

MANILA BULLETIN:

'Masyadong matakaw sa kita': Romualdez refuses to let greedy traders, middlemen off the hook

BY ELLSON QUISMORIO

Apr 29, 2024 08:19 PM

AT A GLANCE

- House Speaker Martin Romualdez has issued a stern warning to so-called "profiteers" amid the growing disparity between farm gate prices of agricultural products and retail prices of basic goods.



House Speaker Martin Romualdez (Ellson Quismorio/ MANILA BULLETIN)

House Speaker Martin Romualdez has issued a stern warning to so-called "profiteers" amid the growing disparity between farm gate prices of agricultural products and retail prices of basic goods.

"So, sa mga nag-profiteer, sa mga traders, sa mga middlemen na masyadong matakaw sa mga kita nila, basta bantay na lang kayo. Basta moderate your greed and try to be more reasonable," Romualdez said during an impromptu press briefing Monday, April 29.

(So, to the profiteers, the traders, the middlemen who are too greedy when it comes to their profit, keep an eye out. Just moderate your greed and try to be more reasonable.)

The Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats (Lakas-CMD) president gave these remarks following a hearing by the House Committee on Trade and Industry on the low farm gate prices and high retail prices.

Romualdez was dismayed upon learning from Department of Agriculture (DA) and Department of Trade and

Industry (DTI) officials who attended the hearing that they had no immediate solution to the problem.

Similarly expressing their dismay at the press briefing were committee chairman, Iloilo 4th district Rep. Ferjanel Biron and House Deputy Majority Leader ACT-CIS Party-list Rep. Erwin Tulfo.

Farm gate prices refer to the prices received by farmers once their crops are sold at the farm's location. Retail prices, on the other hand, are the prices that consumers pay for products, particularly in small quantities.

"Naghanap kami ng mas maaga at mas magandang paraan kung paano natin aagapan itong trend na tumataas iyong bilihan," Romualdez said.

(We are looking for more immediate and better solutions on how to address this trend of runaway prices of basic goods.)

In this regard, the House chief said he would have the traders and middlemen themselves attend the next hearing so they may answer the solon's queries.

"Tatawagan natin yung mga trader, yung mga middlemen. Tatanungin natin kung bakit ang malalaking agwat naman, yung farm gate ay ganito, yung binebenta niyo ay ganito masyadong malayo ang diperensya," he said.

(We will invite the traders, the middlemen. We will ask them why there's such a huge disparity, why the farm gate is at this level, and why they're selling at prices so far from it.)

And they'd better answer properly. Although none of the congressmen said it, the House, during its inquiries, may hold a resource person in detention if they feel that they are being uncooperative.

"So i-inquire natin kung bakit ganon. ung di maayos yung explanation, kung masyadong matakaw lang sa kita, sabihin natin i-moderate nila yan kasi kung hindi, talagang agrabyado tayong lahat at syempre may mananagot diyang hindi ba?" Romualdez said.

(So we will inquire why that happened. If they don't give a proper explanation and they just greedy with profit, we'll tell them to moderate it because if not, then we will all suffer and we will hold someone accountable, right?)

In his speech during plenary session, the Speaker declared, "The discrepancy between farmgate and retail prices of basic goods is alarming and warrants immediate attention."

"We cannot ignore the plight of our farmers who are struggling to make ends meet, nor can we turn a blind eye to the burden placed on consumers," he added.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/4/29/masyadong-matakaw-sa-kita-romualdez-refuses-to-let-greedy-traders-middlemen-off-the-hook>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Salt Industry Development Act

BY FLOR G. TARRIELA

Apr 29, 2024 06:02 PM

The Philippines has one of the longest coastlines at 36,289 kilometers, the 5th longest in the world. The country's thriving salt industry, mostly from Occidental Mindoro, Pangasinan, Bulacan, and Cavite, in the 90's was able to supply about 85 percent of local requirements.

An Act for Salt Iodization Nationwide, Republic Act 8172 became a law in 1995. Known as the ASIN LAW, it aimed to promote the production of iodized salt for the prevention of iodine deficiency disorders. It mandated all salt producers to iodize their products. Salt has many uses other than food such as in agriculture (coconut fertilizer), health and wellness (relieve sore throat-gargle with warm water, soak feet) etc. It was successful as the iodine deficiency was addressed. However, it "practically killed" the salt industry and made the Philippines imports 93 percent of the salt requirements, resulting in loss of livelihood and production.

The good news is that President Marcos Jr. recently signed into law, Republic Act 11985 or the "Philippines Salt Industry Development Act" to revitalize the salt industry. Finally, iodizing salt is now optional. Clara Lapus, founder of Mamasita that specializes in food mixes, condiments, and sauces, has been clamoring for this change for so many years.

The new Salt Law will provide a comprehensive roadmap to implement programs and interventions: in technology (all year-round production), research, and adequate financial, production (low cost), marketing, modernization and other support services. It is envisioned that new jobs particularly in the coastal communities will be generated. Salt, unprocessed and processed shall be exempt from all taxes.

The Department of Agriculture through the Bureau of the Fisheries Aquatic Resources (BFAR) as lead government agency will ensure that salt is a priority commodity to be produced locally. Government agencies will also have active roles. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) will identify suitable public lands for salt farming, while the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) will work on road linkages. The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) for conduct training along technical expertise by the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) while the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) will work on trade and exports promotion. The goal is to be self-sufficient and ultimately be an exporter of salt to be properly labelled "Made in the Philippines".

The topic of salt reminds me of my mother Arling. As a young housewife and an entrepreneur, she prayed for a business that she can do at home. As we were from Malabon and with the Navotas "punduhan" or wholesale fish market nearby, she started a patis business. She branded her patis "Dalisay" taking pride that it was unadulterated, purely a mixture of the basic raw materials: fish and salt. As a home-based business, my mom did practically everything. She bottled the patis with our house help and even drove the jeep in the 1950s (one of the first woman drivers) to deliver the patis to sari-sari stores and markets. Her business prospered with little overhead. Soon our backyard had truckloads of fish and salt to be mixed and placed in huge, cemented tanks to ferment as patis.

Nanay had a trusted agent to source the salt. The practice is that salt was paid by counting the empty sacks after delivery. On one salt delivery day, she noticed empty sacks inside the truck upon entering our gate. Oh my! This means that she was paying for empty sacks! She was so

disappointed. What to do? Grrr! She stopped using that supplier and shared her heartaches with anyone with sympathetic ear. One suggested why not have your own salt beds?

To take her mind off her traumatic experience, my father then Director of Mines brought her (and me) to Baguio at the Annual Mining Conference. At Burnham Park, she met a friend who offered her salt beds in Pangasinan. As it was fully developed, she found the price steep. This crystallized the idea of producing her own salt. She bought raw land in PangASINan (means a place to cultivate salt) and supervised the construction of salt beds. Her experience was a “blessing in disguise” as today, many years later, we still enjoy the crystal-clear unpolluted fruits of those salt beds.

Local salt production (mainly from Occidental Mindoro and Pangasinan) is now estimated to supply about 16 percent of local requirements. The Philippine Salt Industry Development Act is an excellent step to restore our salt industry. Next is to watch the actual implementation by government agencies - DA, DENR, DTI, DOST, DPWH, DOLE, TESDA etc.- and with private sector to achieve self-sufficiency and even be an exporter.

Ms. Tarriela was former PNB Chairman and now serves as Board Advisor. A former Undersecretary of Finance, she is lead independent director of Nickel Asia Corp., director of LTG Inc. and FINEX. A gardener and an environmentalist, she founded Flor's Garden in Antipolo, now an events destination.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/4/29/salt-industry-development-act-1>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Erwin Tulfo bats for return of NFA rice; seeks review of Rice Tarrification Law

BY DEXTER BARRO II

Apr 29, 2024 03:06 PM

AT A GLANCE

- House Deputy Majority Leader and ACT-CIS Party-list Rep. Erwin Tulfo is urging the Department of Agriculture (DA) to review the Rice Tarrification Law (RTL) in order to reinstate the National Food Authority's (NFA) power to directly sell lower-priced rice to the market.



ACT-CIS Party-list Rep. Erwin Tulfo (Facebook)

House Deputy Majority Leader and ACT-CIS Party-list Rep. Erwin Tulfo is urging the Department of Agriculture (DA) to review the Rice Tarrification Law (RTL) in order to reinstate the National Food Authority's (NFA) power to directly sell lower-priced rice to the market.

“A lot of our people are asking, kailan ba ibabalik ang NFA rice sa mga palengke? (when will NFA rice return to the markets?) That’s what they are looking for,” said Tulfo.

Tulfo issued this statement during a House Committee on Agriculture and Food briefing on the RTL’s implementation status.

Under Republic Act (RA) No. 11203 or the RTL, the NFA is prohibited from selling rice to the public as part of its stabilization function to the rice industry.

The agency is only allowed to sell directly to local government units (LGUs), which will then be in charge of selling rice to their constituents.

“Right now, ang bigas natin parang ginto ang presyo (the price of our rice is like gold). Unlike before, when NFA [was] selling rice sa palengke affordable binibili ng mga tao (in the markets what the people were buying was affordable),” Tulfo said.

He pointed out that when rice from the NFA was available, it was usually P10 to P15 cheaper than the price of commercial rice.

“By taking away the authority or the power of NFA to sell rice sa (to the) public at a lower cost, inalisan niyo rin ng kapangyarihan ang taongbayan na mahihirap na bumili ng murang bigas (you also take the power away from the poor people to buy cheap rice),” the solon stressed.

According to National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) Director Nieva Natural, the NFA was barred by law from selling due to supposed issues in the agency’s governance that placed the government in debt.

Because of this, the NFA is left to prioritize the purchase of buffer stocks—which refers to the optimal level of rice inventory to be used for emergency situations and disaster relief programs.

“Ang trabaho na lang ng NFA ngayon maging inutil (the job of the NFA now is to be useless),” chimed Tulfo.

The broadcaster-turned-lawmaker noted that the RTL should be immediately “tinkered with” to revitalize the NFA’s previously vital role in Filipinos’ dining tables.

“There is an urgency, we cannot just sit back and relax while most of our kababayan (countrymen) cannot afford [rice], who are living under the minimum wage,” he said.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/4/29/erwin-tulfo-bats-for-return-of-nfa-rice-seeks-review-of-rice-tarrification-law>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Marcos vows more farm aid to boost farmers' output

BY RAYMUND ANTONIO

Apr 29, 2024 07:13 PM

Farmers in Mindanao can expect farm machineries and equipment, irrigation systems, and technologies to boost their production as part of President Marcos' continuous support for them.



President Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr. leads the inauguration of the Malitubog-Maridagao Irrigation Project Stage II in Pikit, Cotabato on Monday, April 29, 2024. (Photo from the Presidential Communications Office)

In his media interview in Cotabato on Monday, April 29, the Chief Executive vowed to keep supporting farmers as they aim to uplift their lives.

“Kukuha tayo ng mga makinarya, ng mga equipment... farm equipment, kasama na diyan ‘yung tractor, ‘yung mga post harvest facility. Para mas maganda ang hanap-buhay ng ating mga farmer (We will get machinery, equipment... farm equipment, with tractors and post harvest facility. Farmers will have better livelihoods),” he told reporters.

“At hindi na sila masyadong nag-aalala at mas mababa pa ang production cost para mas malaki naman ang kita nila (This way, they won't have to worry because the production cost

is lower and their income is higher). This is the same thing that we've been trying to do all around the country," he added.

Marcos also assured that the government is on top of the situation regarding the impact of the El Niño phenomenon, citing the irrigation systems, dams, and impounding pools that his administration has prioritized since November last year.

These, he added, later paid off with a much better agriculture production during the latest harvest season.

"Siyempre bababa ang ani natin dahil walang tubig. Ngunit sa mga area na may patubig mas tumaas ang production rate natin (Of course, our harvest will decrease because there's no water. But in the areas with irrigation, our production rate increased)," Marcos explained.

The Chief Executive added that the tons per hectare of the irrigated areas are higher because of government intervention.

"So, ang susi talaga rito ay palawakin ang irrigation system. At 'yun ang ginagawa natin. Isang magandang halimbawa itong ating binuksan ngayong araw (The key here is to expand the irrigation system. That's what we are doing. One good example is the one we opened today)," he said.

The President was in Cotabato to lead the inauguration of the Malitubog-Maridagao Irrigation Project Stage II (MMIP II), which will benefit more than 4,000 farmers there.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/4/29/marcos-vows-more-farm-aid-to-boost-farmers-output>

BUSINESS WORLD:

NIA granted full Angat water allocation in May

April 29, 2024 | 8:55 pm



PHILSTAR FILE PHOTO

THE National Water Resources Board (NWRB) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources said they agreed on a full allocation of water from Angat Dam for irrigation ahead of the harvest.

“For May, full allocation was given by the NWRB to the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) because May is the last month of the cropping season. Farmers will soon harvest their crops,” Environment Undersecretary Carlos Primo C. David said in a briefing on Monday.

He added that NIA will be allocated 24 cubic meters per second (cms), following an adjustment in the wet-season crop calendar to start in February due to El Niño.

The dry-season calendar has been adjusted accordingly to start in September.

Angat Dam is the main source of water for Metro Manila and nearby provinces, accounting for about 90% of the capital’s potable water.

Mr. David said that despite the threat of El Niño on the water supply to keep from letting the dry-season crop from going to waste.

“We are in the last month of the cropping season. If we were to stop at this point *masasayang ’yung* dry season cropping *natin* (our dry-season crop would go to waste); therefore, we have given full allocation to irrigation for a harvest by the end of May,” he said.

According to the government weather service, known as PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration), El Niño is currently weakening, with its effects projected to last until August.

“The El Niño is ending but the drought conditions persist because of the transition from El Niño to La Niña,” Science and Technology Secretary Renato U. Solidum, Jr. said.

PAGASA said that about 41 provinces will experience drought until the end of April, with 23 undergoing dry spells.

Mr. David added that the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) will be allocated 50 cms for the May 1 to 15 period, unchanged from January. The MWSS typically draws 48 cms from Angat Dam.

“The allocation is enough from May 1 to 15. However, I should mention that even if we have full allocation... our secretary is recommending to us and the (other) agencies to do pursue conservation measures,” he said.

Mr. David added that the department will release a bulletin on water conservation measures.

“(There are) at least two months of drought conditions that we need to get through. *Kahit sapat pa ang ating tubig* (even if the water is sufficient), we need to practice conservation,” Mr. David said.

Meanwhile, the Department of Agriculture reported that the damage to farm goods from El Niño has amounted to P4.39 billion, with rice and corn being the most affected crops.

Damage to rice made up 61.7%, or P2.71 billion of the total, equivalent to 113,446 metric tons (MT). Corn damage was valued at P769.68 million or 45,995 MT. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/04/29/591791/nia-granted-full-angat-water-allocation-in-may/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Budget funding sought for food imports to serve as price stabilization ‘buffer’

April 29, 2024 | 8:54 pm



THE Department of Agriculture (DA) asked legislators on Monday for a P513-billion budget to import farm products that it plans to tap as a reserve to bring under control the widening gap between farmgate and retail prices.

The DA proposed maintaining a reserve equivalent to 10 days' worth of demand for key commodities.

“Our problem is not only a short-term issue but a long-term, systemic issue,” DA Policy Research Service Director Jerome D. Bunyi told in a House Trade and Industry Committee hearing. “We have a proposal allowing us to have a buffer fund, allowing us to procure and import (goods),” he added.

House legislators were looking into the wide gap between farmgate and retail prices of basic goods.

To solve price discrepancies, Perpetua Werlina C. Reyes-Lim, a division chief for enforcement at the Department of Trade and Industry's Fair Trade Enforcement Bureau, said such a reserve of commodities has legal authorization from the Price Act.

"There is a provision in the Price Act that an agency can implement an appropriation fund to have a buffer fund," she said. "This would allow imports, especially for the DA, because the entry of more stocks (of basic goods) would reduce prices."

The commodity reserve is designed to deter hoarding, she added.

The divergence of farmgate and retail prices was noted in the DA's report to the panel.

"The presentation clearly shows that farmgate prices are too low compared to retail prices," Surigao del Sur Rep. Romeo S. Momo, Sr. said.

"Processing costs, marketing margins, and consumer preferences (influence) retail pricing," Junibert E. de Sagun, DA director for agribusiness and marketing assistance services, said.

Farmgate prices are mostly influenced by "supply and demand dynamics, weather conditions, transportation costs, and marketing competition," he added.

Steven T. Cua, Philippine Amalgamated Supermarkets Association executive director, said retailers are only putting an "8%" gross margin for "fast-moving" produce and a "10%" margin for refrigerated goods, to account for electricity costs.

The divergence in the prices indicate that "someone in the middle is earning," Iloilo Rep. Ferjenel G. Biron, who presided over the panel, said.

The House is planning on inviting traders and importers to explain the price disparities, Speaker and Leyte Rep. Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez said in a statement. — **Kenneth Christiane L. Basilio**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/04/29/591790/budget-funding-sought-for-food-imports-to-serve-as-price-stabilization-buffer/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

PHL 2023 meat imports fell by 16% on higher domestic production — FAO

April 29, 2024 | 8:54 pm



REUTERS

PHILIPPINE meat imports declined 16% in 2023 in the face of higher domestic production, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), an agency of the United Nations.

In a report, the FAO said that imports last year amounted to 1.05 million metric tons (MT), against 1.25 million MT in 2022.

“The import drop in the Philippines was driven by higher inventories and an upturn in domestic output, despite the extension (of favorable) tariff rates on pig meat imports,” it added.

Last year, the President signed Executive Order No. 50, which extended the lower tariff regime on pork, rice, and corn.

Pork tariffs were retained at 15% for shipments within the minimum access volume (MAV) and 25% for those exceeding the MAV.

Domestic production of meat increased 3.5% in 2023 to 2.99 million MT.

Pork production rose 2.5% to 1.25 million MT. Imports declined to 388 thousand MT from 521 thousand MT in 2022.

The National Federation of Hog Farmers, Inc. has estimated a 3% increase in domestic hog production for 2024.

Meanwhile, the FAO said global trade in meat and meat products dropped 1.5% to 40.5 million MT last year.

“(In terms of) trade performance at the country level, Japan registered the largest volume drop in imports, followed by the Philippines and the US,” it added.

It reported that the contraction in global trade was mainly due to lower exports of pig meat, which fell 7.9%.

In the first quarter, meat imports rose 3.06% year on year to 273.64 million kilograms, driven by rising shipments of pork and beef. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/04/29/591789/phl-2023-meat-imports-fell-by-16-on-higher-domestic-production-fao/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Restore NFA's authority to sell cheap rice to public — Tulfo

April 29, 2024 | 9:01 pm



PHILIPPINE STAR/ MICHAEL VARCAS

THE GOVERNMENT should consider giving back control to the National Food Authority (NFA) to sell rice in public markets amid increasing prices of basic goods, a congressman told a House panel hearing on Monday.

“By taking away the authority (of the NFA) to sell rice to the public at a lower cost, you removed the ability of the people, the poor, to buy cheaper rice,” Party-list Rep. Erwin T. Tulfo said.

Aside from deregulating the importation of rice products, the Rice Tariffication Law (Republic Act No. 11203) also removed the ability of the NFA to sell rice directly to public markets, only allowing the agency to monitor and ensure ample rice stocks for use during times of emergency.

“Our people are looking for NFA rice. There’s no more NFA rice in the markets today,” Mr. Tulfo said.

The enactment of Republic Act (R.A.) 11203 allowed the NFA to directly sell rice to the public, NFA Officer-in-Charge and Deputy Administrator Mario G. Andrada told the House Agriculture and Food Committee.

The NFA can only sell rice to local governments, he added. “LGUs (Local Government Units) can buy rice stocks from us, with them selling it to the public,” he said in Filipino.

A review of the law should include considering the restoration of the NFA’s authority to sell rice to public markets, Mr. Tulfo said.

While the current law disallows the selling of NFA rice to public markets, the Department of Agriculture (DA) could utilize its buffer fund to stockpile rice stocks to be provided in Kadiwa stores, DA Assistant Secretary Paz Benavidez II said.

“Not all towns in the Philippines have Kadiwa (stores). Kadiwa only exists three to four times a week,” Mr Tulfo said.

‘EXTEND RICE FUND’
The DA has proposed the extension of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) up to 2030 as the fund is set to expire next year.

DA Undersecretary for Rice Industry Development Christopher V. Morales is also seeking to increase the funding of farm machinery under the RCEF to 55% from its current share of 50% in the P10-billion annual allocation.

Amending the Rice Tariffication Law to allow the department secretaries of the agriculture and trade agencies to import rice under “specified conditions” is also recommended by Mr. Morales, allowing the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and DA to secure buffer stocks alongside the NFA.

