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India agrees to supply PH with non-basmati white rice

D. FOREIGN STORY

BUSINESS MIRROR

Cocoa breaks \$10,000 record, with pricier chocolate to follow



Ban lifted on live poultry and by-products from 2 US states

By Joel dela Torre

LIVE poultry products and by-products from Iowa and Minnesota are now allowed in the country.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) announced it has already lifted the temporary ban on the importation of these products which was imposed last year due to an outbreak

of avian influenza in the two countries.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. said that the order which includes day-old chicks and hatching eggs will take effect immediately and remain in force until revoked.

The decision he added, was based on the official report of US veterinary authorities to the World Organization of Animal

Health that all affected counties in Iowa and Minnesota had been free of the highly pathogenic avian influenza cases since January 10 this year.

The US Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agricultural Service has reported that in 2023 it shipped to the Philippines USD180.5 million worth of poultry meat and products, excluding eggs.



Marcos: India rice to beef up PHL food supply

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. welcomed the arrival of more rice imports as the country is now in the “critical” phase of El Niño.

During the courtesy call of India External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar in Malacañang on Tuesday, the chief executive thanked Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for authorizing the export of 295,000 metric tons of non-basmati white rice to the Philippines.

Marcos said the additional rice supply will help ensure the country's food supply amid the ongoing effects of El Niño, which is expected to worsen next month.

The Department of Science and Technology (DOST) said the number of provinces affected by

drought and dry spell in April is expected to rise to 72 by April from 54 this month, and this can affect local food production.

“The [rice from India comes at] a very crucial time since we are right now suffering the effects [of] drought,” Marcos said.

The Bureau of Plant Industry reported that rice imports from January to March rose to 886,963 metric tons (MT) from 801,732 MT in the same period last year, which helped keep rice prices stable. Of the latest rice imports, 235.5 MT came from India.

Based on price monitoring by



WORKERS load bags of paddy rice at the grain market in Ambala, India. T. NARAYAN/BLOOMBERG

the Department of Agriculture (DA), the average price of local well-milled rice and regular milled is P52.17 per kilogram (kg) and P49.66 per kg, respectively.

To keep food prices affordable, India, the world's largest rice exporter, banned the export of non-basmati rice in July 2023.



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In October, however, India's Ministry of Commerce and Industry granted some countries an exemption from the ban. Among them are the Philippines, Nepal, Cameroon, Côte d' Ivore, Malaysia, Seychelles, and the Republic of Guinea.

Marcos said he wants to further

expand the country's trade with India beyond agricultural products.

India is the country's 15th largest trading partner, with bilateral trade between the two countries exceeding \$3 billion in 2023.

Hybrids

THE Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) introduced four public hybrid varieties that are cheaper than private hybrids in a technology demonstration farm called "rice derby," during the recent 17th National Rice Technology Forum (NRTF) in Sto. Domingo, Nueva Ecija.

"Farmers are always searching for ways to reduce rice production costs. This forum promotes affordable, accessible government-funded hybrid varieties available for use," said Science Research Specialist Jerry D. Batcagan.

Priced at P212 per kilogram (kg), the agency attached to the

Department of Agriculture (DA) said public hybrid varieties offer farmers savings of around P100 or more per kilogram compared with the higher-priced private hybrids.

Among the varieties — PSB Rc 72H (Mestizo 1), NSIC RC 204 (Mestizo 20), NSIC RC 446H (Mestizo 73), and NSIC RC 544H (Mestizo 99) showcased in the derby, PhilRice said Mestizo 73 stood out for its good performance.

Maturing in 113 days, it exhibits moderate resistance to blast, sheath blight, and green leafhopper, hitting an average yield of 6.6 tons per hectare (t/ha) and a maximum yield reaching 11.6t/ha.

Miniature displays of PhilRice-developed direct-seeding machines were also displayed while IEC materials and planting guides for Mestizo 1 and Mestizo 20 were distributed to the more than 500 participants. **Samuel P. Medenilla**



Govt all set to begin construction, rehab of fisheries infra

By REINE JUVIERRE ALBERTO

THE Department of Budget and Management (DBM) released over P6 billion to the state-run Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA) to construct and rehabilitate fisheries infrastructure in the country.

Budget Secretary Amenah F. Pangandaman cleared the issuance of a Special Allotment Release Order (SARO) amounting to a total of P6.037 billion to implement the fisheries infrastructure development program of the PFDA.

The DBM added that the P1.1 billion of the allocated funds, which represent the Congress-Introduced Changes in Appropriations, will be used for the construction, rehabilitation and improvement of fish ports and

other post-harvest facilities in the country.

The authorized appropriation to the PFDA serves as the National Government (NG) subsidy for fiscal year 2024, the DBM said. The budget will be released to the PFDA under the 2024 General Appropriations Act (GAA).

Pangandaman signed the release of the SARO for the purpose on February 28, according to the DBM.

"Enhancing and maintaining strategic and globally competitive fish ports would allow our ships and crews access to essential supplies and services, and for vessel operators to successfully bring in their catches, safeguarding the livelihood of our fishermen," Pangandaman said in a statement.

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed the

local fisheries production in 2023 stood at 4.26 million metric tons (MMT), lower than the 4.34 MMT produced in the previous year.

The PSA noted that commercial, marine municipal fisheries, and inland municipal fisheries production also declined, adding that only the aquaculture subsector reported an annual increment in production.

Meanwhile, the World Bank said the country's fisheries sector contributes 1.3 percent to the country's GDP and provides approximately 1.6 million jobs or around 4 percent of the labor force.

