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Bigger budget brews brighter business for coffee bean farmers

B2

By JASPER EMMANUEL ARCALAS

Freshly brewed coffee.

Three words, but you can "instantly" smell the aroma waking up every inch of your body - and mind.

The lowly coffee has become part and parcel of our daily lives. May it be a morning fix, an afternoon delight, or an evening pour to wash out a great dinner.

It has become part of our lives that we demand and crave for it more than anything else. It is affordable. And it does its work: gives us a caffeine boost.

Just as Chit Juan, president of the Philippine Coffee Board Inc. (PCBI), says: it is the cheapest drug - a stimulant - available.

Coffee even has its own inflation print. The rate of increase in the prices of coffee and coffee substitutes stood at two percent in February.

But the coffee industry - just like us drinkers - has been longing for a boost.

In the late 1880s, the Philippines was recognized as the fourth largest coffee exporter, boasting a peak production of over 80,000 metric tons (MT) of green coffee beans.

Today, production level has dropped to an average of 30,000 MT in the past six years.

In the past two decades, the industry has been surviving, albeit thriving, on its own thanks to private sector investments.

State support remains miniscule to revive what was once a glorious agricultural subsector of the country.

But that could change soon.

Unlocking idle funds

Industry stakeholders have lobbied to the Department of Agriculture (DA) the use of collected special safeguard duties (SSG) from imported coffee products to bankroll programs for the development of the

The additional duty is computed using a formula based on the difference between the imported products' value and the trigger price.

Since 2018, the Philippines imposed the price-based SSG on imported coffee products following a surge in import volume, particularly for instant coffee.

Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) data showed that combined imports of coffee products between

for the development of the local industries adversely impacted by imported commodities, which is known as the Competitiveness Enhancement Measures Fund (CEMF).

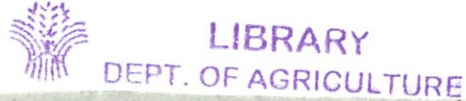
As of end-2022, the total CEMF stood at P3.343 billion. Industry players noted that the bulk of the SSGs collected came from the poultry and coffee sectors.

Despite the law being enacted 22 years ago, the CEMF will be utilized for the first time this year with an initial utilization of P250 million following the enactment of its implementing guidelines last year.

Subsequently, the DA issued the supporting implementing guidelines



Mojica



2018 and 2019 reached almost 500,000 MT.
The government continues to impose SSG on imported coffee products today, despite repeated appeals from trade partners, particularly Indonesia, to lift the trade remedy.
Indonesia is the top supplier of coffee products to the Philippines. No

for the use of CEMF in the agriculture sector, finally paving the way for the use of idled funds.

Boosting domestic productivity

Industry groups hailed the actions made by the current DA leadership in unlocking the CEMF.

The Philippine Chamber on Agriculture and Food Inc. proposed to

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. to consider the following programs to be funded by the entire CEMF:

- * Establishment of a coffee and cacao institute (P1 billion)
- * Planting of five million coffee trees (P500 million)
- * Credit facility for coffee industry (P1 billion)
- * Construction of instant coffee facility operated by farmers' cooperative (P500 million)
- * Establishment of coffee trading post (P500 million)

The PCBI points out that the use of the CEMF is one of the options to ramp up domestic coffee production amid surging demand.

The group estimates that the country has a 120,000 MT production shortfall to meet the estimated demand of about 150,000 MT.

PCBI director Andy Mojica emphasizes that local coffee production has been left behind by the growth in its demand, forcing processors and retailers to source imported stocks



Coffee seedlings planted under a joint program by GForest and PCBI

local coffee industry.

The SSG is a trade remedy imposed by countries on imported products whose prices fall below an established trigger price to protect domestic industries injured by increased imports.

less than Indonesian President Joko Widodo raised his country's concern regarding the coffee SSG to President Marcos during the former's state visit last January.

Under Republic Act 8800, half of the collected SSG shall be earmarked



Juan



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for their requirements.

He noted that the country's average coffee yield is around 300 kilograms per hectare, nowhere near the over 2,000 kgs per hectare productivity of Vietnam.

In fact, the Philippines's self-sufficiency in coffee fell to a five-year low of 38.1 percent in 2022 as imports continued to increase to meet the country's growing demand for the commodity.