Suggested amendments to empower the secretaries of DA and DTI to import rice under specified conditions alongside allowing the NFA to secure buffer stocks through alternative schemes

“We’re also recommending disallowing exports during food security emergencies during time,” he said. — **Kenneth Christiane L. Basilio**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/the-nation/2024/04/29/591757/restore-nfas-authority-to-sell-cheap-rice-to-public-tulfo/>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Agri damage due to El Niño hits P1.6 billion

By: [John Eric Mendoza](#) - Reporter / [@JEMendozaINQ](#)
[INQUIRER.net](#) / 08:55 PM April 29, 2024



President Ferdinand “Bongbong” R. Marcos Jr. talks to government officers and representatives during an inspection at an onion and rice field hit by drought due to El Niño in Brgy. Central in San Jose, Occidental Mindoro on Tuesday, April 23, 2024. (PPA POOL)

MANILA, Philippines — Agricultural damage due to the effects of the El Niño phenomenon has reached P1.6 billion, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council said in a situational report on Monday.

The weather phenomenon has so far affected 46,805 farmers and fisherfolk and damaged 44,437 hectares of farm lands.

Damage to livestock, poultry, and fisheries is pegged at P772,600.

A total of 2,087,027 individuals in 10 regions nationwide were affected by El Niño.

El Niño prevails nationwide, causing below-normal rainfall conditions that could bring “dry spells” or droughts in some parts of the country until the first quarter of 2024.

But the US weather bureau said the [La Niña weather pattern](#)—characterized by unusually cold temperatures in the equatorial Pacific Ocean and is linked with floods and drought—could emerge in the second half of 2024 and cause adverse effects to the agriculture sector.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1935039/agri-damage-due-to-el-nino-now-at-p1-6-billion>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Marcos to farmers: Take care of people-owned agri infrastructure

By: [Jean Mangaluz](#) - Reporter / [@JMangaluzINO](#)
INQUIRER.net / 02:21 PM April 29, 2024



President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. gives a speech in this file photo taken on June 14, 2023, during the launching of the Consolidated Rice Production and Mechanization Program in Banga, South Cotabato. (Photo from the Presidential Communications Office)

MANILA, Philippines — President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Monday told farmers in Cotabato to take care of the newly inaugurated Malitubog-Maridagao Irrigation Project Stage II (MMIP-II).

Marcos led the inauguration ceremony in Cotabato in Mindanao.

“Ang proyektong ito ay mula sa taumbayan, tungo sa taumbayan, kaya dapat pangalagaan din ng taumbayan. As a people-owned infrastructure, you must take care of this very valuable project that we are inaugurating today,” Marcos said.

(This project is from the people, for the people, so the people must take care of it. As a people-owned infrastructure, you must take care of this very valuable project that we are inaugurating today.)

According to the Palace, the newly inaugurated MMIP-II cost P5.133 billion, and covers a total agricultural land area of 9,528 hectares in North Cotabato and Maguindanao del Sur.

Once operational, 4,000 farmers are set to benefit from the irrigation project.

“Without water, there are no farms. Without farms, there are no food. No food, no life. Therefore, water is life. With this comes another fundamental truth, Without water security, we cannot have food security,” said Marcos.

Joining Marcos in the ceremony are Mindanaoan cabinet officials Budget Secretary Amenah Pangandaman and Special Assistant to the President of the Philippines Antonio Lagdameo Jr.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1934863/marcos-to-farmers-take-care-of-people-owned-agri-infrastructure>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Rep Momo: Spike in cost of goods from farm to retail is 215%

By: [Gabriel Pabico Lulu](#) - Reporter / [@GabrielLuluINQ](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 01:47 PM April 29, 2024



Ramon Saner looks after his rice stall in Quezon City. (File photo by GRIG C. MONTEGRANDE | Philippine Daily Inquirer)

MANILA, Philippines — A Department of Agriculture (DA) office was scolded by lawmakers at the House of Representatives for failing to check why basic commodities have high retail prices despite relatively low farm gate costs.

At a House Committee on Trade and Industry hearing on Monday, Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Service (AMAS) Director Junibert de Sagun showed that farm gate and retail prices have been stable.

However, staples like rice have shown an upward trajectory.

Farm gate prices are the cost of the products from the producers or the farmers, while retail refers to the actual price of goods in the market.

During de Sagun's presentation, lawmakers noticed the huge gap between farm gate and retail prices in the third week of April, among them:

- ampalaya (bitter gourd): P52 per kilogram farm gate, P120 per kilogram retail
- sitaw (string beans): P45.50 per kilogram farm gate, P100 per kilogram retail
- pechay (cabbage): P44.50 per kilogram farm gate, P80 per kilogram retail

“Mr. Chairman, the presentation clearly shows that the price at the farm gate is too low compared to the retail prices,” Surigao del Sur 1st District Rep. Romeo Momo Sr. observed.

“In fact, it's an increase of around 213 (percent), 215 percent! Why did that happen?” he said.

“We know the supply chain, but I don't think that is how huge the prices of the commodities should be at the retail.”

De Sagun responded that they have been trying to compute the build-up cost from the farm gate to retail.

But he also admitted that if suppliers said they sourced their products from huge markets like Balintawak in Quezon City and Divisoria in Manila, they no longer questioned the price increase.

“Actually, there are certain commodities, Mr. Chair, that we are trying... We computed for the cost-build up from the farm gate until it reaches the retail,” de Sagun said.

“There are instances, however, like many of our suppliers come from Divisoria and Balintawak, so it’s very... When they say it’s Divisoria, we do not [...] ask everyone in Divisoria because it’s somewhat difficult to do interviews in Divisoria,” he told Momo.

“But we are able to get prices... but we just take photos of prices in Divisoria, Mr. Chair,” he added.

This response prompted Deputy Majority Leader Erwin Tulfo to ask why AMAS was taking the word of traders as gospel truth.

“Mr. De Sagun, with the retail, who dictates the prices? the traders?” Tulfo wondered.

“And you just accept... ‘This is it DA. This is how we computed it, factoring fuel, blah-blah-blah, taxes.’ And you just take it like that? That’s what you meant when you said you do not investigate in Divisoria?”

Tulfo also noted that the Department of Agriculture seemed not intent on putting suggested retail prices (SRPs) on agricultural goods.

“Sir, you have the authority to investigate. It is not the power — well, we have the power, what we call an investigating power of Congress. But it is under your responsibility to check these prices actually,” he said.

“Do you just accept whatever the trader would tell you about his or her costs? You just say, ‘Ah, okay, very good. We cannot do anything about it’ — and then announce it? You also do not release any SRPs.”

Aside from the three vegetables mentioned, de Sagun also gave the following figures:

- squash: P18.88 per kilogram farm gate, P50 per kilogram retail
- tomato: P25.56 per kilogram farm gate, P60 per kilogram retail

- cabbage: P30.75 per kilogram farm gate, P60 per kilogram retail

Prices not adding up

During the hearing, Iloilo 4th District Rep. Ferjenel Biron, the committee chair, asked Steven Cua, president of the Philippine Amalgamated Supermarkets Association, about the margins that supermarket operators placed on their products.

According to Cua, markets use different margins, but an average figure could be around 8 to 10 percent.

“For types of fresh produce, those which are refrigerated, 10 percent because of the cost of electricity,” Cua added.

Biron and Momo said that if that was the case, then somebody in the middle of these transactions was earning because the gap between farm gate and retail prices was still high even if these margins were to be factored in.

“But still, if you see the prices here – the retail price vis-a-vis the farm gate prices, you can see the discrepancy. So, somebody is earning in the middle,” Biron said.

“If their margin is only 8 percent, but the increase from the farm gate to market is 213 percent, who earned from this scheme? How many steps, how many people do the produce go through before these products reach the market?”

Last April 23, Tulfo and House Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez sat down with farmers, retailers, and other stakeholders to find out why the prices of basic commodities had been skyrocketing despite low farm gate prices.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1934847/fwd-solons-on-scolding-da-unit-for-not-thoroughly-probing-farm-gate-retail-price-gap>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

House to summon traders, middlemen for next House probe on rising prices

By: [Gabriel Pabico Lalu](#) - Reporter / [@GabrielLaluINQ](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 07:29 PM April 29, 2024



The House of Representatives. INQUIRER FILE

MANILA, Philippines — Traders and middlemen, who were believe to be taking advantage of low farm gate prices, would be summoned for the next hearing of the House committee on trade and industry regarding skyrocketing costs of basic goods.

In a press briefing on Monday afternoon, House Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez said lawmakers are saddened that the Department of Agriculture (DA) has no immediate solution to cushion the rising prices of basic commodities, as shown in the committee hearing earlier.

However, Romualdez said what the House can offer is to continue the investigation into the huge discrepancy between farm gate and retail prices, or the price point of produce and goods when sold by farmers and growers compared to the actual price of these goods in stores and supermarkets.

“Here in the first hearing called by (Iloilo 4th District Rep. and) Chairman Ferj Biron, we are somewhat sad with the results because we saw in the inquiry that DA and DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) have no immediate solution here aside

from their request of additional funding to create a buffer stock, [however], reaping the results of that would take time,” the Speaker said in Filipino.

“We would call the traders, the middlemen, ask them why there is a huge gap — the farm gate prices are low, but you are selling it with a huge difference. So we will inquire why that is the case, and if they do not have a good explanation, if they are too greedy with profit, we will tell them to lower it or else people would suffer — and if that happens, someone would be held accountable,” he added.

Earlier, lawmakers from the said panel scolded the Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Service (AMAS) for not scrutinizing why market prices of basic goods like agricultural products increased despite low farm gate prices.

Lawmakers noticed that according to AMAS Director Junibert de Sagun’s presentation, there is a huge gap between farm gate and retail prices like in the case of ampalaya, which has a per kilogram farm gate price of P52.00 during the third week of April — which is eventually sold at P120.00 at grocery stores.

Aside from that de Sagun also gave the following figures:

- Sitaw: P45.50 per kilogram farm gate, P100.00 per kilogram retail
- Pechay: P44.50 per kilogram farm gate, P80.00 per kilogram retail
- Squash: P18.88 per kilogram farm gate, P50.00 per kilogram retail
- Tomato: P25.56 per kilogram farm gate, P60.00 per kilogram retail
- Cabbage: P30.75 per kilogram farm gate, P60.00 per kilogram retail

Surigao del Sur 1st District Rep. Romeo Momo said that even with margins from supermarkets, which were said to be around 8 percent to 10 percent of farm gate of actual prices, the [jump from farm gate to retail price is so huge](#), hovering over 213 percent.

Romualdez said he has no problem about providing a higher budget to DA and other agencies to ensure that they are able to perform their mandates, but these may not be felt immediately by the public.

“So, we have to find more immediate or quicker solutions that will address this problem, right? We need a long-term demand solution also; we have no problem if we need to allocate additional funding to the department budgets so that they can establish their buffer. But we need an immediate, a more immediate solution that’s why we will take the bull by the horn as they will say,” he said.

