halos P4.3 bilyon sa agrikultura at kabuhayan ng mga Filipino.

Sa harap ng krisis na ito, sinabi ng senador na dapat ipamalas ng mga pangunahing bansang kaalyado ng Pilipinas na kanilang alalahanin sa kapakanan ng mga Filipino sa pamamagitan ng pagbigay ng karampatang suporta para matugunan ang krisis at palakasin ang ekonomiya ng bansa.

“Help us with our economy and the people’s livelihoods instead of missiles, submarines, frigates, etc.,” ani Pimentel.

“Instead of going to our military bases, go to areas afflicted by extreme drought and extend help. This can dispel any perception that you are here to turn the Philippine into a battleground,” sambit pa niya.

Iniulat na ng Department of Agriculture na ang crop at livelihood productions sa bansa ang siyang labis na tinamaan ng matinding tagtuyot sa buong bansa.

“The real battle we face is this El Niño and how we Filipinos will survive this prolonged drought,” diin ni Pimentel.

Aniya, bagama’t seryosong banta ang tenisyon sa West Philippine Sea, mahalagang tiyakin din ng gobyerno na agad na makabangon ang mga Pinoy sa epekto ng El Niño crisis na ito.

“These so-called allies of Philippines must prove that their engagement with the Philippines goes beyond military matters and that their interests extend to helping our economy and restoring lost livelihoods of our citizens,” sabi ni Pimentel. (Dindo Matining)

<https://www.abante.com.ph/abante-search/#gsc.tab=0&gsc.sort=date&gsc.q=department%20of%20agriculture>

**ABANTE:**

# Iba pang ayuda, i-fastbreak na

- Abante News
- April 28, 2024



Tatlong buwan bago ang target na June 2024 ay naipasa na namin sa Kamara ang 19 priority bills na inendorso ng Malacañang. At dahil dito, may panahon na kaming mga kongresista para harapin ang iba pang panukala hinggil sa iba pang ayuda upang mas pagaanin ang buhay ng mga kababayan natin sa ilalim ng Bagong Pilipinas.

Sa pagbalik ng sesyon ng 19th Congress ngayong araw, puwede nang trabahuhin ang iba pang panukala na naglalayong mabigyan ng ayuda ang iba pang sektor bukod sa senior citizens, solo parents at PWDs o person with disabilities na kasama nga sa mga inuna nating inayudahan.

Kabilang sa mga kailangang bigyan din ng hiwalay na benepisyo ang mga kababayan nating magsasaka, mangingisda, mga electricity consumers at maging ang mga itinuturing nating ‘junior citizens’ o mga Filipino mula sanggol hanggang 12-anyos. Nararapat lang sila mabiyayaan ng ayuda dahil kasama rin namin sila sa pangarap ng Pangulo na mapayapa at masaganang Bagong Pilipinas para sa lahat ng Pilipino.

Magugunitang naisabatas na ang mga nalikha naming panukala na nagkaloob ng pinansyal na tulong, price discount at iba pang pribilehiyo sa mga priority

sector tulad ng senior citizens, solo parents at PWDs. Ang iyong lingkod ang isa sa may-akda ng RA 11916 o “Social Pension for Indigent Seniors Act” of 2022 kung saan dinoble ang buwanang pension ng mga mahihirap na lolo at lola na ginawang P1,000, gayun din ang RA 11982, kung saan bibigyan ng cash reward na P10,000 ang seniors pagdating nila ng edad na 80, 85, 90 at 95.

Tayo rin po ang isa sa mga pangunahing may akda sa RA 11861 na nagkakaloob naman ng tulong pinansyal at iba pang pribilehiyo sa single parents o ang mga naytay (nanay na, tatay pa).

Kahapon natapos ang aming 5-linggong pahinga at kami ay magsasagawa ng mga nalalabing plenary sessions at committee meetings sa second regular session ng 19th Congress sa darating na 4 na linggo hanggang sa sine die adjournment pagsapit ng May 25.