The PCBI says the country can achieve a comfortable level of sufficiency in coffee if the government would invest at least P6 billion to boost domestic productivity.

The amount would be used to plant at least 20 million seedlings across the targeted areas to reduce or erase domestic production shortfall.

PCBI proposed that the investment could be made on a staggered basis at P600 million per year for the next decade.

"We cannot do it overnight, it should be a year-on-year program," Juan said.

The funding for that program, PCBI argues, can come from the CEMF as well as from the coco levy fund, which is being overseen by the Philippine Coconut Authority through, through its intercropping component.

PCBI officials disclosed that it is in talks with the Philippine Coconut Authority, to implement an intercropping program that would allow farmers to plant coffee alongside their coconut trees.

Annual demand: how huge really?

But how huge is the country's coffee demand really? Some industry players peg it at around 150,000 MT a year. But the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) says it is more than that.

The USDA estimates Philippine coffee consumption at almost seven million 60-kilogram bags of green coffee beans. That's about 417,000 MT or 417 million kgs, making the country the world's fifth largest drinker of coffee.

And that is a lot. But local production has been insufficient to meet total domestic requirement, whether it is based on industry estimates or the USDA's.

The country has turned to imports, particularly soluble coffee products

or locally known as 3-in-1, to meet its demand for the commodity.

No less than the DA's coffee industry roadmap identified the influx of imported coffee products as a threat to the domestic industry.

The roadmap published in 2022 and was crafted by industry stakeholders even identified certain brands that have become huge players in the market.

"An Indonesian brand has become a key player in the single serve coffee sachet (3-in-1) market in the Philippines with its Kopiko brand," it said.

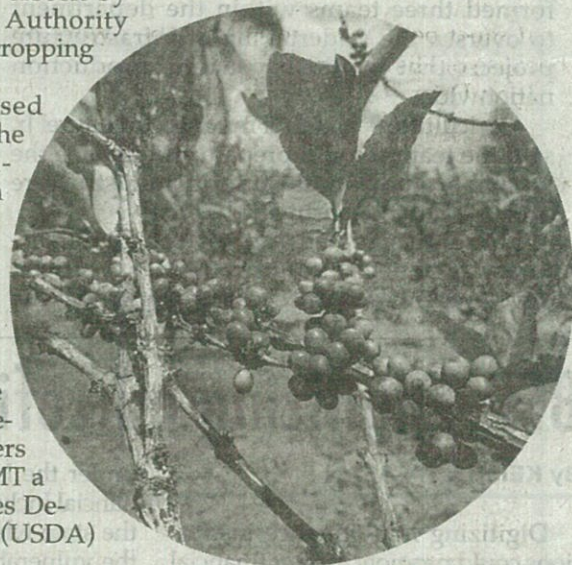
But since the imposition of the SSG, coffee imports have dwindled to a seven-year low last year at nearly 170,000 MT.

The USDA projected that the Philippines's coffee imports in market year 2023-2024 would reach 6.3 million 60-kilogram bags or some 378,000 MT, the fourth highest in the world.

Of that total import figure, about 5.5 million 60-kilogram bags or 330,000 MT would be soluble coffee.

The Philippines is the world's top importer of soluble coffee, based on USDA data.

Juan said instant coffee remains



Coffee berries

as the go-to choice for most customers since it is the most affordable, accessible and available in the market. But overall, it is the youth that is driving the demand for coffee in the country.

"Demand is coming from young Filipinos. It is still that sweet demographic profile of the country," she said, citing young workers in the business process outsourcing who seek caffeine to stay late at night.



DA forms working teams for infra projects

By **JASPER EMMANUEL ARCALAS**

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has formed three teams within the department to oversee the undertaking of infrastructure projects that would boost food production nationwide.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said the teams would prepare and finalize the feasibility studies of the priority infrastructure projects of the department.

Laurel designated Agriculture Undersecretary for special concerns and for official development assistance Jerome Oliveros as the

chairperson across all three project-preparation teams.

The teams would draft the framework and plans for the proposed post-harvest program for rice and corn, the solar-powered cold storages and proposed solar-powered irrigation systems.