During the briefing, suggestions to limit the price increase within middlemen to a certain percentage were also brought up, but Romualdez, Biron, and Deputy Majority Leader Erwin Tulfo admitted that the DA can only suggest and encourage, but not enforce.

“They can suggest actually. They cannot impose but they can suggest that only this margin should be workable,” Biron said.

“For now, nakikiusap tayo pero (we would try to plead with them but) we have the power to direct the DA or the DTI to use their powers for prosecution, as in Congress,” Tulfo added.

Romualdez said they will call the attention of the DA and DTI for a stricter enforcement of the Price Act — and eventually, after the hearings, make recommendations or initiate investigations if needed.

“We shall call their attention for a stricter enforcement of their policies and to enforce the price act. So that the end users will not fall prey to the very, very grossly large margins, and we will seek more enforcement on the part of the Executive,” he said.

“Because we in Congress, we legislate and we exercise oversight functions, so on our findings in these inquiries we can now make recommendations calling the attention of the responsible officials and personalities to take proper action and if not then you can imagine that Congress will use all its powers to make sure that this happens,” he added.

Last April 23, Tulfo and Romualdez sat with stakeholders from the farmer, grower, and retailer sectors, to discuss why prices are skyrocketing despite low [farm gate prices](#).

Aside from a probe, Romualdez also vowed that the House will [review laws](#), if they are being implemented properly or if amendments have to be made.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1935019/house-to-summon-traders-middlemen-for-next-house-probe-on-agri-prices>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

In Negros Occidental, drought-hit farmers seek national gov't help

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 04:30 AM April 30, 2024



NO YIELD The palay grown in this rice field in Sipalay City, Negros Occidental, is affected by the drought, with rice crop damage in the city reaching P1.6 million as of April 25, the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist (OPA) reported. **OPA PHOTO**

BACOLOD CITY, NEGROS OCCIDENTAL, Philippines — Officials of the sixth congressional district in Negros Occidental has sought assistance from the national government to assist farmers who have been the worst-hit by the long drought in the province.

According to the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist (OPA), the damage to rice and corn crops in Negros Occidental caused by the drought caused by the El Niño phenomenon has reached P197.1 million, with the sixth district accounting for almost two thirds, at P130.3 million, as of April 25.

Rep. Mercedes Alvarez of Negros Occidental's sixth district said she sought the help of the Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Social Welfare and

Development (DSWD), and Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to assist the drought-hit farmers.

The DSWD, she said, has given food packs to the affected farmers.

“We’re also in talks with the DA for assistance to the farmers. Hopefully they will also grant our request for solar pumps and mini dams,” she said.

Alvarez said they also asked the DA to conduct cloud seeding but said the operation was not likely to happen.

The DA has earlier said they could not do a cloud seeding since there was no visible cloud in the area that could be seeded.

According to Alvarez, she was also asking the DENR for tree seedlings for the continuation of the tree planting program in southern Negros.

Alvarez said she has purchased a water tanker to augment the local government’s delivery of water to drought-affected residents.

In the sixth district, damage to rice crops in Cauayan town was placed at P66,139,789; P2,525,595 in Hinoba-an town; P1,697,533 in Sipalay City; P7,487,370 in Ilog town; P41,910,361 in Kabankalan City; and P10,300,773 in Candoni town.

For corn crops, Sipalay City sustained damage amounting to P243,356, the OPA reported.

Sizzling hot

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) has earlier said that the dry spell and the extreme heat experienced in Negros Occidental and in many parts of the country were projected to last until May.

In Zambales province, the hot weather still prevails in the area on Monday, following Sunday's extremely dangerous heat index of 53 degrees Celsius.

In its forecast, Pagasa said the heat index in Zambales would remain at a dangerous level, peaking at 42°C on Monday.

It was, however, cooler than the extremely dangerous heat index logged in the province's capital town of Iba the previous day.

Pagasa said a heat index of at least 52°C is already categorized as within the "extreme danger" level and could easily lead to heatstroke when exposed to the sun for a long time.

Heat index is the degree of high humidity and air temperature felt by an average person.

The 53°C recorded in Iba, Zambales, on Sunday was the highest in the country so far this year as a result of the El Niño weather phenomenon. —**REPORTS FROM CARLA P. GOMEZ AND JOANNA AGLIBOT**

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1935087/in-negros-occidental-drought-hit-farmers-seek-national-govt-help>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

BIZ BUZZ: Finance, farm guys join PDIC board

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 02:12 AM April 30, 2024



Two names with diverse backgrounds in investment banking, digital finance and agriculture innovation are joining the governing board of the Philippine Deposit Insurance Corp. (PDIC), an attached agency of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) mandated to protect depositors.

PDIC Chair and BSP Governor Eli Remolona Jr. administered the oath of office of John Mark Frondoso and Luis Rey Velasco. Both will serve at the PDIC Board as independent directors representing the private sector until Nov. 16, 2028.

Frondoso will bring with him a wealth of experience in the fields of investment banking and digital finance, while Velasco will join PDIC equipped with a background on agriculture innovation and public-private sector partnership in rural development.

Frondoso is the president of FSG Capital Inc., a financial advisory and holding company. Prior to founding FSG Capital, he was country head for Morgan Stanley's Philippine Representative Office.

Meanwhile, Velasco—a former chancellor of the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) from 2005 to 2011 and Dean of the UPLB College of Agriculture—is currently the president of Japan-Asia Development Foundation Inc. and a member of the Board of Trustees of the Philippine Rice Research Institute of the Department of Agriculture.

Fronoso and Velasco's roles as independent directors are vital in ensuring impartiality in policies governing deposit insurance, and promoting the integrity and soundness of the country's deposit insurance system. —*Ian Nicolas P. Cigaral*
IFC boosts fintech firms

Fintech is the magic word these days for the International Finance Corp., the private sector arm of the World Bank.

After recently announcing a \$7 million investment in Salmon Group Ltd., which provides short-term credit to Philippine consumers underserved by traditional banks, we hear that IFC is keen on deploying the same amount to beef up another Philippine-focused fintech, this time one that lends to small and medium enterprise (SMEs).

We're talking about Carabao Capital Global Pte Ltd., currently operating in the Philippines under the brand name First Circle.

“With data and technological edge as the cornerstone of First Circle's strategy, the company is providing unsecured credit lines to SMEs with competitive rates, flexible repayment options and the convenience of fast digital operations, in a country that has one of the lowest SME credit penetrations in Southeast Asia,” IFC said in a project note.

“The proposed investment is up to \$7 million in equity by IFC as part of a fundraising round to enable the company to scale its business,” it added.

For its part, Salmon operates and owns a licensed bank, Rural Bank of Sta. Rosa Laguna Inc. and uses artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled technology and a proprietary credit engine to offer “market-disruptive” consumer loans.

With IFC as its proposed new investor, could Full Circle take the same route of scaling up by gobbling up a local bank? — *Doris Dumlao-Abadilla*

BIR logo buzz

Aversion comes to many Filipinos whenever they see the imposingly yellow logo of the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), the agency tasked to collect taxes from people. And it has been like that for 120 years—as old as the bureau itself.

BIR Commissioner Romeo Lumagui Jr. is aware of this and his solution is to change the agency's logo for the first time in over a century. The problem with the current logo, Lumagui explained, is that it does not reflect the bureau's transformation through the years and its important role in nation-building.

"Why is the current logo showing industries? I don't like to see industries in the logo because we are all taxpayers. Employees are the biggest taxpayers, why are they not represented in the logo?" Lumagui told reporters.

"I don't see the mission of BIR in the logo. We are collecting taxes for nation-building and upliftment of the lives of Filipinos," he added.

Learning from recent mishaps on government logo changes (*clears throat* Pagcor), the BIR is crowdsourcing designs via a contest that will have three winners who will receive prizes of P100,000, P50,000 and P25,000.

Once the new design secures all necessary approvals, Lumagui plans to unveil the new logo in time for the BIR's anniversary in August. — *Ian Nicolas P. Cigaral*

<https://business.inquirer.net/456822/biz-buzz-finance-farm-guys-join-pdic-board>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

TF El Niño allays fears of Metro water crisis

By: [Russel Loreto](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 05:20 AM April 30, 2024



DENR Usec Carlos Primo David **DENR PHOTO**

MANILA, Philippines — Metro Manila’s water supply is “more than enough,” even amid the impact of the El Niño phenomenon on the capital region’s reserves, while the allocation set last January for the period of May 1 to 15 will still be provided on schedule.

According to Environment Undersecretary Carlos Primo David, the water allocation set by the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) for the first half of May is 50 cubic meters per second (CMS).

“That’s our allocation since January,” he said in a press briefing on Monday by Task Force El Niño. “[This] is actually 2 cubic meters per second higher than in previous years. We are increasing the allocation for Metro Manila because our consumer base is growing, the [consumption] per person in Metro Manila is also increasing and the demand from Bulacan is also rising.”

As for the country's irrigation requirements, he said, farmers will get a "full allocation" of 24 CMS through the National Irrigation Administration since May is the last month of the cropping season.

'Proactive conservation'

David said the task force is determined to prevent a repeat of the water crisis that hit Metro Manila in 2019.

"I don't think we will reach that point because, number one, in the case of MWSS, we are activating another outlet where water flows out at a lower level," he said.

The government has also carried out "proactive conservation" measures ahead of El Niño, he said, after it was earlier projected to hit its peak beginning March.

The MWSS had said in January that "We can assure our countrymen that water will be sufficient this summer."

Also that month, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. issued Executive Order No. 53, reviving Task Force El Niño and mandating that body to carry out policies that would help mitigate the effects of the weather phenomenon.

The task force is headed by the defense secretary. Its member agencies include, besides the Department of National Defense, the National Economic and Development Authority and the Department of Health, Department of Agriculture, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and Department of Science and Technology.

Drop in water level

Despite the assurance of continued water supply, David warned that the water level at Angat Dam, the source of about 90 percent of Metro Manila's supply, continues to decrease.

“I should say that while the supply is still enough, the decrease in water level in terms of its rate is quite alarming,” he said. “Our water level is dropping by almost 0.4 to half a meter every day.”

Analiza Solis, chief of the climate monitoring section of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration, said the current El Niño “could be one of the worst.”

“If we look at the climate impact, we also see a similar pattern of very high daytime temperatures [such as] during the 1997-1998 El Niño, as well as the strong El Niño [of] 2015-2016. So, temperatures are also high now, surpassing those a bit,” she said.

David said the government continues to try different solutions to help alleviate the impact of El Niño.

“Perhaps many haven’t noticed that during the night, we lower the water pressure in our households,” he said.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1935137/tf-el-nino-allays-fearsof-metro-water-crisis>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Inbound fish on PH vessels ‘not imported’

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 02:04 AM April 30, 2024

The Department of Agriculture (DA) clarified that its recent order to suspend the importation of frozen fish excludes Philippine vessels that caught their haul outside the country.