Ang inyo pong lingkod ay isa rin po sa pangunahing may akda ng batas kung saan nagpatupad ng condonation sa P58 bilyong utang ng halos kalahating milyong agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARB) at ngayon ay gusto ko namang isulong ang kauna-unahang pension plan para sa mga magsasaka at iba pang agricultural workers.

Kabilang sa mga panukala na puwedeng ikonsidera ng Kongreso ang HB 7963 na magbibigay ng mandato sa Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. (PCIC) para magtatag at pangasiwaan ang kauna-unahang Agricultural Pension Fund (APF) at mabigyan ng benepisyong mga magsasaka at mangingisda pagdating nila sa retirement age. Ito’y upang tulungan ang ating agri workers na kabilang sa mga mahihirap na bahagi ng lipunan. Sila ay hindi saklaw ng anumang pension program ng pamahalaan.

Kasama ko sa pag-aakda ng HB 7963 si Bicol Saro Rep. Brian Raymund Yamsuan.

Isa pang panukalang maaaring ikonsidera ng Kamara, ang ating HB 8312 na magbibigay naman ng automatic free coverage sa “junior citizens” sa National Health Insurance Program (NHIP) ng National Health Insurance Corp. (PhilHealth). Sa pamamagitan nito, makakatanggap ang mga junior citizens na nabibilang sa mga pamilyang may taunang kita na mas mababa pa sa P250,000 ng mga benepisyong tulad ng free medical at dental services gayundin sa laboratory fees sa mga government health facilities, bukod pa sa 20% discount at Value Added Tax (VAT) exemption sa medical at dental services, laboratory at professional fees sa mga pribadong ospital at klinika.

Mabibigyan din ng 20% discount at VAT-free privileges ang mahihirap na “junior citizens” sa admission fees sa mga sinehan, concert hall, circus, leisure and amusement; maging sa funeral at burial services.

Isinusulong din ng inyong lingkod ang trio of tax cuts para mapababa ang singil sa kuryente at petroleum products, bilang tulong sa mga kababayan natin sa gitna ng tumataas na inflation na dulot ng global oil shock.

Ang HB 8231 ay naglalayon na amiyendahan ang iba’t ibang seksyon ng National Internal Revenue Code (NIRC) of 1997 sa pamamagitan ng pagpapatupad ng temporary suspension sa loob ng 3 taon, o 50% cut sa ilang tax payments, upang mapababa ang halaga ng kuryente at retail prices ng mga produktong petrolyo.

Naunang iniulat ng ating House Speaker na si Martin Romualdez ang 100% passage ng Kamara sa 19 priority measures na tinukoy ng Pangulong Marcos bilang prayoridad. Naipasa ito tatlong buwan bago ang deadline na June 2024.

Ang inyong lingkod ay kabilang sa 10 sa 19 na priority bills na ito. Ang mga ito na co-author tayo ay ang mga bills sa E-Governance, Blue Economy, National Citizens Service Training (NCST) o dating Reserve Officers Training Corps o ROTC, Philippine Ecosystem and Natural Capital Accounting System (PENCAS), Negros Island Region, Waste-to-Energy Act, Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act, Government Procurement Reform Act, Anti-Financial Accounts Scamming Act (AFASA) at Department of Water Resources and Services (DWRS).

Sa 56 bills na inaprubahan ng Kamara out of the 59 priority bills, ang inyong lingkod po ay kabilang sa author o co-author ng 41 sa mga inaprubahang panukala na ito.

Pero tayo po ay naniniwalang, hindi naman ito maisasakatuparan ng Kamara kung wala ang mahusay na pagtitimon ni Speaker Martin na determinadong masustena ang masiglang post-pandemic growth at makalikha ng mas maraming trabaho at pangkabuhayan upang maingat pa ang pamumuhay ng mga Pilipino.