"Kapag maayos at napanganalagaan ang ating mga fish port, malaking pakinabang ito sa kabuhayan ng mga mangingisda at sa kaunlaran ng komunidad [When our country's fish ports are prop-

erly maintained, this will greatly benefit the livelihood of our fisherfolk and in the community development]," Pangandaman added.

The PFDA is a government-owned and -controlled corporation attached to the Department of Agriculture (DA) and was created to promote the development of the fishing industry through the provision of post-harvest infrastructure facilities and essential services that improve efficiency in the handling and distribution of fish and fishery products.

The PFDA sustains the operation of the nine Regional Fish Ports particularly in Navotas, Iloilo, Zamboanga, Camaligan, Lucena, Sual, Davao, General Santos, and Bulan Fish Port. It also jointly manages the Tacloban Fish Port with the municipality of Leyte.

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Law reviving salt industry to strengthen PHL food security—group

THE signing into law of a measure that aims to revitalize the salt industry will bolster the efforts of the country to achieve food security, according to nonprofit organization Philippine Chamber of Cooperatives Inc. (Coop Chamber).

The group said salt is an important ingredient in food and is essential to certain industries.

Coop Chamber also said that it shares the views of the Salt Industry Networks which declared that salt self-sufficiency will contribute to the agro-industrial development of the Philippines.

"Salt is, therefore, a national food security issue—and without salt, we believe that the Philippines is vulnerable to a food supply chain crisis," it said in a statement.

The Philippine Salt Industry Development Act was signed by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. last March 11, a move that is aligned with the administration's

food security agenda.

"It should be noted that the Philippine salt industry was in a dire situation because despite the country being archipelagic, it relies upon its salt through importation coming from China and Australia," the group said.

Citing data from the National Fisheries Research and Development Institute the group noted that the production of salt in the Philippines is only 114,623.29 metric tons, which represents less than 20 percent of the country's annual salt requirement.

As part of efforts to revive the salt industry, the law mandated the creation of the Philippine Salt Industry Development Council to be headed by the **Department of Agriculture** and co-chaired by the Department of Trade and Industry and representatives from the cooperatives in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao.

The council will formulate the Philippine Salt Industry Devel-

opment Roadmap containing the short-term, medium-term, and long-term development plans, including specific and priority programs and projects.

"The role of cooperatives in the council is very much welcome as well, as we all know that cooperatives have a lot of experience on the ground in promoting programs and projects in partnership with the government to alleviate the poor and create livelihood activities for the upliftment of the lives of its members and the communities where they operate," said the group's chairman Noel Raboy.

Apart from the creation of the council, Republic Act (RA) 11985 also stipulated the imposition of a 9-percent tariff on imported salt. Prior to the new law, the government slaps a tariff of 1 percent on table salt.

The new ad valorem rate will be applied on all imported salt, including table salt, denatured salt,

pure sodium chloride, whether or not aqueous solution of containing added anti-caking or free-flowing agent, as well as sea water.

After 90 days from the implementation of RA 11985, the collected salt tariff will be credited to the Salt Industry Development and Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (Sidcef) to be created in the special accounts of the National Treasury.

The law mandates the Agriculture Secretary and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Director to manage Sidcef. Its beneficiaries include salt cooperatives/associations of subsistence and small farmers and fishers.

The fund will exist for 10 years and will be used to provide the machinery and equipment for salt production, establish a salt farm warehouse, provide extension services and develop modern salt production and processing technology in line with the roadmap.



Govt to build 4 new high water dams—NIA

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA

[X@sam_medenilla](#)

THE National Irrigation Administration (NIA) on Tuesday said four new high dams are set to be built until 2028 to help secure the country's water needs and address flood control needs.

NIA Administrator Eddie G. Guillen said the dams will be built in the the Tumauni River, Panay River Basin, Ilocos Sur and

in Mindanao in line with the instruction of President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.

"Because as he said, if you have a high dam, you have irrigation, flood control, power generation, domestic water and aquaculture. So what more can you ask for? You will get many returns if it is a high dam! So this is the focus of the President," Guillen said.

Based on NIA standards, he said high dams have a height of 100 meters.

Guillen noted that at least 20 high and medium-sized dams are expected to be completed by 2028. Ten of these will start construction this year.

Among those pending for completion are dams that have been subjected to a catch-up plan through their design and build manual. These dams, the NIA official said, are scheduled to be finished this year.

"Our design and build manual shortened the implementation of


the dam from conception to actual construction by three years," Guillen said.

Among the possible sites for the said dams in the Visayas, NIA is building the Jalaur Dam and other projects in the Panay River Basin, in addition to smaller or medium-sized dams.

Aside from building new dams, he said the government is also targeting to rehabilitate major dams such as Magat and Pantabangan, which has existed for half a century.