The DA issued Memorandum Order (MO) No. 18 clarifying the guidelines governing a previous directive which temporarily halted the entry of frozen round scad (galunggong), bonito (tulingan) and mackerel (alumahan) from outside the country.

The agency said those fish caught by Philippine-registered fishing vessels with a valid distant water fishing permit are not considered “imported.”

Therefore, these are “subject to all import duties and taxes when the same is landed in duly designated fish landings and fish ports in the Philippines,” the memo dated April 26 said.

“Considering that fish caught by Philippine-flagged fishing vessel are not considered imported, this clarificatory guidelines [are] hereby issued,” it added.

Earlier this month, the DA promulgated MO No. 14 putting on hold the importation of these fishery products intended solely for canning and processing and for institutional buyers catering to the requirements of hotels and restaurants.

The issuance was done in response to several reports received by the agency that commodities were being diverted to wet markets to the detriment of local fisherfolk.

“The top commodities that are identified as prone to diversion [to local wet markets] are round scad, bonito and mackerel,” the order said. The suspension does not cover sourcing imported mackerel for canning purposes, as long as the volume is based on

the sales of the canned product from the previous year plus an additional 10 percent for buffer.

Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) spokesperson Nazario Briguera said at that time the diversion of these fish varieties to wet markets is an illegal act that “could disrupt the supply and demand” and “would have a repercussion on the local fishery industry.”

Institutional buyers are allowed to source fish and fishery/aquatic products from abroad, but for canning and processing purposes only and when certified as necessary by the agriculture secretary to achieve food security. —**Jordeene B. Lagare INQ**

<https://business.inquirer.net/456806/inbound-fish-on-ph-vessels-not-imported>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

DA to tap buffer fund for stockpile of products

[Sheila Crisostomo](#) - The Philippine Star

April 30, 2024 | 12:00am



Customers visit the Paco Market in Manila to check on the goods that are put up for sale on April 6, 2024.

STAR / Ryan Baldemor

MANILA, Philippines — The Department of Agriculture (DA) is planning to use its buffer fund to build stockpiles of “sensitive” products such as rice and pork to ensure public access to affordable food in the market.

This was indicated by DA Assistant Secretary Paz Benavidez II during yesterday’s briefing of the House committee on trade and industry on the status of the implementation of Republic Act 11203 or the law liberalizing the importation, exportation and trading of rice.

Benavidez was responding to a proposal of ACT-CIS party-list Rep. Erwin Tulfo for the National Food Authority (NFA) to be allowed to sell rice in the market to make the commodity more accessible to the Filipino people.

Tulfo pointed out that the Rice Tarrification Law (RTL) prohibits the sale of NFA rice in the market.

“Can we do something about it because this is what people are looking for? They want to buy more rice with the little money that they have,” he noted.

The lawmaker has urged the DA to “tinker (with) the RTL a little bit,” underscoring that such prohibition is wrong.

“By taking away the authority or power of NFA to sell rice to public at a lower cost, you also remove the people’s power to buy,” Tulfo added.

According to Benavidez, DA will now exercise this stockpiling function and they have prepared draft implementing rules and regulations (IRR) for this.

“Actually DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. already signed the IRR so what happens is we will have the buffer fund and we will make sure that we have stocks of sensitive products including rice, pork,” she said.

Benavidez added the NFA could sell in the market but the IRR indicates that the agency could do so only through Kadiwa Centers.

She said the Price Act is intended to address hoarding and price manipulation while the NFA mandate covers emergencies, among other calamities.

“So it is stated there (IRR) that this will be upon the recommendation of the Local Price Council ... This is also subject to the approval of the President,” she added.

Meanwhile, Speaker Martin Romualdez wants traders and middlemen to explain the huge gaps in the prices of agricultural products at farmgate and retail stores.

At a press briefing yesterday, Romualdez said traders and middlemen will be summoned by the House of Representatives in its next hearing to explain why the prices of these commodities are unreasonably higher at retail than farmgate.

“Moderate your greed. Try to be more reasonable (with the pricing). It is not good that the prices of products at the farmgates are very low but you will sell them to the consumers at very high prices. The margin is very bloated,” he said.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/04/30/2351441/da-tap-buffer-fund-stockpile-products>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Tighter control over rice imports, direct buying from farmers eyed

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

April 30, 2024 | 12:00am



Despite scorching heat, farmers are busy putting their harvested rice inside the sacks in Calatagan, Batangas on March 30, 2024. STAR / Jesse Bustos

MANILA, Philippines — The Department of Agriculture (DA) is seeking tighter control over the rice industry by restricting imports during harvest seasons and inspecting warehouses of traders and importers.

In a meeting of the House committee on agriculture yesterday, Agriculture Undersecretary Christopher Morales discussed some of the department's recommendations for the extension of the rice competitiveness enhancement fund (RCEF).

One of the recommendations was to allow the DA to impose timing restrictions on the issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances (SPSICs) for rice imports.

This would allow the government to “enhance” its control over rice import arrivals, particularly during harvest seasons, Morales said.

“We propose that imported rice must arrive before the specified date indicated in the issued SPSICs, with enforced fees and measures for low or non-utilization to ensure timely arrival,” said Morales, who oversees the DA’s rice industry development program.

Under Republic Act 11203 or the Rice Trade Liberalization (RTL) Law, the Bureau of Plant Industry cannot impose timing and volume restrictions for imported rice in the SPSICs it issues. The BPI is an attached agency of the DA, mandated to oversee rice importation.

The regulatory functions of the BPI must also be strengthened by allowing the agency to require mandatory registration of the warehouses of rice importers, Morales said.

He said the BPI must be given the power to regularly inspect the registered grain warehouses to ensure that these are compliant with SPS standards.

Morales also disclosed that the DA is proposing that the secretaries of the Departments of Agriculture and Trade and Industry must be empowered to allow the government to import rice “under specified conditions.”

The agriculture chief should also be given the power to “disallow” exports during food security emergencies, Morales said.

The DA proposed the extension of the RCEF until 2030 and the budget of its components reallocated to address the current needs of rice farmers, Morales said.

Created under the RTL law, the RCEF seeks to improve the competitiveness of local rice farmers through the provision of free seeds, machinery, training and credit.

RCEF has a guaranteed fund of P10 billion annually. The fund is set to expire this year as stipulated under RA 11203.

The DA proposed that the allocation of farm machinery to be increased to 55 percent from the current 50 percent and retain the budget for seeds at 30 percent.

The budget of the training and extension services should be reduced to five percent, according to the.

The DA said that at least five percent of RCEF should go to soil health improvement initiatives.

Lastly, the DA proposed that rice tariffs collected in excess of P10 billion to be allocated to four programs: financial assistance to farmers, crop diversification, water impounding systems, and watershed rehabilitation and development.

Meanwhile, state-run National Food Authority (NFA) is planning to purchase rice directly from local farmers to beef up its buffer stock, its administrator said.

NFA Administrator Larry Lacson said they are looking into the possibility of procuring milled rice from local farmers. This would be on top of the agency's regular procurement of palay or unmilled rice from farmers.

Lacson explained that the idea of buying rice and not just palay from farmers stemmed from the seemingly gray area of a provision of Republic Act 11203 or the Rice Trade Liberalization (RTL) Law.

"It is not clear under the RTL Law. What was stated there was that we should be able to buy rice for buffer stocking sourced solely from the farmers. It says rice and not palay," he said in a recent interview with state broadcaster PTV-4.

Purchasing rice directly from farmers would not just allow the NFA to ensure its buffer stock, but may also lead to some savings, Lacson said.

However, Lacson said procuring rice from farmers would only be done if necessary. The priority of the NFA is to buy palay or unmilled rice from farmers, he added.

"The benefit of buying rice to the farmers is indirect. Buying palay would have a direct benefit to the farmers," Lacson said.

"We just want some flexibility. For example if there are calamities and we have insufficient buffer stock, then we will buy milled rice from local farmers," Lacson said.

The NFA administrator said that buying rice from farmers would not result in a competition against traders in the market. Lacson emphasized that buying rice from local farmers is like a "safety net" mechanism for the agency.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/04/30/2351368/tighter-control-over-rice-imports-direct-buying-farmers-eyed>

MANILA STANDARD

El Niño damage at P4.39b; Angat level ‘alarming’

By Othel V. Campos

April 30, 2024, 12:50 am

Damage to agriculture due to the El Niño phenomenon has breached the P4-billion mark, with Mindoro and Palawan sustaining the biggest blow, the Department of Agriculture said Monday.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources also warned of an “alarming” decline in Angat Dam’s water level, prompting the government to implement water conservation measures starting this week.

“The decrease in water level in terms of its rate is quite alarming. The water level in Angat Dam lowers by almost 0.4 meters or half a meter every day. So we need to have a little intervention,” Environment Undersecretary Carlos Primo David said.

The water level in Angat Dam, which supplies around 90 percent of the water needs of Metro Manila, Rizal, and portions of Cavite and Bulacan, is currently at 188.45 meters, while its minimum operation level is 180 meters.

For his part, DA Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said damage to agriculture has reached P4.39 billion, with the Mimaropa region logging the highest damages at P1.7 billion to date.

“Western Visayas posted the second biggest damage at P1.02 billion while the two provinces that were hardest hit by the intense hot spell are Mindoro and Palawan,” he said.

The unusually hot weather in the country was expected to last until mid-May, the state weather bureau said as extreme heat scorched Southeast Asia in recent days.

Global temperatures hit record highs last year, and the United Nations’ weather and climate agency said Asia was warming at a particularly rapid pace.

The Philippines ranked among the countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

The DA said it has provided P2.16 billion worth of interventions to farmers and fishers, including P1.05 billion worth of financial assistance to affected farmers.

This, De Mesa said, involved the release of P5,000 to affected farmers tilling not more than two hectares of land.

Farmers have also received assistance in kind amounting to P638 million worth of farm inputs such as seeds, fertilizers and other farm implements.

The DA likewise provided P295 million worth of small-scale irrigation projects.

The Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation (PCIC), the agricultural insurance unit of the DA, provided indemnification to about 7,322 farmers, totaling about P68 million.

Meanwhile, the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) distributed more than 60,000 animals and about 111 alternative livelihood projects for affected fishermen and their families.

Cloud seeding operations by the Bureau of Soils and Water Management (BSWM), done mostly in the Magat Dam reservoir, provided additional irrigation support to farmers.

To date, about 11 regions have been affected by El Niño that include the whole of Luzon and Cordillera Administrative Region, Western Visayas, Davao Region and Soccsksargen in Mindanao.