Sa ilalim ng mahusay na liderato ni Speaker Martin, napagtagumpayan ng Kamara ang pagpapasa ng malaking bilang ng mga panukalang batas na maglalapit sa ating Pangulo sa kanyang layunin na magkaroon ng mataas na malawakang pag-unlad o inclusive growth sa lahat ng Pilipino upang mabawasan ang kahirapan, maparami ang trabaho at kabuhayan at mapaangat pa ang ating ekonomiya.

Dahil sa mahusay na pamumuno ni Speaker, ang Kamara ay naging isang importanteng partner ng Malacañang sa Bagong Pilipinas ng ating Pangulo kung saan ang pag-unlad ay para sa lahat. Kaya tuloy-tuloy ang inyong lingkod

at ang National Unity Party (NUP) na aking pinamumunuan sa pagsuporta kay Speaker at sa aming common legislative agenda ni Pangulong Marcos.

<https://www.abante.com.ph/2024/04/28/iba-pang-ayuda-i-fastbreak-na/>

**ABANTE:**

## **Priority bills ng Malacañang tapos na: Villafuerte hiniling pagpasa ng panukalang sumusuporta sa Bagong Pilipinas**



- April 28, 2024

Matapos aprubahan ng Kamara de Representantes ang 19 na prayoridad na panukala ng Malacañang tatlong buwan bago ang deadline, hiniling ni Camarines Sur Rep. LRay Villafuerte na ipasa na rin ang iba pang panukala na tumutukod sa Bagong Pilipinas campaign in Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

Ayon kay Villafuerte, pangulo ng National Unity Party, ang magandang performance ng Kamara sa ilalim ni Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez ay nagbigay rito ng pagkakataon upang matalakay ang iba pang panukala na makatutulong sa mga Pilipino.

Kasama umano sa mga panukala na maaaring iprayoridad ng Kamara ang pagpasa ang dagdag na benepisyo sa mga magsasaka, mangingisda, mahihirap at “junior citizens” o mga indibidwal edad 0 hanggang 12 taong gulang.

“Improving the lives of all by granting benefits to more sectoral groups is in keeping with the President’s commitment to not leave any Filipino behind in his vision for a peaceful and prosperous Bagong Pilipinas,” sabi ni Villafuerte.

“Extending succor to these additional sectors is in order, given that we in the Congress have already written laws providing cash aid, price discounts, and other forms of economic privileges



and financial relief to such priority sectors as senior citizens, solo parents and PWDs,” dagdag pa nito.

Si Villafuerte ay isa sa may-akda ng batas na bumura sa halos P58 bilyong utang ng may kalahating miyong agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARB).

Matapos ito ay itinulak naman ni Villafuerte ang panukalang pagtatayo ng Agricultural Pension Fund (APF) upang magkaroon ng pensyon ang mga nagretirong magsasaka at mangingisda.

“Our agricultural workers, especially farmers and fisherfolk, are among the poorest groups in our society and are not covered by any pension program of the government,” sabi ni Villafuerte.

Itinutulak din ni Villafuerte ang automatic coverage ng mga “junior citizens” na mula sa mahihirap na pamilya sa National Health Insurance Program (NHIP) ng National Health Insurance Corp. (PhilHealth).

Sa ilalim ng panukala, ang mga junior citizen ay bibigyan ng 20% diskwento at Value Added Tax (VAT)-exemption sa medical at dental services sa laboratory at professional fee sa mga pribadong ospital at klinika.

Matapos ang mahigit isang buwang break, muling magbubukas ang sesyon ng Kongreso sa Lunes, Abril 29. Tatagal ito hanggang sa Mayo 25. (Billy Begas)

<https://tnt.abante.com.ph/2024/04/28/priority-bills-ng-malacanang-tapos-na-villafuerte-hiniling-pagpasa-ng-panukalang-sumusuporta-sa-bagong-pilipinas/news/>

**MANILA STANDARD:**

## **DA says will desist from revamping moves**



By Manila Standard

April 28, 2024, 11:00 pm

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said it will desist from any significant revamp within its affiliated agencies after the Office of the Ombudsman removed several officials of the National Food Authority (NFA) and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR).