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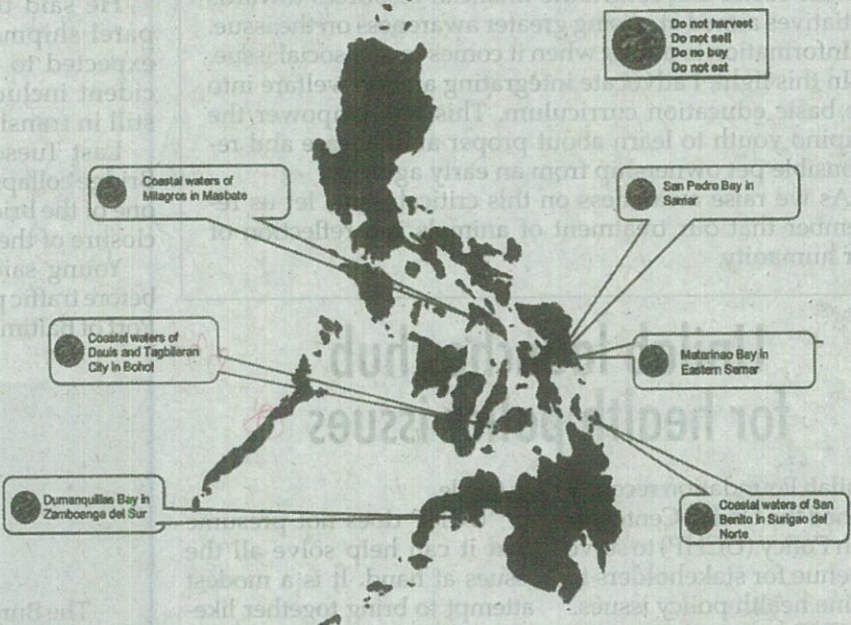


BAGONG PILIPINAS
Pagpapalaganap ng Malinis at
Magsasakang Konsepto

Republic of the Philippines
Department of Agriculture
BUREAU OF FISHERIES AND AQUATIC RESOURCES
Fisheries Building Complex, BPI Compound, Brgy. Vasra
Visayas Ave., Quezon City
| do@bfar.da.gov.ph | records@bfar.da.gov.ph |
+63(2) 8539-5685

Shellfish Bulletin No. 06
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26 March 2024

Shellfishes collected and tested from coastal waters of Milagros in Masbate; coastal waters of Daus and Tagbilaran City in Bohol; San Pedro Bay in Samar and Matarinao Bay in Eastern Samar; Dumanquilas Bay in Zamboanga del Sur; and coastal waters of San Benito in Surigao del Norte are still positive for Paralytic Shellfish Poison (PSP) or toxic red tide that is beyond the regulatory limit.




Do not harvest
Do not sell
Do not buy
Do not eat


All types of shellfish and *Acetes sp.* or alamang gathered from the areas shown above are NOT SAFE for human consumption. Fish, squids, shrimps, and crabs are safe for human consumption provided that they are fresh and washed thoroughly, and Internal organs such as gills and intestines are removed before cooking.

The following areas continue to be **FREE from toxic red tide**: coastal waters of Cavite, Las Piñas, Parañaque, Navotas, Bulacan, and Bataan (Mariveles, Limay, Orion, Pilar, Balanga, Hermosa, Orani, Abucay, and Samal) in Manila Bay; mariculture areas in Infanta, coastal waters of Bolinao, Anda, Alaminos, Sual, and Wawa, Bani in Pangasinan; mariculture areas in Rosario, and Sto. Tomas in La Union; coastal waters of Pampanga; Masinloc Bay in Zambales; Pagbilao Bay, Pagbilao, and coastal waters of Waley, Padre Burgos in Quezon; Honda, and coastal waters of Inner Malampaya Sound, Taytay in Palawan; coastal waters of Mandaon in Masbate; Sorsogon Bay, and Juag Lagoon, Matnog in Sorsogon; coastal waters of Borongan, San Dionisio in Iloilo; Sapijan Bay (Ivisan and Sapijan in Capiz; Mambuquio and Camanci, Batan in Aklan); coastal waters of Altavas, Batan, and New Washington in Batan Bay, Aklan; coastal waters of Pontevedra; Panay; Pilar; Roxas City and President Roxas in Capiz; coastal waters of E.B. Magalona, Talisay City, Silay City, Bacolod City, Hinigaran, and Victorias City in Negros Occidental; Tambobo, and Silt Bays, Siaton; and Bais Bay, Bais City in Negros Oriental; coastal waters of Daram, Calbayog, and Zumarraga, Cambatutay, Irong-irong, Maqueda and Villareal Bays in Samar; coastal waters of Guluan in Eastern Samar; coastal waters of Leyte, Calubian, Ormoc, Sogod, and Carigara Bay and Cancabato, Tacloban City in Leyte; coastal waters of Biliran Island; Tantanang Bay in Zamboanga Sibugay; Murcielagos Bay in Zamboanga del Norte and (Sapang Dalaga, and Balianao) in Misamis Occidental; Pangull Bay, Tanguib City, and coastal waters of Ozamiz City in Misamis Occidental; coastal waters of Baroy in Lanao del Norte; Taguines Lagoon, Benoni, Mahinog in Camiguin; Balite, and Pujada Bays, Mati City in Davao Oriental; Tagabull Bay in Davao del Sur; Malalag Bay in Davao Occidental and Davao del Sur; coastal waters of Hinatuan, Lianga and Cortes, and Bislig Bay in Surigao del Sur.

ATTY. DEMOSTHENES R. ESCOTO
Director

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Milk tariff collections rise by 31% to P2.4 B

By **JASPER EMMANUEL ARCALAS**

Revenues raised by the government from various imported milk products jumped by 31 percent to P2.36 billion in 2023, the highest in at least eight years, from P1.8 billion in 2022.

The latest **National Dairy Authority (NDA)** report attributed the increase to the higher duties slapped on imported cheese, whey powder and buttermilk.

The tariffs collected from imported cheese skyrocketed by 88 percent to P588 million from P312 million in 2022.

Likewise, the government collected P32.26 million from imported whey powder, which used to be zero since 2018.

Meanwhile, the tariffs from buttermilk more than doubled to P220 million from

P95 million in 2022.