Agriculture Undersecretary for operations Roger Navarro will co-chair the team that will prepare the feasibility study on the post-harvest program for rice and corn, while Undersecretary for high value crops Cheryl Marie Natividad-Caballero will be the co-chair of the team on the proposed solar-powered irrigation

system project.

Meanwhile, Agriculture Assistant Secretary and spokesperson Arnel de Mesa will be the vice chairman of the team that will prepare the solar-powered cold storage project.

"The teams will have to ensure the project documents are compliant with the requirements of the DA-wide project clearing house system and the National Economic and Development Authority-Investment Coordination Committee," Laurel said.

Laurel has instructed the solar-powered irrigation project team to ensure that the proposed sites are consistent with the database of the National Irrigation Administration and with Bureau of Soil and Water Management irrigation masterplan.

Earlier this year, Laurel estimated that the government needs to spend about P93 billion to build the necessary post-harvest facilities for rice and corn to minimize wastage.

Meanwhile, at least P1 billion is needed to build necessary cold storages for vegetables, Laurel added.



Leyte mayors create task forces vs bird flu

Amid the reported cases of avian influenza or bird flu in Kananga town in Leyte, the mayors of two other towns in the province have created task forces to implement measures to prevent the spread of the disease.

Mayor Ramon Oñate of Palompon and Mayor Bernardino Tacoy of Matag-ob issued executive orders (EOs) creating their respective municipal task forces to carry out preemptive measures.

Tacoy ordered the creation of Task Force Lipad to address bird flu-related concerns within his town.

The task force is tasked to develop and enforce guidelines for livestock management and biosecurity measures and oversee vaccination of poultry. It will also conduct public awareness on the disease, monitor the avian population with ready response mechanisms and implement disease control

measures in case bird flu hits Matag-ob.

Under Oñate's EO, the task force will enforce a ban on the entry of live domestic and wild birds as well as monitor and inspect poultry meat sold in public markets in Palompon.

Oñate said four other town mayors would meet to discuss measures to stop the spread of bird flu in their areas.

The Department of Agriculture (DA)-Eastern Visayas office said confirmatory test from the Bureau of Animal Industry's Animal Disease Diagnosis and Reference laboratory on a poultry farm in Kananga was positive for bird flu.

DA regional executive director Andrew Orais assured the public that the situation is "under control" after the affected breeder farm decided to cull 60,000 poultry heads.

— Miriam Desacada



Rabbit production stumbles on supply glut, weak demand

Rabbit production in the country declined by 15 percent last year, as raisers scaled down their output goals after a supply glut amid tepid demand from consumers.

Latest Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) data showed that rabbit output in 2023 fell to 155,030 kilograms, about 27,480 kgs lower than the 182,510 kgs production recorded in 2022.

Rabbit production in 2022 was more than double the 94,760 kilograms recorded in 2021, when the first production figure of the animal protein was recorded.

This is the first time in the country's history that the PSA released official statistics on the country's rabbit meat industry.

It could be recalled that production and consumption of rabbit meat gained spotlight at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic that coincided with the ravage of African swine fever (ASF) on local pig farms in 2021.

No less than the Department of Agriculture (DA) touted rabbit meat as a quality alternative to pork

after prices of the latter skyrocketed to unprecedented levels due to the decimated pig population nationwide caused by the ASF outbreak.

The PSA defines rabbit as "a domesticated rodent of the genus *Oryctolagus Cuniculus*" with "four legs, about the size of a large cat, medium or long ears."

The DA is willing to put where its mouth is: boost rabbit meat production as an alternative protein source.

"We will allocate funds for rabbit meat production. We are just fixing it," Agriculture Undersecretary for Livestock Deogracias Victor Savellano told **The STAR**.

Expand rabbit meat production

Savellano disclosed that his office is preparing an inventory of other animal protein sources being produced locally, including rabbits and red ants. These alternatives, Savellano emphasized, are high in protein and low in cholesterol.

However, Savellano is cognizant that consumers' acceptance of rabbit meat remains low since most Filipinos consider the animal as pet

and not as food. This, he pointed out, is one of the biggest hindrances toward boosting domestic rabbit meat production.

"We need to work on education. What we are thinking of is doing a cooking show that will showcase various dishes of rabbit meat and let the public taste them and know the difference for themselves," he said.