The Ombudsman in March 2024, suspended former NFA administrator Roderico Bioco and other officials for allegedly selling rice reserves at a loss.

This was followed by the dismissal of BFAR director Demosthenes Escoto in 2017 over a bidding irregularity. Escoto was dismissed over alleged “grave misconduct” in the bidding for the contract of vessel monitoring systems.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel assures these are isolated incidents. He downplays any impact of Escoto’s dismissal on the ongoing NFA rice investigation, expected to conclude soon.

Both agencies continue normal operations under acting heads: Larry Lacson for NFA and Isidro Velayo Jr. for BFAR.

“I think these are isolated incidents. The former NFA administrator’s case happened early this year while the case of director Escoto happened in 2017. It’s just unfortunate

that the orders of the Ombudsman were issued one after the other,” said DA secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel.

He said the order removing BFAR director Escoto, who was earlier tasked 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.

<https://www.manilastandard.net/news/national/314440882/da-says-will-desist-from-revamping-moves.html>

**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# Catarman to build cold storage facility

By The Manila Times

April 29, 2024

THE local government of Catarman, in collaboration with the Department of Science and Technology (DoST), has initiated a project to construct a post-harvest facility equipped with cold storage technology to enhance local livelihoods and promote food security.

Catarman, through its mayor, Kiterio Antonio Palarca II, submitted a project proposal to the DoST.

The proposal justified the need for this facility and the viability of this project, prompting the DoST to approve and allocate funding support with counterparts from the municipality.

The start of the project is marked by a ceremonial turnover activity held on March 13, 2024.

During the turnover, Mayor Palarca and key municipal officials, including Municipal Planning Development Officer Mac Steven RJ de la Riarte, Municipal Agriculturist Joseph Navales and Municipal Accountant Joan Razo, witnessed the event.

The funding, provided under DoST's Community Empowerment through Science and Technology program, underscores the government's commitment to providing innovative solutions for community development.

The project aims to increase the income of fisherfolk by minimizing post-harvest losses and getting a better price for their produce. The steady supply of fish is assured, and tourism will be supported.

With a potential impact on over 239 fishermen, the initiative seeks to equip them with reliable storage facilities, ensuring the freshness and

quality of their catch. Mayor Palarca expressed gratitude to the DoST for its support in advancing the welfare of the fisherfolk.

"I am immensely grateful to DoST and its collaborative spirit with our municipality. This facility will revolutionize our local fishery sector, enabling our fishermen to preserve their harvest efficiently," said Palarca. "Beyond ensuring quality, this initiative opens avenues for expanded market access, driving economic growth and enhancing food security," added Palarca.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/04/29/regions/catarman-to-build-cold-storage-facility/1943795>

# **Inflation likely to hit 4.2% in second quarter**

By Niña Myka Pauline Arceo

April 29, 2024

HIGH oil and rice prices are expected to drive inflation to 4.2 percent in the second quarter, breaching the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas' (BSP) 2.0- to 4.0-percent target.

The pace of consumer price growth will then slow in the following three months, private sector economists said, allowing for a within-target average of 3.8 percent for 2024.

The inflationary impact of elevated rice and oil prices, economists from First Metro Investment Corp. (FMIC) and the University of Asia and the Pacific (UA&P) said, will be tempered by softer prices of other food products and base effects.

Rice prices also "have little upside," they said in the April edition of The Market Call report released last Friday, as Vietnam started harvesting in March and had committed to provide the Philippines with up to two million metric tons of the staple.

Crude oil prices, meanwhile, have "had difficulty moving beyond \$86 per barrel" — this is for the West Texas Intermediate benchmark — as production outside of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) make up for output cuts by the cartel.

Third and fourth quarter inflation will subsequently average within the BSP's 2.0- to 4.0-percent target, the economists said.

Consumer prices rose for a second straight month to 3.7 percent in March as food and transport costs increased. Rice inflation, in particular, picked up to 24.4 percent from 23.7 percent.

Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and OPEC's decision to extend output cuts, meanwhile, drove the rise in transport costs to 2.1 percent from 1.2 percent in February.