The NDA data showed that tariffs collected grew despite the decline in both volume and value of imports.

Total milk and milk products imported slipped by three percent to 575,460 metric tons in 2023 from 595,640 MT in 2022.

In terms of value, milk imports amounted to P76.29 billion in 2023, 15 percent lower than the P89.65 billion recorded in 2022.

The NDA data indicated the higher aggregate tariff rates applied on imported milk products lifted the government's tariff collections.

In 2023, the aggregate tariff rates applied stood at three percent versus the usual two percent from 2016 to 2022.

The tariff on imported whey powder

was increased to one percent from zero, while that of buttermilk and buttermilk powder was raised to three percent from one percent.

Likewise, the duty slapped on cheese increased to six percent from four percent.

Legislators are keen on passing a bill that would appropriate all milk tariffs collected to the development of the domestic dairy industry.

The Philippines virtually imports all of its milk requirements as domestic production can only meet a percentage of the country's total requirement.

The US emerged as the country's top milk supplier in 2023 with a total volume of 137,620 metric tons valued at P22.5 billion followed by New Zealand at 95,300 metric tons worth P19.53 billion.



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Vizcaya coconut farmers get product training

TO boost the coconut industry in Nueva Vizcaya, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) in Region 2 (Cagayan Valley) conducted trainings on product enhancement and marketing for 20 farmers in Alfonso Castañeda town under the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan (CFIDP).

The CFIDP is a program of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Michael Paggabao, DTI Nueva Vizcaya director, said the training held in Alfonso Castañeda town in the province was led by the DA-Agricultural Training Institute (DA-ATI) Regional Training Center 2 based in San Mateo, Isabela,

from March 19-21.

The coconut farmers who are also CFIDP-enrolled micro, small and medium enterprises went through training sessions on developing coconut products and by-products, and coconut (buko) pie processing and preservation of the shared service facility (SSF) projects.

Paggabao said the sessions also focused on the training proper on product enhancement and marketing with the DTI Nueva Vizcaya Team led by Flomilyn de la Cruz, senior trade industry development specialist-Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program, and technical as-

sistant Jan Christopher Decoro as resource speakers and facilitators.

During the event, de la Cruz reiterated the importance of attaining and sustaining success by practicing effective and efficient marketing; undergoing product development through proper labeling and branding; and complying with the standardization of food product preparation and manufacturing.

The participants also underwent profiling. This was done to ensure that relevant data and information are captured by the agency to tailor and provide future interventions, according to Paggabao.

Aside from the training, the DTI Nueva Vizcaya Team also visited other SSF projects in Alfonso Castañeda, such as the soft broom production and buko pie processing facility to conduct monitoring and inventory count.

In 2022, the Agriculture department, through the Philippine Coconut Authority, launched the CFIDP that aims to increase the income and productivity of the 2.5 million coconut farmers in the country; promote poverty alleviation, education and social equity; and rehabilitate and modernize the Philippine coconut industry.

LEANDER C. DOMINGO



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Moisture meter eyed for adlai

THE Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech) and the Department of Agriculture (DA) Region 10 (Northern Mindanao) office have kicked off a collaboration to develop a moisture meter for adlai.

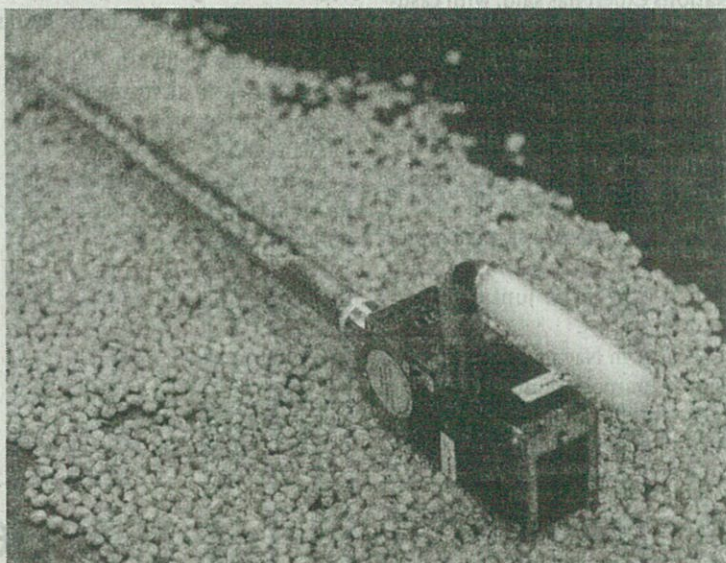
"With the agency's dedication to advancing the adlai industry in the region, Director Collado said that the activity will help measure the water content of adlai grains with more efficiency, and hopefully, for the eventual adoption of the instrument among adlai farmers," it added, referring to Carlene Collado, who is the director of the DA Region 10 office.

Representatives of the DA Region 10 office already met

the team from PHilMech for the adlai grain moisture meter prototyping. Also included in the project is the development of an adlai huller.

The PHilMech project team, led by Supervising Science Research Specialist Arlene Joaquin, intends to present the initial prototype of the adlai moisture meter to farmers and end-users, and conduct debugging of the adlai huller to ensure its normal and optimal functionality.

Adlai, scientific name *Coix lacryma-jobi L.*, is also Indigenous in the Philippines and is used as a staple when rice or corn is not available. It is also cultivated in the country as a healthier option to rice. **CONRAD M. CARIÑO**



■ The Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech) is currently developing moisture meters for grains. Photo shows the moisture meter for corn. PHILMECH PHOTO



Dinagat Islands to get marine hatchery

THE provincial government of Dinagat Islands has earmarked a supplemental budget of P7 million for the full implementation of Republic Act (RA) 11736 that stipulates the establishment of a multispecies marine hatchery in Basilisa.