The decline in rabbit meat output could be attributed to lukewarm demand due Filipinos' hesitation and skepticism toward eating the animal protein, Savellano said.

He added that the price point of rabbit meat products was also a factor in the performance of the industry since supplies remain low.

"If we will be able to expand rabbit meat production, then its price will go down just like chicken meat," he said.

The DA is also targeting to introduce high-quality breeders to improve local genetics and conduct more promotions to market rabbit meat as a viable animal protein alternative and industry, Savellano

said.

"I saw some breeds from France which grew as large as dogs. Rabbit raising is a good additional source of income for farmers besides they populate fast," he added.

Growing demand today

Art Veneracion, president of the Association of Rabbit Meat Producers Inc., has second thoughts about the data methodology done by the PSA in getting the estimated rabbit production of the country.

Veneracion emphasizes that the figures released by the PSA are "too huge." Nonetheless, he agrees that rabbit meat production declined last year.

He explained that the output fell last year due to an influx of rabbit breeders who eventually closed shop due to lack of demand from rabbit meat producers.

"It was overhyped and a lot of hog raisers who got hit by ASF ventured to rabbit raising with the thought that they can recoup their losses here," he told **The STAR**.

"But their focus was wrong. They

ventured into the breeders market and it turned out there's no market for the offspring of their breeder stocks," he added.

Veneracion pointed out that what the industry needs is a supply of rabbits for meat production and not breeder stocks.

One of the challenges we are facing right now is supply. Most of the rabbit raisers stopped because they were broke last year. So now, we are having a hard time buying rabbits for slaughter," he said.

Veneracion said there is a need to boost rabbit meat supply because Filipinos' acceptance and demand for the animal protein is slowly growing.

"Perhaps before only three out of 10 Filipinos would try and eat rabbit meat but now it is around six out of 10," he added.

The country, as of Jan. 1, has a rabbit inventory of about 209,054 heads, almost 19 percent over the 175,979 heads recorded in the same period of last year, based on PSA data. — **Jasper Emmanuel Arcalas**



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Leyte towns unite to protect poultry industry

TACLOBAN CITY: Four municipalities in Leyte have formed task units to oversee the entry of live domestic and wild poultry into their respective areas in order to safeguard the local poultry and game fowl industry.

This came up when the Department of Agriculture (DA) Region 8 (Eastern Visayas) discovered the first occurrence of avian influenza, or bird flu, in Kananga, Leyte.

Following the farm's unusual daily mortality rate earlier this month, around 60,000 chickens were culled.

Palompon Leyte Mayor Ramon Oñate has issued an executive

order prohibiting any entry of domestic and wild birds into the municipality and also advises cockfighting enthusiasts not to visit other cockpits outside Palompon.

"Live birds entering Palompon are barred, especially those coming from Kananga. However, dressed chickens are allowed because they have certificates from the National Meat Inspection Service," he said.

Matag-ob Mayor Bernardino Tacoy also signed an executive order establishing Task Force Lipad (Livestock, Immunization, Public Awareness, Avian Surveillance and Disease Control Measures), which

will be the principal operational unit for handling bird flu threats in the municipality.

Both Isabel Mayor Edgardo Cordeño and Merida Mayor Rolando Villasencio signed executive orders to preserve livelihoods, health and the economy in their respective towns.

The mayors requested that the DA, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of Agrarian Reform, Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Bureau of Animal Industry review the documentary requirements and facilities for

the agro-commercial poultry category of the poultry farm in Kananga, as well as the disposal of carcasses in accordance with environmental laws.

They also asked the Department of Health to educate local governments on H5N1 management protocols and other mitigation measures.

On March 25, the DA Region 8 declared that there is no avian influenza outbreak in the province of Leyte despite positive test findings from the Bureau of Animal Industry's Animal Disease Diagnosis and Reference Laboratory on two chickens.