These brought first-quarter inflation to 3.3 percent, the economists noted.

Employment and manufacturing gains in February and March, meanwhile, prompted a revision to FMIC and the UA&P's first quarter growth forecast to 6.2 percent from 6.1 percent previously.

Gross domestic product (GDP) growth a year earlier was 5.5 percent.

Preliminary growth data for the first quarter of 2024 will be released by the Philippine Statistics Authority on May 9.

The government last month lowered its GDP growth target for this year to 6.0-7.0 percent, from 6.5-7.5 previously, given continued global headwinds including stubborn inflation and geopolitical tensions.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/04/29/business/top-business/inflation-likely-to-hit-42-in-second-quarter/1943853>

# **No revamp at NFA, BFAR; El Niño damage at P4.4B**

By **Jed Macapagal**

April 29, 2024

Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. ruled out a major revamp in DA attached agencies after the Office of the Ombudsman last month relieved heads of the National Food Authority (NFA) and Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR).

The Ombudsman ordered the preventive suspension of former NFA administrator Roderico Bioco and other officials of the grains agency for alleged disadvantageous sale of rice buffer stocks. The Ombudsman also ordered the dismissal of BFAR director Demosthenes Escoto for alleged “grave misconduct” in the bidding for the contract of vessel monitoring systems.

“I think these are isolated incidents. The former NFA administrator’s case happened early this year while the case of director Escoto happened in 2017. It’s just unfortunate that the orders of the Ombudsman were issued one after the other,” said Tiu Laurel, in a statement.

Tiu Laurel added the order removing BFAR director Escoto, who was tasked to head the review of the disposition of NFA rice buffer stocks in recent years, should not have a major impact on the investigation which should be completed in the coming weeks.

He also assured operations of the NFA and the BFAR are proceeding as usual, with the appointment of Larry Lacson as acting NFA administrator and assistant director for technical services Isidro Velayo Jr. as officer-in-charge of BFAR.

Meanwhile, the DA reported damage of El Niño to agriculture has reached P4.39 billion, up 11 percent from P3.94 billion last April 1.

The Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Operations Center in its advisory as of 12 noon of April 23 said damage from the weather phenomenon is equivalent to 77,731 hectares (ha) of areas tended by 85,232 farmers in the regions of Cordillera Administrative Region, Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol, Western Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Davao and Soccsksargen.

The total amount is also equivalent to a total volume loss of 184,002 metric tons (MT).

The DA said of the 77,731 ha affected, only 17,706 ha or 22.78 percent have no chance of recovery while the remaining 60,025 ha or 77.22 percent have a chance of recovery.

Initial El Niño agricultural damage from the said regions amounted to 113,446 MT of rice worth P2.71 billion; 24,306 MT of high value crops worth P869.34 million; 45,995 MT of corn worth



P769.68 million; effects to 2,261 fisherfolk worth P33.83 million; 381 heads of livestock and poultry worth P7.75 million; and 41 MT of cassava worth P561,900.

The DA said it has so far provided a total of P2.16 billion worth of assistance to affected farmers, including support to production, financial and livelihood assistance as well as water management.

[https://malaya.com.ph/news\\_business/no-revamp-at-nfa-bfar-el-nino-damage-at-p4-4b/](https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/no-revamp-at-nfa-bfar-el-nino-damage-at-p4-4b/)

# Empowering Filipino farmers

April 29, 2024



*KSK graduates from Cebu City learn about marketing techniques during their market tour at SM City Cebu and SM Seaside Cebu.*

The SM Foundation continues its mission of empowering Filipino farmers by bringing modern agricultural practices to rural and urban communities across the country through the Kabalikat sa Kabuhayan (KSK) on Sustainable Agriculture Program.

Recently, 98 farmers from Cebu and Tagum City graduated from KSK.

This batch comprised 25 graduates from Batch 310 in Brgy. Madaum, Tagum City; 25 from Batch 311 in Brgy. Nueva Fuerza, Tagum City; 21 from Batch 283 in Brgy. Carita, Cebu City; and 27 graduates from Batch 291 in Brgy. Mambaling, Cebu City.