RA 11736 was signed by then-president Rodrigo Duterte on April 27, 2022.

The initial funding of the project, amounting to P18 million, was released by the **Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR)** to the local government unit of Basilisa on July 7, 2023, for the construction of the required building.

"I want the BFAR, together with our technical people here at the agriculture office in Dinagat, to continue to identify other areas that are good spots for more hatchery projects for the benefit of our fishermen," Dinagat Gov. Nilo Demerey

Jr. said.

Demerey said the supplemental budget allocated by the provincial government would ensure the project's full completion.

The governor has met with the technical team from the BFAR Caraga (Region 13) office led by Rizalinda Abing for updates on the continuing completion of the project.

"Harnessing the potential of aquaculture in Dinagat through the hatchery and other projects will diversify the species of marine life that can be sustainably cultivated in the province, help open new avenues for income generation for the fishermen and ensure food security," he said.

Aside from finding a perfect location for the hatchery, Demerey said the research study to find areas suited for deep-sea fishing for the fishermen in Dinagat should be sustained.

THE TIMES



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PhilRice launches new social media pages

TO address the needs of agriculture stakeholders to have easier access to science-based rice information, the **Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice)** launched new social media accounts during its Farmers Field Day dubbed "Lakbay Palay" in Muñoz, Nueva Ecija, on March 20-21.

The institute's page on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/@philricetv/shorts>) and TikTok (https://www.tiktok.com/@rice_matters) were created based on rice stakeholders' demand for rice information on the two social media platforms.

In a survey conducted on the Department of Agriculture-PhilRice Facebook page, 87 percent of the 1,205 respondents indicated that they search for rice information on YouTube while in another poll, the majority of over 200 respondents expressed an interest in obtaining farming tips on TikTok.

"The spread of science misinformation can lead to the adoption of harmful practices, which can have unfavorable effects on crop yield, farmer income and food security. We established these pages as credible sources, in which information was checked and based on rigorous research of rice experts," said Charisma Love Gado-Gonzales, project lead of PhilRice's Production and Sharing of Rice S&T through Stra-

tegic Media.

Virginia Rihad, the president of the Casongsong Farmers Association in Guimba, Nueva Ecija, stated that as a lead officer, she bears the responsibility of disseminating the latest information on rice production, which she often sources from social media.

"We wanted to know more about the technologies we read on print, and videos provide us with an interactive platform to deepen our understanding and see these technologies in action," she said.

For her part, farmer Jemalyn Ranjo from Morong, Bataan, said she was enthusiastic about the presence of PhilRice videos on social media as these will make farming more attractive to the younger generation.

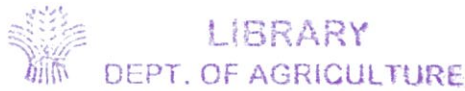
"Through the videos, the youth see that agriculture has significantly improved through machines, making farming much easier," she said.

Ranzcel Lanz Reyes of Bataan Peninsula State University said he is excited about the "new noble cause" of TikTok, believing it serves a dual purpose of reaching more farmers and engaging the youth who will sustain agriculture.

Conducted twice a year, the Lakbay Palay events of PhilRice also showcases the latest rice varieties and farming technologies to more than 1,000 participants over two days.



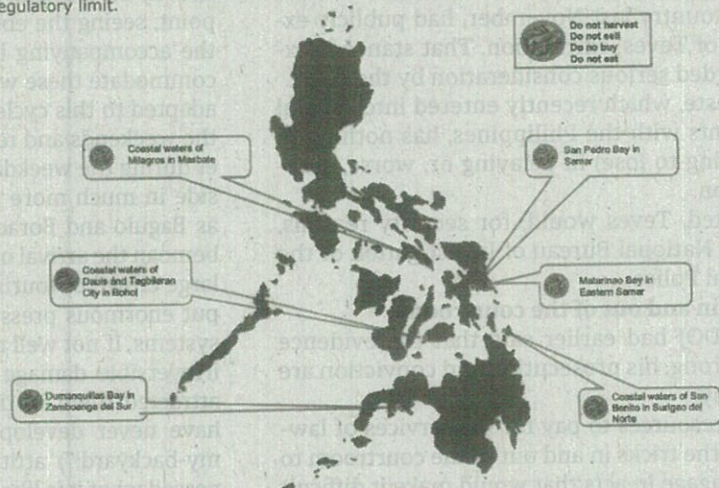
■ The Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) recently launched two new social media accounts to help rice farmers gain more knowledge on rice farming. Photo shows PhilRice personnel behind a rice field celebrating the record 20 million metric ton palay (unmilled rice) harvest in 2023. PHILRICE PHOTO



Republic of the Philippines
Department of Agriculture
BUREAU OF FISHERIES AND AQUATIC RESOURCES
Fisheries Building Complex, BPI Compound,
Brgy. Vasra, Visayas Ave., Quezon City
| do@bfar.da.gov.ph | records@bfar.da.gov.ph |
+63(2) 8539-5685

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ATTY. DEMOSTHENES R. ESCOTO
Director



MARCOS ADMINISTRATION PLANS NEW 'HIGH DAMS' TO BOLSTER WATER SUPPLY, AGRICULTURAL RESILIENCE

EDITORIAL

High dams

PRESIDENT Marcos has demonstrated anew his determination to come up with far-reaching programs to boost the country's resiliency against the effects of climate change.