Editor's Note: This is an updated article. Originally posted with the headline Damage to crops due to El Niño breaches P4-billion—DA

<https://manilastandard.net/news/314441013/damage-to-crops-due-to-el-nino-breaches-p4-billion-da.html>

MANILA STANDARD

Speaker to go after profiteers, hoarders and agri smugglers

By Maricel Cruz

April 30, 2024, 12:40 am

Speaker Martin Romualdez on Monday reaffirmed his commitment to fight hoarding, profiteering and smuggling of agricultural products, making it a top priority of the House of Representatives.

“We will continue our fight against hoarders, profiteers, and smugglers of agricultural products,” Romualdez said in his speech during the resumption of the legislative session.

Romualdez reiterated his commitment while expressing deep concern about the widening gap between farmgate and retail prices of essential commodities, especially rice.

He said there will be no let-up in the fight against hoarding, profiteering, and smuggling of agricultural products, ensuring fair prices for both farmers and consumers.

“The discrepancy between farmgate and retail prices of basic goods is alarming and warrants immediate attention,” Romualdez said.

“We cannot ignore the plight of our farmers, who are struggling to make ends meet, nor can we turn a blind eye to the burden placed on consumers,” he added.

To address this pressing issue, the House Committee on Trade and Industry convened on Monday to receive briefings from relevant government agencies regarding the implementation of laws and programs governing pricing mechanisms and regulations for basic necessities and prime commodities.

Romualdez indicated that the briefing marked the start of a congressional inquiry, in aid of legislation, into the widening gap between farmgate and retail prices of rice and other essential goods.

He noted the stability of farmgate prices for rice, poultry, pork, and onions over the past three months, indicating that there should be no sudden increase in the prices of these items.

The House chief stressed the need for legislative action to protect the interests of both producers and consumers, emphasizing the role of oversight in ensuring a fair and transparent trading environment.

Citing the need for collaboration among various stakeholders, Romualdez urged government agencies, industry representatives, and consumer advocacy groups to actively participate in the investigation and contribute to the formulation of effective policy interventions.

“We must identify and address loopholes that contribute to profiteering and unfair pricing practices within the supply chain,” he said.

“At the end of the day, we want to make sure that all the stakeholders in whatever industry or sectors are viable, if they are in the business side of it, so that it becomes sustainable so that we can continue delivering basic goods and services to the consumers at sustainable, affordable prices,” he added.

Editor’s Note: This is an updated article. Originally posted with the headline Speaker targets hoarders, profiteers with insatiable greed

<https://manilastandard.net/news/314441015/speaker-targets-hoarders-profiteers-with-insatiable-greed.html>

DA declares Bulacan free from avian influenza

By Frederick Silverio

April 30, 2024

CITY OF MALOLOS: Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. has declared Bulacan as an avian influenza-free province on April 23, 2024.

This was after the province has been cleared of the 10 confirmed cases of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) subtype H5N1 recorded between January 2022 to February 2023.

HPAI was previously detected in Baliwag City, San Rafael, San Ildefonso, San Miguel, Santa Maria, and Pulilan, impacting the poultry industry including ducks, quails, native chickens, chicken layers, broiler breeders, and game fowls.

However, through the combined efforts of the provincial government of Bulacan, Department of Agriculture Regional Field Office 3, and Bureau of Animal Industry, the province has attained a bird flu-free status accomplished by conducting disease investigations, promptly depopulating affected areas, conducting thorough cleaning and disinfection procedures, enforcing movement restrictions, and implementing surveillance measures in accordance with the Avian Influenza Protection Program (AIPP) guidelines.

Continued disease monitoring in the 1-km and 7-km surveillance zones surrounding the affected farms has yielded negative test results for influenza type A virus in April.

Meanwhile, Gov. Daniel Fernando reminded poultry farmers to always follow biosecurity protocols and promote proper cleaning

and disinfection of equipment and surroundings of their respective farms.

"Let us remain vigilant and continue to prioritize the health and safety of our poultry industry," Fernando said.

"Immediately report to authorities any sign of contamination so that we can contain it right away and prevent it from spreading."

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/04/30/regions/da-declares-bulacan-free-from-avian-influenza/1944010>

Rice imports up 7.95% to 1.4 million metric tons

By Janine Alexis Miguel

April 30, 2024

THE Philippines recorded higher rice imports as of mid-April compared to last year's level, data from the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) showed.

Latest report from the BPI showed that the country's rice imports from January 1 to April 19 went up by 7.95 percent to 1.42 million metric tons (MT), higher in comparison to last year's 1.31 million MT. The BPI is an agency under the Department of Agriculture (DA).

For April alone, rice deliveries were tallied at 243,710.92 MT, which is less than half the 516,895.17 MT posted a year earlier.

Since the year started, the BPI has released a total of 1,952 sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances to accredited importers.

Vietnam remains the country's top source of the staple from January 1 to April 19, shipping 955,817.87 MT of rice or 67.14 percent of total imports.

Thailand delivered some 265,019.64 MT of rice, Pakistan followed with 133,984.50 MT, and some 59,880 MT came from Myanmar.

The remaining volume, meanwhile, came from China, Japan, Cambodia, India, Italy and Spain.

Last year, inbound shipments of the staple totaled 3.6 million MT, down 5.9 percent from the record-high 3.82 million MT logged in

2022. For this year, the DA projects rice imports not exceeding last year's import volume.

Local rice inventory, meanwhile, declined by 3.0 percent as of March 1, the Philippine Statistics Authority said. Rice inventory at the beginning of March was estimated at 1.37 million MT, lower compared to the 1.41 million MT logged in the same period of 2023.

On a monthly basis, rice stocks declined by 9.6 percent compared to the 1.51 million MT logged on February 1.

With those developments, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. assured that the country has enough rice stocks amid the El Niño and despite the temporary closure of several warehouses of the National Food Authority.

Tiu Laurel also said that the country's rice imports for this year were unlikely to reach the 4 million MMT forecast of the United States Department of Agriculture.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/04/30/business/top-business/rice-imports-up-795-to-14-million-metric-tons/1943990>

DA briefs House on prices of goods

By Ma. Reina Leanne Tolentino

April 30, 2024

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) advised the House Committee on Trade and Industry on Monday on farmgate and retail prices of basic goods and prime commodities.

Director Junibert de Sagun of the DA's Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Service said that farmgate prices of dry and wet palay (unmilled rice) gradually increased from January to April 2024 with fluctuations, while retail prices for special, premium, well-milled and regular-milled rice were relatively stable during the period.

"The farmgate price is relatively low compared to the retail price due to several factors, including processing, transportation, and marketing costs incurred between the farm and the consumer," de Sagun said.

He added that "market demand, supply chain dynamics... contribute to the significant markup in retail price despite moderate fluctuations in farmgate prices."

During the briefing, the DA said it planned to create Kadiwa centers that would regularly sell items.

An assistant secretary of the DA said that "the secretary has recently signed a concept note on the creation of Kadiwa centers."

"We are planning to set up 17 centers here in Metro Manila and nearby areas. These Kadiwa centers will be created in order to have regular Kadiwa selling because, as of now, we only have a few centers that are regularly selling here in Metro Manila," she said.

She said that "we have determined FTI as our major food hub" and that the creation of food hubs was "in the pipeline."

Speaker Martin Romualdez had said that the House of Representatives would look into the "disconnect" between the farmgate and retail prices of basic goods.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/04/30/news/national/da-briefs-house-on-prices-of-goods/1943939>

Filipino farmers struggle as drought, heat wave hit

By Agence France-Presse

April 30, 2024

FILIPINO farmer Daniel Velasco pumps water from a well in a desperate attempt to save his wilting vegetables as a scorching heat wave and the worst drought in years hit crops.

It has hardly rained on Velasco's plot of gourds and tomatoes since November, as the El Niño weather phenomenon brings drier conditions and baking temperatures.

"I'm losing a lot of money," Velasco, 57, told Agence France Presse, standing barefoot on the cracked ground in the northern province of Nueva Ecija.



HARD LIFE In this photo taken on April 25, 2024, farmer Daniel Velasco (left) waters the drought-stricken crops at a farm in San Antonio, Nueva Ecija. More than half of the Philippines' provinces, including Nueva Ecija, are in drought as El Niño exacerbates hot and dry conditions typical for March, April and May. AFP PHOTO

His gourds "died before I could even sell them," pushing him deeper into debt.

El Niño is a naturally occurring climate pattern typically associated with increased heat worldwide, leading to drought in some parts of the world and heavy rains elsewhere.

Unusually hot weather has blasted South and Southeast Asia for the past week, forcing schools to send children home and the authorities to issue health warnings.

Global temperatures hit record highs last year, and the United Nations' weather and climate agency said last week that Asia was warming at a particularly rapid pace.

More than half of the Philippines' provinces, including Nueva Ecija, are in drought as El Niño exacerbates hot and dry conditions typical for March, April and May.

Temperatures have sizzled around 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) in parts of the country in recent days, with the heat index — what the temperature feels like, taking into account humidity — in one area hitting 53 C.

'Up against nature'

In the Philippines, which ranks among the countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, the upcoming harvest is likely to be "below average," the UN has warned.

Crop losses are estimated at more than P4 billion (\$69 million), and farmers face further hardship if the drought doesn't break soon.

It is hoped rain in mid-May will bring some relief, but drier than normal conditions could persist until August, Ana Solis, chief climatologist at the state weather forecaster, told AFP.

Joey Villarama, spokesman for the government's Task Force El Niño, said the current conditions were comparable to the drought during the 1997-1998 El Niño, the country's worst-ever dry spell.

"We are up against nature," Villarama said. "It's very difficult because it's unpredictable."

Like Velasco, many farmers in Nueva Ecija normally count on the Pantabangan Dam for irrigation, but levels have fallen nearly 50 meters (164 feet), and it no longer reaches their fields.

The receding water forced two hydropower plants to shut earlier than usual — worsening already strained electricity supplies, as people crank up air conditioners and fans to cool off.

Some farmers like Velasco switched from rice to vegetables, which need less water, but even those are dying.

Velasco said his January harvest was halved by insufficient rain, and those that he did pick were too small to sell at the market.

Now, the groundwater is drying up.

It takes Velasco three times as long to draw water from the well as it did before.

He worries how he will cope if the rains do not come soon and his well dries up — as others around have done.

"Farming is my only way to earn a living," Velasco said, fearing he would slip deeper into debt and be unable to send his youngest child to school. "If there's no water, how can I continue?"

His neighbor Eddie Balagtas, 69, is also struggling.

"I just wasted my effort," Balagtas said, removing his shriveled watermelon vines on his 1-hectare (2.5-acre) farm.