KSK graduates from Cebu City learn about marketing techniques during their market tour at SM City Cebu and SM Seaside Cebu.



*KSK graduates from Brgy Nueva Fuerza Tagum City*

All 98 participants successfully completed a rigorous 14-week hands-on training program, where they are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to thrive in today's agricultural landscape. Conducted with SM Foundation's partners, the program covers various aspects of farming, including technology updates, capacity building, financial literacy, and market opportunities.

This holistic approach empowers graduates to not only produce bountiful harvests to contribute to food security but also develop their entrepreneurial capabilities.

Since 2007, the KSK-SAP has fueled the farming and entrepreneurial capabilities of over 30,000 marginalized rural and urban farmers nationwide. Some of the farmers' training graduates have become seasonal suppliers within the SM Group and other local markets.

<https://malaya.com.ph/news/living/empowering-filipino-farmers/>

# Wheat climbs, corn flat

By Reuters

April 29, 2024

CHICAGO- Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) wheat futures turned higher for a seventh trading day on Friday on a weather-driven surge that pushed the most-active contract to its biggest weekly gain since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war.

Soybean futures inched down, and corn stayed fairly flat as traders watched for US planting delays as heavy showers are forecast in the Midwest in the coming days.

Corn also drew support from stronger-than-expected weekly US export sales, though slower soybean exports underscored competition from Brazil, analysts said.

CBOT's July wheat futures settled up 1-3/4 cents at \$6.22-1/4 a bushel. Earlier in the session, that contract hit a high of \$6.33-1/4 a bushel, the contract's highest price since Jan. 11.

Dry weather in parts of southern Russia and the central US as well as freezing weather in parts of Europe continued to propel short covering, although weather forecasts showed greater chances of rain next week in both regions.

[https://malaya.com.ph/news\\_business/wheat-climbs-corn-flat-2/](https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/wheat-climbs-corn-flat-2/)

## **BUSINESS MIRROR:**

# **Laurel rules out major revamp in agencies attached to DA**

- BusinessMirror
- April 29, 2024
- A major revamp in agencies attached to the Department of Agriculture (DA) is not needed even after the Office of Ombudsman relieved the heads of the National Food Authority (NFA) and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (Bfar).
- Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu P. Laurel Jr. also said the operations of the two agencies remain unhampered despite the relief of their heads.
- The Ombudsman in March ordered the preventive suspension of NFA Administrator Roderico R. Bioco and other officials of the grains agency over the alleged disadvantageous sale of rice buffer stocks. Bfar Director Demosthenes Escoto was ordered dismissed over alleged “grave misconduct” in the bidding for the contract of vessel monitoring systems.
- “I think these are isolated incidents. The former NFA administrator’s case happened early this year while the case of director Escoto happened in 2017. It’s just unfortunate that the orders of the Ombudsman were issued one after the other,” Laurel said in a statement over the weekend.
- He also said the order removing Escoto, who was earlier tasked to head the review of the disposition of NFA rice buffer stocks in recent years, should not have a major impact on the investigation which should be completed in the coming weeks.
- He said operations of both the NFA and Bfar are “proceeding as usual,” with the appointment of two officials—Larry Lacson as acting NFA administrator and assistant director for technical services Isidro Velayo Jr. as officer-in-charge of Bfar.
- Last month, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. said the government is reviewing the disposal procedures of the NFA after it allegedly sold 75,000 bags of “deteriorating rice.”
- “It also is an examination of some of the procedures within the NFA that were undertaken without Board approval, without the proper discussion within the NFA and with the DA and with the rest of the Cabinet,” Marcos told reporters.
- The Ombudsman initiated its probe on the matter based on the letter-complaint submitted by NFA Assistant Administrator for Operations Lemuel R. Pagayunan to the Office of the President last month.