MOISES CRUZ

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Editorial

Walang katapusan pag-import ng bigas

ITONG Marso, umabot na sa 886,963 metric tons ng bigas ang naangkat ng Pilipinas. Kalahati niyan ay galing sa Vietnam. Ang natitirang kalahati ay inangkat mula sa Thailand at Pakistan. Ang Pilipinas ay numero unong importer ng bigas sa mundo. Ikalawa ang Indonesia, pangatlo ang China at pang-apat ang European Union. Wala pa sa kalagitnaan ang 2024, pero mahigit 800,000 metric tons na ang naaangkat. Hindi ba nakakahiya ito na naturingang agricultural na bansa ang Pilipinas pero number one rice importer. Anong malkakatwiran sa nangyayaring ito?

Dati, ang Pilipinas ang number one rice exporter sa Asya pero nabaliktad ang pangyayari. May malaking problema na hindi tinutugunan ng mga kinauukulan. Tinalo pa ng Vietnam na dinurog ng digmaan noong dekada 60. Ngayon ang Vietnam ang nagsusuplay ng bigas sa Pilipinas. Mas malaki pa ang lupang sakahan ng Pilipinas kaysa Vietnam. Saan may problema at wala nang pangarap maparami ang ani at lagi nang nagdedepende sa bigas na imported.

Sinabi minsan ni President Ferdinand Marcos na hindi katanggap-tanggap ang pag-angkat ng bigas lalo't ang bansa ay isang agricultural na bansa. Sinabi niya ito noong 2022 nang maupong Presidente at nanungkulan ding Agriculture Secretary. Pinangako niya na magkakaroon ng pagbabago. Napabayaang niya ang sector ng agrikultura ng mga nakaraang pamunuan. Tutulungan ang mga magsasaka para dumami ang ani. Pati ang farm to market road ay nabanggit din niyang isasaayos. Pero magkakalahati na siya sa termino, wala pa ring pag-unlad sa agrikultura at patuloy pa ang pag-angkat ng bigas.

Ngayong nananalasa ang El Niño sa bansa, walang nakikitang pagkilos sa **National Irrigation Administration (NIA)**. Marami nang palayan ang hindi napakinabangan dahil natuyo na. Reklamo ng mga magsasaka, walang aksyon ang NIA sa kabila na may pondo para sa irigasyon. Wala raw naglalagay ng mga bomba para sa patubig gaya ng solar pump. Dahil sa kawalan ng tulong, natigang na ang mga palayan. Ang kanilang pinuhunan sa pagtatanim ay nawalang parang bula.

Habang patuloy sa pag-angkat ng bigas ang pamahalaan, patuloy naman ang mga kawatan sa pagbebenta ng NFA rice. Kamakailan lang, maraming opisyal ng NFA ang sinuspende ng Office of the Ombudsman dahil sa pagbebenta ng NFA rice sa murang halaga at hindi dumaan sa bidding. Ibinenta lamang umano sa mga pinaborang rice traders sa halagang P20 per kilo.

Nagdudulot ng pangamba at agam-agam na ang patuloy na pag-angkat ng bigas ay nagbibigay lamang ng pagkakataon sa mga tiwali na pagkaperahan ito. Kung tone-toneladang bigas ang aangkatin, marami ring pagkakakuwartahan ang mga gutom na buwaya. Hanggang kailan ang pag-angkat ng bigas?



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New facility to cut IRRI rice breeding process to 2 years

By **JASPER EMMANUEL ARCALAS**

Rice breeding at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) could be as fast as two years compared to conventional

breeding that takes a decade once its new facility operates, an official said.

Mary Jean Du, regional breeding lead for Southeast Asia at IRRI, said the rice breeding cycle at the Los Baños-based

research institution would be significantly slashed once its speed breed facility (SBF) becomes fully operational.

According to Du, the SBF would shorten the rice breeding cycle to two to four years compared to conventional breeding that takes around 10 to 12 years.

"Maybe next month (it will be operational already). It is an advantage for the Philippines since IRRI is here," Du told reporters.

The facility, located in a 587-square meter area, boasts a capacity of 120,000 plants and is equipped with advanced automated irrigation and control systems and interconnected chambers.

"The SBF will ensure improved reliability, precision, quality, environmental consistency, and water efficiency in the breeding process," IRRI said.

Some of the rice varieties in the pipeline at IRRI are drought-tolerant ones that can withstand the lack of water or irrigation for about two to three weeks. These varieties are also better compared to its predecessors in terms of withstanding water stresses such as drought, Du said.