President Marcos called for the construction of more "high dams," like the aging Magat and Pantabangan dams, as a long-term solution to the country's water supply problem.

It will be recalled that in 2013, then Senator Marcos wanted the **National Irrigation Administration (NIA)** to have an effective action plan against the effects of climate change.

As an agricultural country, the Philippines needs irrigation systems in the face of the worsening problem of global warming.

NIA Administrator Eduardo Guillen said that his agency, which was established in 1963, plans to construct three to five "big dams."

They include the proposed Tumauni Multi-Purpose Dam in the Cagayan Valley and the Panay River Dam in Panay Island.

Guillen said NIA hopes to finish the construction of the "big dams" before President Marcos leaves Malacanang.

Likewise, the agency is seen to undertake 20 medium-scale irrigation projects throughout the six-year Marcos administration.

Without doubt, it's about time to construct new "high dams" since the Magat and Pantabangan Dams are already aging.

Magat Dam is located on the Magat River at the boundary between the towns of Alfonso Lista and Ramon in Ifugao and Isabela, respectively.

The Pantabangan Dam, on the other hand, is located in Nueva Ecija.



Bukidnon's award-winning coffee farmers get livelihood boost from One Meralco Foundation

AROUND 150 coffee farmers in Talakag, Bukidnon have received a much-needed boost for their livelihood through One Meralco Foundation (OMF), the social development arm of Manuel V. Pangilinan-led Manila Electric Company (Meralco), after it energized their post-harvest coffee bean processing facility using solar power.

The coffee farmers are now benefitting from the five-kilowatt solar photovoltaic (PV) system that was turned over to the Milalittra Farmers Agriculture Cooperative (MILFACO), whose members are from the Mirayon-Lapok-Lirongan-Tinaytayan-Talaandig Tribal Association, Inc. (Milalittra), one of the indigenous groups of Bukidnon.

The group is known for its award-winning coffee beans, cited as the best washed processed coffee by the Philippine Coffee Quality Competition.

The newly energized post-harvest production facility improved the Talaandig coffee farmers' productivity by enabling them to run their pulping machine for four hours—an essential step to postharvest production. From previously pulping coffee cherries for 10 minutes per kilo manually, they can now pulp 60 kilos per hour, which is expected to result in about 43 percent increase in their income.

"With electricity, our coffee beans will be of high quality so that we can find the right buyers at a right price point. The electrification has helped us give justice to the hard work of our coffee farmers," according to Joannah Dumaquita, General Manager of MILFACO.

Through OMF's agriculture and livelihood electrification program, rural cooperatives, and community organizations like MILFACO are given an opportunity to

improve their micro-enterprise through solar PV systems.

"Through our years of implementing community electrification programs, we have discovered and realized that many in these last-mile communities are still left wanting basic services. Lack of electricity continues to be a perennial hurdle to progress which many communities, especially in rural Philippines, deserve. Through our Agriculture and Livelihood Electrification, we have witnessed that solar power is not only a fundamental tool for productivity but also a great equalizer to enable last mile Filipinos to become productive actors of their community and country," said OMF President Jeffrey O. Tarayao.

The installation of the solar PV system was also made possible by the generosity of Meralco employees, who donated a combined P560,000 for the energization project that benefitted MILFACO.

The project serves as an important part of OMF's electrification for development portfolio. To date, the Foundation has energized 300 schools, four rural health centers, three water access facilities, and three agriculture and livelihood facilities. As a contribution to the universal aspiration of sustainability and inclusive growth, electrification for development aims to bring the benefits of electrification to those who need it the most.

"One Meralco Foundation's work is an ever-evolving journey to understand the daily realities of Filipinos in need, address their gap and initiate interventions to better their situation. The community electrification program is a testament that we are ready to support them until they are able to stand on their own and become agents of change for others," said Manuel V. Pangilinan, Meralco Chairman and CEO.



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ONE Meralco Foundation (OMF) President Jeffrey O. Tarayao (third from right) turned over to Milalitra Farmers Agriculture Cooperative (MILFACO) a solar photovoltaic system that will energize the cooperative's post-harvest coffee bean processing facility. Also present during the ceremonial turnover were Agricultural Cooperative Development International and Volunteers in Overseas Cooperative Assistance (ACDI-VOCA) Country Manager Melissa Alado (first from left), Talakag Municipal Administrator Alberto Bigas (second from right) and OMF Program Manager Patrick Famisaran (rightmost).



Cocoa cracks record above \$10,000 before Easter

LONDON, United Kingdom (AFP) — New York cocoa prices on Tuesday cracked an all-time peak above \$10,000 on stubborn supply fears, further stoking worries about the elevated cost of Easter eggs and other chocolate treats.

The commodity, which is mostly used to make chocolate, zoomed as high as \$10,080 per tonne to extend its record-breaking run.

The most-traded cocoa contract later stood at \$9,767 at about 1600 GMT, as poor harvests in producing countries sparked shortage woes.

London cocoa prices meanwhile vaulted Tuesday to a new historic pinnacle of £8,682 per tonne.

The rocketing cocoa market has sparked worries over the knock-on impact on the price of chocolate, at a time when the world's major economies are already grappling with elevated inflation.

"Chocolate is the new luxury good in town, and we expect that sweet treats will see their prices surge in response," said XTB analyst Kathleen Brooks.

New York cocoa seen its price more than double this year, surging by around 135 percent.

London prices have leapt by 144 percent in value.