"If you don't have other sources of income, there's no choice but to borrow money," Balagtas said, praying for rain so that he could plant a crop of rice. "It's hard."

'Why is this happening?'

Rice farmers in drought-stricken Occidental Mindoro province, south of the main island of Luzon, have started to receive financial assistance.

"You could push your fist through the cracks; that's how severe it is for the rice farms," said Daisy Leano, information officer for San Jose municipality.

As dam levels drop, some urban areas have been left without water.

More than 100 cities and municipalities have declared the drought a state of calamity to access emergency funds.

Fire trucks have been deployed in neighborhoods of Bacolod city in the central province of Negros Occidental to deliver water to residents.

"I ask myself, 'Why is this happening to us?'" said Dolores Bauya, 54, who lines up at least once a week to receive the free water.

In the central province of Cebu, Har Tabalino, 24, said she had to pump water from a well in another village to cook and bathe after water from a nearby dam had stopped.

"I think this is the hottest and the longest [dry] season I have ever experienced, that it actually affected my everyday life," Tabalino said.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/04/30/news/national/filipino-farmers-struggle-as-drought-heat-wave-hit/1943944>

Iloilo province eyes state of calamity

By Rjay Zuriaga Castor

April 30, 2024

ILOILO CITY: The province of Iloilo, the hardest-hit by the El Niño phenomenon in Western Visayas, is poised to declare a state of calamity due to the severe agricultural losses from the drought that is estimated to reach more than P1 billion.

The Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (PDRRMC) convened on Monday, April 29, and approved a resolution recommending the declaration of a state of calamity for the entire province.

Data from the PDRRMC showed that the damage inflicted by the dry spell in the province of Iloilo has reached an alarming figure of P1.025 billion.

According to the April 26 progress report from the Provincial Agricultural Office (Pagro), rice cultivation suffered the largest loss with damages amounting to P653 million, followed by corn farming with P219 million, and high-value crops, which include various fruits and vegetables, incurring a total damage worth of P136 million.

The fisheries sector also experienced losses amounting to P16 million, while the damage inflicted on the livestock and poultry industry reached P196,552.

Pagro also reported that 88,764 farmers and fisherfolk in the province have been affected by El Niño, including 71,978 in high-value crops and 12,590 rice farmers.

Three towns in the province have already declared a state of calamity in response to the drought conditions. Sara was the first to

declare on April 12, followed by Estancia on April 15, and Bingawan on April 24.

Meanwhile, Gov. Arthur Defensor Jr. said he will order the implementation of adjustments to various activities in the province in response to the scorching weather conditions.

Among the adjustments being considered are limitations on outdoor activities, such as parades related to religious fiestas, groundbreaking ceremonies for projects, meetings, and other events.

Defensor, however, clarified that outdoor activities held in well-ventilated areas are exempted from the restrictions.

The Iloilo station of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) reported a heat index of 46 degrees Celsius in Iloilo City on April 28, the highest heat index the city recorded since 2023.

The state weather bureau has previously issued warnings to the public regarding the likelihood of even more extreme heat in the coming days in Iloilo and neighboring provinces.

In response to the El Niño phenomenon's grip on the region, the Regional Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council raised a blue alert status on April 25.

The decision comes as a response to the below-normal rainfall conditions experienced over the past months, resulting in adverse effects on water resources across most parts of the region.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/04/30/regions/iloilo-province-eyes-state-of-calamity/1944012>

Imports to beef up fish supply

By **Jed Macapagal**

April 30, 2024

The Department of Agriculture (DA) will allow the entry of 25,000 metric tons (MT) of sardines and mackerel in the last quarter of the year to support supply for the three-month closed fishing season.

Closed fishing season in the country starts November 1 in waters northeast of Palawan and from November 15 in the Visayan Seas and Zamboanga Peninsula. All three areas serve as spawning grounds for small pelagic fishes like sardines and mackerel.

DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said the imports will arrive in the country before January 15 next year of which 80 percent will be allocated to registered importers in the commercial fishing sector and the balance to fisheries associations and cooperatives.

DA said a minimum import volume (MIV) of 112 MT, equivalent to four containers, will be allocated to commercial importers while the MIV for fisheries associations and cooperatives will be 56 MT, or two containers.

Tiu Laurel said additional import volume will be determined based on an importer's percentage share of fish landings in the last three years prior to the importation.

The DA said importers could apply for sanitary and phytosanitary permits anytime after the effectivity of the order to import fish but will only be valid between September 1 and November 30.

However, Tiu Laurel said frozen pelagic fish species could only be released to the market from October 1.

The DA said the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources must encourage importers to immediately trade imported fish to ensure the supply does not overlap with local catch by the end of the closed fishing season.

https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/imports-to-beef-up-fish-supply/

Wheat slips, corn steady

By **Reuters**

April 30, 2024

CANBERRA- Chicago wheat futures fell on Monday but remained near four-month highs after concerns that adverse weather conditions in Russia, Europe and the United States could reduce supply pushed prices up around 10 percent last week.

Corn and soybean futures were little changed.

The most-active wheat contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) was down 0.5 percent at \$6.19 a bushel after rising to \$6.33-1/4 on Friday, its highest since Dec. 29.

In Russia, the world's biggest wheat exporter, the state weather forecaster said it sees a threat of drought persisting in May in the eastern half of the Southern Federal District.

"Russia's drying trend has emerged as a major issue for wheat and other winter crops," independent analyst Tobin Gorey said.

"Russia's southern region and Ukraine's east are on path to deficient soil moisture ... These regions are hefty exporters so they materially impact wheat supply," he said, adding that dry weather in parts of the United States was putting crops there "on a path to yield decline".

https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/wheat-slips-corn-steady/

PHL support for agri ‘most distorting’ to trade— OECD

- Cai U. Ordinario
- April 30, 2024



As Philippine inflation rises amid the challenges posed by El Niño, farmers in Mabitac, Laguna, carry on with their crucial tasks despite the adversities. In the face of widespread water shortages induced by El Niño, the agricultural sector faces significant hurdles, with crop production damage being highest at this period. This impact extends beyond upland and rainfed areas to lowland irrigated areas like Mabitac. After meticulously tending to newly planted palay seedlings and applying fertilizers and pesticides, farmers now turn their attention to the essential task of irrigating the farm plots using the traditional “painumin” method.

THE Philippines led in terms of the support it provided to the agriculture sector relative to GDP, but the form of assistance came in the form of what the OECD characterized as “most distorting” to production and trade.

Based on the OECD’s Agricultural Policy Subsidies report, the country invested 2.3 percent of GDP in agriculture in the 2020 to 2022 period. However, this was lower than the nearly 3-percent average spent between 2000 and 2002.

Most of the support extended in the Philippines came in the form of market price support such as fuel discount vouchers for farmers as well as fertilizer subsidies such as the discount vouchers for the Plant, Plant, Plant Part 2 program.

“The types of support considered to have the potential to be the most distorting are market price support, payments based on output, and payments based on the unconstrained use of variable inputs,” OECD said.

“These forms of support are also known for being both inefficient and untargeted to providing support to those households in need as a large share of the transfers are leaked in the form of higher prices for and larger use of inputs, or capitalized into land values,” the report added.

OECD said that on average, these forms of support are much more prevalent in emerging economies. In the 11 emerging economies, including the Philippines, the most distorting policies generated positive support to producers.

This was equivalent to 10 percent of gross farm receipts and implicit taxation equal to 6 percent of gross farm receipts between 2020 and 2022.

In OECD countries, the report showed, the most distorting policies generated positive support equalling 7 percent of gross farm receipts in 2020-2022, but did not implicitly tax producers.

In the case of the Philippines, the report said 22.4 percent of gross farm receipts were considered distorting support in 2020-2022. This was higher compared to the 20-percent average between 2000 and 2002.

Of the amount in 2020-2022, the data showed 20.7 percentage points were spent on market price support and the remaining 0.8 percentage points were composed of other potentially distorting support.

“Market price support [MPS] arises as a result of domestic or trade policies that raise or lower domestic market prices, such as border tariffs, export taxes and price ceilings or floors,” the report stated.

“Excluding policies that depress prices, MPS accounts for the majority of positive support provided to farmers across all covered economies both in aggregate as well as within a majority of the covered economies [counting the European Union collectively as one economy],” it added.

Earlier, the International Food Policy Research Institute (Ifpri) said a measure allowing the extension of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) should include its gradual phaseout.

Research Fellow Emeritus at the IFPRI Director General's Office, Mark Rosegrant told reporters on the sidelines of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Food Security Forum that it is important to place sunset provisions on farm subsidies.

Rosegrant said this after recent reports indicated that Senator Cynthia A. Villar is proposing to extend the RCEF for another six years, doubling the support for farmers to P20 billion.

Once the RCEF is phased out, he said the funds from rice tariffs could be used for other investments in the agriculture sector. This will ensure that government funds are spent for agriculture that could lead to "higher returns."

These other areas include research and development, improving value chains, and efforts that would help reduce post-harvest losses, among others. (See: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/04/15/ifpri-farm-subsidies-must-have-sunset-clauses/>)

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/04/30/phl-support-for-agri-most-distorting-to-trade-oecd/>

DA asks solons to amend RTL to allow DA, DTI to import rice

- Jovee Marie N. de la Cruz
- April 30, 2024
- FIVE years after the enactment of the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), the Department of Agriculture (DA) has asked lawmakers to introduce amendments to the law, to include “empowering” the secretaries of the DA and Department of Trade and Industry to import rice under “specified conditions.”
- At a briefing with the House Committee on Agriculture and Food, National Rice Industry Development Program Undersecretary Christopher Morales said the proposed changes are designed to address prevailing gaps in the legislation and to provide greater support to Filipino rice farmers, notably through enhanced control over rice imports.
- Morales said the proposed amendments seek to empower the secretaries of agriculture, and trade and industry to import rice under specified conditions, while allowing the National Food Authority (NFA) to secure buffer stocks through alternative schemes.
- However, Morales did not specify these exact “specified conditions” pending the House agriculture panel hearing on the proposal.
- Citing the DA’s proposal, Morales said the export of rice during food security emergencies, as determined by the DA chief, would also be disallowed under the proposed changes.
- At present, two bills have been filed in the House of Representatives, both aiming to extend the RCEF program and ensure its continued support for the country’s rice farmers.
- These bills, as well as the proposed amendments by the DA, will be deliberated on by Rep. Mark Enverga’s committee on Tuesday.
- Moreover, Morales emphasized the pivotal role of rice production in the country’s agricultural landscape and stressed the importance of enhancing the RTL after five years of its enactment.
- Morales said these modifications aim to facilitate a more liberalized importation framework while ensuring safeguard measures remain intact when necessary.
- Among the proposed amendments are timing restrictions on the imposition of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) import clearances to enhance control over arrivals, particularly during harvest seasons, he said.