- Pagayunan claimed Bioco and his administrators allegedly manifested partiality or gross negligence when they allowed the sale of aging rice to “preselected” traders for P93.75 million.
- Meanwhile, in a statement it issued last April 17, the DA said Escoto could still seek reconsideration of the Ombudsman’s decision or file an appeal before the Court of Appeals.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/04/29/laurel-rules-out-major-revamp-in-agencies-attached-to-da/>

# **Report: Acute hunger remains persistently high in 59 countries**

- BusinessMirror
- April 29, 2024
- Nearly 282 million people in 59 countries and territories experienced levels of acute hunger in 2023, a worldwide increase of 24 million from the previous year, according to the latest Global Report on Food Crises (GRFC).
- This rise was due to the report's increased coverage of food crisis contexts as well as a sharp deterioration in food security, especially in the Gaza Strip and the Sudan.
- For four consecutive years, the proportion of people facing acute food insecurity has remained persistently high at almost 22 percent of those assessed, significantly exceeding pre-Covid-19 levels.
- Children and women are at the forefront of these hunger crises, with over 36 million children under 5 years of age acutely malnourished across 32 countries, the report showed. Acute malnutrition worsened in 2023, particularly among people displaced because of conflict and disasters.
- The Global Network Against Food Crises called for a “transformative approach” that integrates peace, prevention and development action alongside at-scale emergency efforts to break the cycle of acute hunger which remains at unacceptably high levels.
- “This crisis demands an urgent response. Using the data in this report to transform food systems and address the underlying causes of food insecurity and malnutrition will be vital,” UN Secretary-General António Guterres said in a statement.
- Protracted hunger
- Thirty-six countries have been consistently featured in the GRFC analyses since 2016, reflecting continuing years of acute hunger, and currently representing 80 percent of the world's most hungry.
- There has also been an increase of 1 million people facing Emergency (IPC/CH Phase 4) levels of acute food insecurity across 39 countries and territories, with the biggest increase in the Sudan.
- In 2023, more than 705,000 people were at the Catastrophe (IPC/CH Phase 5) level of food insecurity and at risk of starvation—the highest number in the GRFC's reporting history and up fourfold since 2016. The current situation in the Gaza Strip accounts for 80 percent of those facing imminent famine, along with South Sudan, Burkina Faso, Somalia and Mali.

- According to the GRFC 2024 outlook, around 1.1 million people in the Gaza Strip and 79 000 people in South Sudan are projected to be in Catastrophe (IPC/CH Phase 5) by July 2024, bringing the total amount of people projected in this phase to almost 1.3 million.
- Key drivers of food crises
- Intensifying conflict and insecurity, the impacts of economic shocks, and the effects of extreme weather events are continuing to drive acute food insecurity. These interlinked drivers are exacerbating food systems fragility, rural marginalization, poor governance, and inequality, and lead to massive displacement of populations globally. The protection situation of displaced population is additionally impacted by food insecurity.
- Conflict remained the primary driver affecting 20 countries with nearly 135 million people in acute food insecurity—almost half of the global number. The Sudan faced the largest deterioration due to conflict, with 8.6 million more people facing high levels of acute food insecurity as compared with 2022.
- Extreme weather events were the primary drivers in 18 countries where over 77 million people faced high levels of acute food insecurity, up from 12 countries with 57 million people in 2022. In 2023, the world experienced its hottest year on record and climate related shocks impacted populations, with episodes of severe floods, storms, droughts, wildfires, and pest and disease outbreaks.
- Economic shocks primarily affected 21 countries where around 75 million people were facing high levels of acute food insecurity, due to their high dependency on imported food and agricultural inputs, persisting macroeconomic challenges, including currency depreciation, high prices and high debt levels.
- GRFC 2024 is the result of a collaborative effort among 16 partners. It aims to inform humanitarian and development action by providing independent and consensus-based evidence and analysis.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/04/29/report-acute-hunger-remains-persistently-high-in-59-countries/>



## **DTI trains local growers on cacao processing**

- BusinessMirror
- April 29, 2024

Local cacao growers participated in a training on cacao bean fermentation and processing conducted by the regional office of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) in Surigao del Norte.