Cocoa soared in 2023 on a wave of speculation over a global supply deficit,

whereby demand outpaces supplies.

The market accelerated its dizzying ascent this year, driven by a supply crunch over bad weather in Ghana and Ivory Coast.

The West African nations are the world's biggest producers of the commodity.

Both countries had been hit by heavy rains that have sparked a tough year for the crop.

Producers now also face fresh turmoil due to the resurgence of the El Nino climate phenomenon, which causes drought in some areas and flooding in others.

"Supply and demand fundamentals have driven the price of cocoa higher this year," noted Brooks.

"Reduced supply from West Africa, the main cocoa growing region, along with a boost in demand is putting upward pressure on the price."



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IRRI developing new rice variety

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

THE International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) is set to introduce by 2026 a new variety of rice in the Philippines that is drought tolerant and could reduce cost for farmers.

IRRI Regional Breeding Lead for Southeast Asia Mary Jean Du said that they are now testing four breeding pipelines for this new rice variety. Testing for

the new rice variety started in 2022 and Du added that they will be selecting which breeding technique to nominate to the National Cooperative Test.

"It will take two more years [and] maybe a new variety will be released," Du told reporters on Monday, adding that the new variety may come out by next year or in 2026.

This new variety of rice is expected to endure higher temperatures and could survive for up to two to three weeks without water. Additionally, it is projected to lower the expenses for planting and mitigate losses for rice

farmers.

The IRRI has been testing the new rice variety by identifying which technique can yield more. These four breeding pipelines include direct seeded with irrigation, transplanted with irrigation, direct seeded under rainfed and transplanted under rainfed.

The selected and most promising rice breeding technique will then move to the next stage of development and will be distrib-

uted to farmers.

Du emphasized that the direct seeding breeding process would help farmers in cutting costs, comparing it with conventional farming or transplanting, which typically amounts to P60,000 to P70,000 per hectare.

"Because with transplanting, they will need to hire many people, unlike if they go with direct seeded, they can use machines for that," she said, adding that the

Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization has started distributing seeders.

To speed up the breeding in IRRI, Du said that they are expecting for a new facility to be finished within the month and may start operations in April. This new facility can help shorten the breeding cycle to two to four years in comparison to the conventional way that takes 10 to 12 years.



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Apiculture center sustains beekeeping training

BY LEANDER C. DOMINGO

THE National Apiculture Research Training and Development Institute (Nartdi) under the Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University (DMMSU) is sustaining the training of beekeepers by collaborating with other academic institutions.

Maricon Viduya, DMMSU Strategic Communications director, said that as an offshoot of their partnership with other institutions, Nartdi conducted the workshop titled "Specialized Training on Beekeeping: Geared toward Stronger Collaboration and Community Development" at the Nartdi Conference Hall on March 12-15.

She said the training has equipped at least 11 participants from state universities and colleges who are partners of Nartdi in training beekeepers.

"This is part of the institution's commitment to building the capacity of community stakeholders in acquiring self-efficacy and empowerment, strengthening aca-

dem institutions in community outreach and extension activities, and encouraging partnership between and among academic institutions," Viduya said.

During the event, Angelina Gonzales, DMMSU vice president for research, development and innovation, underscored the significance of cooperation in advancing beekeeping initiatives.

Gonzales said that in an era marked by environmental challenges and declining bee populations, "we must unite our efforts in safeguarding these vital insects."

"Through collaboration and knowledge-sharing, we can address pressing issues and propel

the beekeeping industry forward," she said.

The event included an interactive session on the "A" to "Z" of keeping and caring for honeybees covering different topics such as the life of honeybees, beekeeping tools and equipment, beehive construction, hive management, pests and diseases management, development of a bee pasture area, honeybee products processing and utilization, and economics of beekeeping.

Viduya said the participants also gained practical experience through hands-on activities and visits to successful beekeepers.

"This training is excellent," said Cristy Owanes, a representative from the University of Southeastern Philippines, expressing hope that more people will be trained "to boost the apiculture industry in the country."

Laurence Almoguera from Don Emilio Espinosa Sr. Masbate State University thanked DMMSU and Nartdi for sharing expertise

and everything about apiculture. "We hope we can apply these learnings in our areas. We will keep in touch with DMMSU-Nartdi to promote beekeeping in Masbate."

Leilani Parugrug, along with trainees from Apayao State College, also extended gratitude for the training. "Thank you for this opportunity. Questions in our minds were answered. We will continue collaborating for the success of apiculture."

Professor Emerita Galiste, DMMSU director for extension, congratulated the training providers, especially the participants, for the successful conduct of the training.

"I hope that this training is not an expense but an investment. I also hope that this will not only be our first and last meeting but also the start of our continuous collaboration to make apiculture a profitable business. Let us adopt the quality of the bees. They do have no sorrow; every morning, they hum for success," Galiste said.

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■ The La Union-based Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University-National Apiculture Research Training and Development Institute continues to train individuals from state universities and colleges to become skilled in beekeeping. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



PROJECT DEADLINE SET FOR 2026

IRRI DEVELOPING RICE VARIETY RESISTANT TO DROUGHT, HEAT

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**
@jordeenelagare

The International Rice Research Institute (Irri) hopes to introduce by 2026 a new variety of rice capable of surviving drought or resisting high temperatures.

The international agricultural research and training organization based in Laguna province is currently testing four breeding pipelines that are either drought-resistant or rainfed.