- “We propose that imported rice must arrive before the specified date indicated in the issued [Sanitary and Phytosanitary Import Clearance] SPSIC with enforced fees and measures for low or non-utilization to ensure timely arrival,” he added.
- Morales said DA proposes strengthening the regulatory functions of the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI), with measures including mandatory registration of grain warehouses and regular inspections to ensure compliance with SPS standards.
- “We also propose strengthening the regulatory functions of BPI since it is crucial with measures including mandatory registration of grain warehouses and regular inspections to ensure compliance with SPS standards,” he said.
- On the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), Morales said the DA advocates its extension until 2030.
- The agency also proposed the reallocation of funds, with 55 percent allocated towards farm machinery, 30 percent towards seed development, and 5 percent towards training and extension services.
- Morales said special attention would be given to the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI) as the lead agency, with a focus on soil health improvement initiatives.
- Moreover, Morales said the DA wants excess rice import tariffs exceeding P10 billion to be allocated to various programs, including financial assistance, crop diversification, water impounding, and watershed rehabilitation and development.
- As these proposed amendments are set forth, discussions on extending the drafting of the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) beyond the initial 90 days are under way to ensure thorough consideration and implementation, said Morales.
- Currently, the RCEF boasts a surplus of P19 billion in 2023, raising concern among lawmakers regarding its optimal utilization to benefit Filipino rice farmers.
- Under the current Rice Tariffication Law, the RCEF allocates P10 billion to four component programs: mechanization (P5 billion), seeds (P3 billion), extension (P1 billion), and credit (P1 billion).
- For his part, House Committee on Agriculture and Food Chairman Enverga acknowledges the significant assistance the RTL has provided to rice farmers, addressing their long-standing need for support.
- Despite its well-intentioned objectives, Enverga said the challenges that have arisen in the wake of the RTL, including issues surrounding rice supply and fluctuating prices, persist, prompting calls for amendments from both the government and the private sector.
- Enverga stressed that the critical juncture at which the proposal to amend the RTL has arisen, particularly as the country marks five years since the law’s enactment.

- It is imperative, he asserted, to reflect on whether the RTL has truly succeeded in improving the lives of rice farmers and making the agricultural sector more viable.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/04/30/da-asks-solons-to-amend-rtl-to-allow-da-dti-to-import-rice/>

REMATE:

P20/kg bigas mabibili sa Kadiwa ng Pangulo sa Bicol

April 29, 2024 11:48



MANILA, Philippines – Nagbenta ng bigas sa halagang P20 kada kilo ang ilang mga kalahok na stall sa katatapos na programang “Kadiwa ng Pangulo” (KNP) sa Bicol Region.

Sa isang balita noong Linggo ng gabi, sinabi ng Presidential Communications Office (PCO), na binanggit ang impormasyon mula sa National Irrigation Administration (NIA), na P20 kada kilo. ibinenta ang bigas noong Abril 25 sa paglulunsad ng KNP sa NIA’s Albay-Catanduanes Irrigation Management Office (ACIMO) sa Ligao City, Albay.

Kabilang sa mga priyoridad na makatanggap ng P20 kada kilo.

Ang bigas ay miyembro ng Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) beneficiaries, matatanda, at persons with special needs, ayon sa PCO.

Ang mga regular na customer naman ay nakabili ng bigas sa halagang P35 kada kilo.

“Ito ay nagsisilbing isang paraan para sa mga Irrigators Associations (IAs) na ibalik ang mga biyayang natanggap nila mula sa gobyerno sa mga taong mas kaunting pribilehiyo para sa kanilang komunidad,” sabi ng NIA na sinipi ng PCO news release.

Bukod sa bigas, sinabi ng NIA na ang iba’t ibang prutas at gulay, ilang delicacies, at iba pang produktong sakahan ay nabili rin sa abot-kayang presyo.

Ang proyekto ay naging posible sa pamamagitan ng pagsisikap ni NIA Regional Manager Engr. Gaudencio M. De Vera, Albay-Catanduanes IMO Manager Engr. Jessie D. Baynas, at ACIMO IA Federation president Melanio Bañares.

Binigyang-diin ng NIA na nananatili itong nakatuon sa pagpapataas ng produksyon ng bigas tungo sa pagsasakatuparan ng “Bagong Pilipinas” na naisip ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. *Santi Celario*

<https://remate.ph/p20-kg-bigas-mabibili-sa-kadiwa-ng-pangulo-sa-bicol/>

REMATE:

Bulacan malaya na sa H5N1 avian flu – DA

April 29, 2024 09:49



MANILA – Idineklara ng Department of Agriculture (DA) ang lalawigan ng Bulacan na malaya na sa H5N1 avian influenza (AI) nitong nakaraang Biyernes, Abril 26.

Sa isang pahayag, ibinigay ng DA ang AI-free status “higit sa 90 araw mula noong mga aktibidad sa paglilinis at pagdidisimpekta, at ang huling pagsubaybay na nagbunga ng mga negatibong resulta.”

Bago ang deklarasyon, nagpatupad ang DA ng mahigpit na hakbang, kabilang ang depopulasyon, disinfection, at mga paghihigpit sa logistik, sa 135 poultry facility na nakarehistro sa Bulacan.

Ang mga surveillance zone na 1 at 7 kilometro ay inilagay sa paligid ng mga nahawaang bukid.

Batay sa monitoring reports ng Bureau of Animal Industry, naitala ang mga impeksyon sa mga itik, pugo, native chicken, chicken layers, at broiler breeders sa Baliwag City, Pulilan, Santa Maria, San Rafael, San Miguel, at San Ildefonso mula Enero 2022 hanggang Pebrero 2023.

Ang huling impeksyon sa H5N1 ay naiulat sa isang game fowl farm sa Santa Maria noong unang bahagi ng Mayo 2023. *Santi Celario*

<https://remate.ph/bulacan-malaya-na-sa-h5n1-avian-flu-da/>

REMATE:

DBM: P15-B disaster relief fund pwedeng gamitin vs El Niño

April 29, 2024 08:31

MANILA, Philippines – SINABI ng Department of Budget and Management (DBM) na maaaring gamitin ng gobyerno ang natitirang P15.507 billion sa ilalim ng National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Fund (NDRRMF) for 2024 para mapagaan ang epekto ng El Niño phenomenon.

Sa isang kalatas, sinabi ni DBM Secretary Amenah Pangandaman na P15.5-billion na balanse na nasa NDRRMF ay bahagi ng kabuuang P20.5 billion na inilaan para sa disaster risk reduction and management ngayong taon.

“We are prepared to support all operations that seek to cushion the negative impacts of the dry spell affecting various provinces in the country. Our data shows that as of April 24 this year, the disaster relief fund stands at over PHP15 billion,” ayon sa Kalihim.

“The current NDRRMF balance also includes PHP1 billion allocated for the parametric insurance coverage of government facilities against natural calamities,” aniya pa rin.

Aniya pa, mayroon ding built-in budgetary allocations para sa iba’t ibang ahensiya ng gobyerno na kilala bilang quick response funds (QRFs) na may kabuuang P7.825 billion.

Para sa alokasyon ng QRF sa bawat ahensiya para sa taong kasalukuyan, may kabuuang P1 billion ang inilaan sa Department of Agriculture, P3 billion para sa Department of Education, P500 million para sa Department of Health, P50 million para sa Bureau of Fire Protection, P50 million para sa Philippine National Police, P500 million para sa Office of Civil Defense, P1 billion para sa Department of Public Works and Highways, P1.75 billion para sa Department of Social Welfare and Development, at P75 million para sa Philippine Coast Guard.

“Aside from that, several identified agencies may mobilize their QRF allocated in their respective budgets when necessary, in accordance with the respective special provisions for QRF. Malaking tulong po ‘yan sa mga apektadong komunidad sa bansa,” ayon kay Pangandaman.

Sinabi naman ng DBM, ang NDRRMF ay maaaring gamitin para sa “aid, relief, at rehabilitation services” sa mga komunidad/ lugar; at maging sa pagkukumpuni, rehabilitasyon at reconstruction works na may kinalaman sa mga pangyayari na natural o human-induced calamities sa kasalukuyan o dalawang naunang taon, na “subject to the approval of the President.”

Ang pondo ay magsisilbi rin bilang karagdagang funding source para sa mga ahensiya na ang budget ay kinabibilangan ng probisyon para sa QRF kung saan ang balanse ay umabot sa 50%, na “subject to the approval of the DBM.”

Maliban sa disaster relief fund, binigyang-diin ni Pangandaman na may kabuuang P4.5 billion ang inilaan para sa Crop Insurance Program ng Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation ngayong taon para sakupin ang buong halaga ng crop insurance premiums ng mahigit sa 2.292 million na target na magsasaka.

Samantala, nauna ng sinabi ni Task Force El Niño spokesperson at Presidential Communications Office Assistant Secretary Joey Villarama na may kabuuang 103 lungsod at munisipalidad ang nagdeklara na ng state of calamity dahil sa epekto ng El Niño.

Ang epekto ng El Niño phenomenon ay inaasahan na tatagal ng Hunyo. *Kris Jose*

<https://remate.ph/dbm-p15-b-disaster-relief-fund-pwedeng-gamitin-vs-el-nino/>

ABANTE:

P20 per kilo ng bigas swak sa 4Ps

- Abante News
- April 29, 2024

Nakatikim na ang mga pinakamahihirap na Pilipino sa campaign pro-mise ni Pangulong Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. na P20 kada kilo ng bigas.

Ito ay sa pamamagitan ng Kadiwa ng Pangulo na binuksan ng National Irrigation Administration (NIA) sa Ligao City, Albay.

Kabilang sa mga prayoridad na nabentahan ng P20 kada kilo ng bigas ay mga benepisyaryo ng Pantawid Pa-milyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), mga senior citizen at mga taong may espesyal na pangangailangan.

Ang mga regular customer naman ay nakabili ng P35 kada kilo ng bigas, mas mababa pa rin kumpara sa presyo sa mga palengke.

Ayon sa Presidential Communications Office (PCO), ang inisyatiba ay paraan ng Irrigators Association na ibalik ang biyaya na natanggap nila sa gobyerno para sa mga mahihirap na sektor sa kanilang mga komunidad. Bukod sa murang bigas ay naibenta sa Kadiwa ng Pangulo ang iba't ibang uri ng prutas at gulay at iba pang produkto sa Ligao City. (Aileen Taliping)

<https://www.abante.com.ph/2024/04/29/p20-per-kilo-ng-bigas-swak-sa-4ps/>