The DTI said 20 participants, mostly women, gained insights into the cacao industry's value and nutritional benefits. This knowledge, the agency said, is set to foster a sustainable approach to cacao cultivation.

The goal of the training was to equip local cacao growers with the technical know-how to become suppliers of fermented cacao beans to local processors. This initiative is part of a broader strategy to promote value-added agriculture, where farmers do not just grow crops, but also process them into higher-value products.

The DTI said the participants are members of the Cantapoy Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Cooperative, composed of local farmers and processors. The cooperative, which is also a dried squid processor, decided to diversify into cacao processing as an additional source of income.

“With more than 1,000 cacao trees already planted, the cooperative is well-positioned to take advantage of this new opportunity,” the DTI said in a statement.

The agency said some members of the cooperative are already processing tableya, a traditional Filipino chocolate made from fermented and roasted cacao beans. According to the chairman of the cooperative, some of the bean buyers are already picking up their orders directly from the area.

“This indicates a growing interest in locally sourced, high-quality cacao products.”

The training on cacao bean fermentation and processing is just the first step in unlocking the secrets of cacao, according to the DTI.

“With the knowledge and skills acquired, the Cantapoy Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Cooperative is set to become one of the key players in the local cacao industry. This will not only provide an additional source of income for the members but also contribute to the overall economic development of Surigao del Norte.”

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/04/29/dti-trains-local-growers-on-cacao-processing/>

# Tulfo, isusulong pagbenta ng NFA rice sa palengke

[Doris Franche-Borja](#)

April 29, 2024 | 12:00am

MANILA, Philippines — “Magbenta muli ng NFA rice sa mga palengke para maging affordable ang bigas sa lahat”.

Ito raw ang isusulong ni ACT-CIS Rep. Erwin Tulfo ngayong linggo sa Kamara na anya’y tanging paraan para bumaba ang presyo ng bigas sa mga pamilihan.

“Noong may NFA rice pa sa palengke, mas mura sila ng P5 to P10 per kilo kumpara sa regular commercial rice”, ayon kay Tulfo, House Deputy Majority Leader.

Aniya, “pero para mangyari ito, kailangan na talagang ibasura itong RA 11203 o Rice Tariffication Law”.

Ayon kasi sa nasabing batas, ipinagbabawal na sa National Food Authority (NFA) ang pagbebenta ng bigas bagkus ito ay maaring mag-imbak na lang ng bigas bilang buffer stock ng bansa para sa panahon ng emergency.

“May mga batas kasi tayo na ‘di na naangkop sa panahon kaya kailangan ng rebyuhin o ibasura”, dagdag pa ng mambabatas.

Pahabol ni Tulfo, “kagaya ngayon mahal ang bigas at naghahanap ang tao ng murang bigas...and its only NFA that can deliver that”.

<https://www.philstar.com/pilipino-star-ngayon/bansa/2024/04/29/2351163/tulfo-isusulong-pagbenta-ng-nfa-rice-sa-palengke>

**ABANTE TONITE:**

## **Kamara ibabalik NFA rice sa palengke**

April 28, 2024

Pursigido si ACT- CIS Rep. Erwin Tulfo na maibalik sa mga palengke ang NFA rice para mas marami ang makinabang.

“Magbenta muli ng NFA rice sa mga palengke para maging affordable ang bigas sa lahat,” pahayag ni Rep. Tulfo ngayong linggo sa Kamara.

Ayon kay Cong. Tulfo, “ito lang ang tanging paraan para bumaba ang presyo ng bigas sa mga pamilihan”.

“Noong may NFA rice pa sa palengke, mas mura sila ng P5 to P10 per kilo kumpara sa regular commercial rice”, ayon kay Tulfo na siya ring House Deputy Majority Leader.

Aniya, “pero para mangyari ito, kailangan na talagang ibasura itong RA 11203 o Rice Tariffication Law”.

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<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2024/04/28/kamara-ibabalik-nfa-rice-sa-palengke/>