These are direct seeded, early, long, soft, rainfed (DELS-R); direct seeded, early, long, soft, irrigated (DELS-I); transplanted, early, long, soft, rainfed (TELS-R) and transplanted, early, long, soft, irrigated (TELS-I).

"It will take two more years for the new variety to come out," said Mary Jean Du, Irri's regional breeding lead for Southeast Asia.

Once made available to farmers, the new rice variety may help reduce the cost of cultivating the commodity, particularly on labor and water usage.

Du said that rice farmers spend P60,000 to P70,000 per hectare to produce rice under conventional farming, which involves transplanting or moving the crop from one location to another.

Consultation with farmers

"In our consultations, many farmers complain about transplanting because they need to hire more people. But if they opt for the direct-seeded variety, they can use the machines for that and I think PHilMech

(Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization) is already distributing the seeders," she added.

According to Irri assistant scientist Maria Cristina Heredia, the drought-resistant breeding pipeline can survive for two to three weeks without being watered.

"The advantage of those with drought tolerance is that when the area is always subjected to water stress, it will still survive and yield compared to [traditional rice varieties]," Heredia said.

Du explained that the Irri was conducting this type of research to address the needs of consumers and the different growing ecosystems of rice given the country's topography or the natural and artificial physical features in different areas.

Among the four breeding pipelines, the Irri is determining which one to nominate for field testing.

"We started it in 2022. We already have selections for stage two and we will select the ones that we will nominate once we harvest the varieties that are in stage two for nomination to the [National Cooperative Test]," Du said.

According to her, there are currently 300 entries being tested in various locations of Irri's phenotyping sites. From there, the research organization will pick only the ones that pass its standards.

"We will screen them again for another two seasons and then we [will] select the very promising ones for nomination," she said. **INQ**



India agrees to supply PH with non-basmati white rice

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. thanked India for allowing the Philippines to import 295,000 metric tons of non-basmati white rice.

Marcos conveyed his intention to deepen collaboration with India in various areas such as agriculture, infrastructure and defense.

"I'd like to thank you and please extend my gratitude to your Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) for the timely provision of imported rice that we bought from India. The very critical, a very crucial time since we are in the right now suffering the effects [of] drought," Pres-

ident Marcos said during the courtesy call in Malacañang of Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, India's Minister of External Affairs.

"I hope... we hope to do better and I hope to continue this trade with India, but not only in agri products but in other [areas]. The ambassador has been working very hard to promote all of these different exchanges and welcome once again," Marcos said.

Marcos added that the Philippines is focusing on agriculture to ensure food security, noting the country's initial exchanges with India.

For his part, the Indian official said Prime Minister Modi looks forward to welcoming President Marcos in India for a state visit, which the President welcomed.

"It would be nice if the President's visit coincides with 75th anniversary celebration of the two countries' diplomatic relations, he said.

In October last year, India approved shipping 295,000 metric tons of non-basmati white rice to the Philippines, the highest allocation it gave to a foreign country after lifting the restriction to specific nations. *Chona Yu*

BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business

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Cocoa breaks \$10,000 record, with pricier chocolate to follow

COCOA futures surged above an unprecedented \$10,000 a metric ton on Tuesday before erasing gains and taking a breather from a historic rally that has seen prices of the key chocolate ingredient double this year.

The market is being rattled by poor crops in key West African growers that has put the world on course for a third straight annual supply deficit. The industry is grappling with the legacy of poor returns paid to cocoa farmers and fears are mounting about being able to

source enough beans.

As well as concerns about scarce physical supplies, pressures are also building in the financial market, where some traders have sold futures to hedge against physical holdings. But as they wait for the contracts to mature they need cash to meet margin calls on losses on derivatives, and in a rising market can be forced to close out short positions, helping to fuel the rally.

The most-active cocoa futures jumped as much as 4.5 percent to \$10,080 a ton in

New York before settling 0.3 percent lower at \$9,622. Cocoa futures in London and New York have more than doubled this year.

The rally has pushed a technical gauge of prices into overbought territory for much of the last couple of months, though cocoa has continued to soar.

"When we're at this price, it's hard to tell whether these prices are justified," said Paul Joules, an analyst at Rabobank in London. "Whenever we have a dip in the market, it seems to shoot straight back up, which is

more to do with the commercials, they've been net buyers."

Reaching the \$10,000 level could spur some profit taking, as price action "has gotten very steep, and traders could be concerned that the rally has reached exhaustion," analysts at the Hightower Report said in a Tuesday note.

There's a risk the supply situation may worsen. Incoming European Union rules—aimed at stopping products that destroy forests from being sold in shops—may make

it even harder for the bloc's chocolate makers to secure supplies.

Focus is now turning to West Africa's upcoming mid-crop, the smaller of two annual harvests. Top grower Ivory Coast's regulator expects that to shrink this season, Bloomberg has reported.

"The West African supply situation remains extremely tight going into the start of the mid-crop harvest next week," the Hightower Report said in a note.

Other growers, like Brazil and Ecuador, are seeking to ramp up production, but it takes a few years before newly-planted cocoa trees bear beans—delaying the relief to strained

global supplies. A ratio of stockpiles-to-grindings will fall to the lowest in more than four decades this season, the International Cocoa Organization has forecast, reflecting the market's precarious position.

Higher cocoa costs are pressuring profits of chocolate manufacturers, and cocoa's advance is also bad news for consumers if companies keep passing on costs or sell products that are smaller or have less chocolate in them. The looming Easter holiday is a peak period for candy consumption, and the lag between commodity and retail markets mean the brunt of the impact for shoppers still lies ahead.

Bloomberg News