

CLIPPINGS FOR TODAY MAY 15, 2024

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# DA calls on legislators to extend Rice Fund until 2030

BY [JEL SANTOS](#)

May 14, 2024 05:49 PM



Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) on Tuesday, May 14, urged lawmakers to extend the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) until 2030 as part of the government's goal of enhancing the livelihood of Filipino farmers.

According to the DA, RCEF is a key component of the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) currently under review for potential amendments.

In a statement, DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said the RCEF or Rice Fund, a dynamic economic strategy that has allowed the government to leverage significant tariff from imported rice to enhance farmers' productivity and incomes, would expire next year.

"[The Rice Fund] has provided a substantial revenue stream for the government to finance essential development projects aimed at improving the competitiveness of the rice sector in the Philippines," Laurel said.

The DA chief noted that over a million Filipino rice farmers have benefited from the Rice Fund since its implementation in 2019.

"The RTL has leveraged tariff revenues to fund critical initiatives that have brought transformative changes to our agricultural landscape. Notably, the provision of high-quality seeds and modern machinery through the RCEF has led to a remarkable increase in rice yields and a reduction in production costs," said Laurel.

He cited DA data indicating that from 2019 to 2023, palay production in the 57 RCEF provinces increased by approximately seven percent.

The agriculture department stated that the Rice Fund allocates P10 billion annually for the distribution of farm machinery and seeds, among other resources, adding that any excess tariff collections are distributed to farmers as financial assistance to mitigate the impact.

As such, the DA said it has also proposed changes to the RTL that would allow the National Food Authority (NFA) temporary powers to intervene in the rice market as needed to correct significant price disparities and perform price stabilization function in times of food security emergencies and periods of sudden price hikes and sustained high prices of rice, creation of an office that would coordinate various rice programs of the government, and strengthening regulatory functions specifically targeting anti-competitive practices such as rice hoarding and price manipulation to protect consumers and ensure market fairness.

“These strategic enhancements aim to bolster the resilience and sustainability of the Philippine rice industry, securing long-term food security and economic stability for the nation,” the agency stated.

Lawmakers warned

On May 9, the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) warned lawmakers that the proposal to subsidize the sale of NFA’s rice to the public is detrimental to the country’s rice farmers.

The proposed scheme could be costly and difficult to manage, the group stated:

Based on the studies conducted by the FFF, the NFA rice subsidy of P10 per kilo will require P31 billion a year to service the 4.4 million poor households covered by the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps).

“If the beneficiaries will include low-income and middle-class households, as proposed by some congressmen, the annual cost would balloon to over P119 billion per year,” the group pointed out.

The aim to stabilize the rice prices is good, according to FFF national manager Raul Montemayor, but he said that “the cost of doing this might become prohibitive.”

Instead of distributing rice, the farmers’ group suggested issuing vouchers, which beneficiaries can use to purchase rice from accredited outlets.

NFA’s aggressive rice distribution, Montemayor said, could end up depressing palay prices for farmers.

Speaker Martin Romualdez stated that on April 30, the House of Representatives (HR) will pass a bill revising the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) to reinstate the NFA's right to buy and sell rice at a lower price, among other improvements.

Romualdez made the statement after the House Agriculture and food panel held its first hearing on proposed RTL amendments.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/14/da-calls-on-legislators-to-extend-rice-fund-until-2030>

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# Marcos declares July every year as Philippine Agriculturists' Month

BY [BETHEENA UNITE](#)

May 14, 2024 12:08 PM

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President Marcos has declared July of every year as Philippine Agriculturists' Month.



Marcos made the declaration through Proclamation No. 544 to honor the dedication of agriculturists and raise awareness on the significance of the agricultural sector.

"The celebration of the Philippine Agriculturists' Month will engage professional agriculturists in agricultural advocacy, policy research and formulation and provide an avenue for enterprise-building, communications training, and community development," Marcos said in the proclamation which was signed on May 10.

The proclamation also noted the contributions of agriculturists and highlighted their importance through a dedicated month that "will honor their hard work and dedication, and raise awareness about the significance of the agricultural sector in enhancing nationwide agricultural productivity and competitiveness."

Government agencies such as the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) and its Board of Agriculture were directed to lead, coordinate, and supervise the observance of the Philippine Agriculturists' Month and identify the programs, activities, and projects for the annual celebration.

The proclamation also stated that all agencies and instrumentalities of the national government including government-owned or -controlled corporations, government financial institutions, state universities and colleges as well as local government units and the private sector were told and encouraged to render the necessary support and assistance.

According to the two-page document cited the Manila School of Agriculture for paving the way for agriculture to formally become an educational course in the Philippines.

It was established in July 1989 to provide theoretical and practical education to skilled farmers and overseers, and promote agricultural development in the Philippines by means of observation, experiment and investigation towards deeper awareness and understanding of Philippine agriculture.

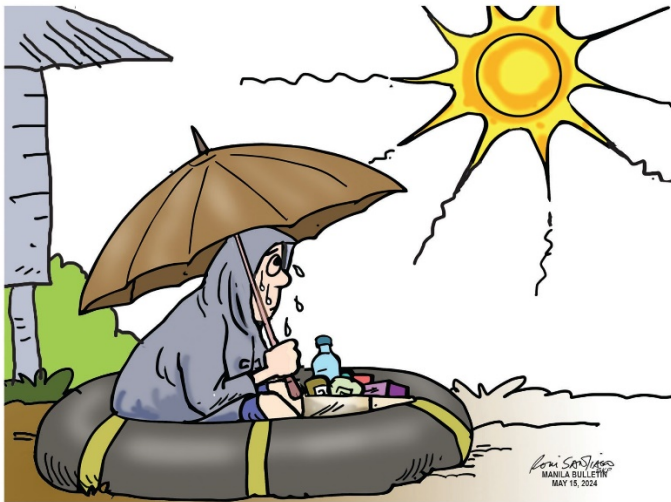
<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/14/marcos-declares-july-every-year-as-philippine-agriculturists-month>

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# Early preparations key to mitigating impact of looming La Niña

BY [MANILA BULLETIN](#)

May 15, 2024 00:11 AM



La Niña, the opposite of El Niño, is a climatic phenomenon characterized by unusually cooler sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific. While El Niño brings drought and heat, La Niña tends to trigger above-normal rainfall, potentially leading to flooding, landslides, and other weather-related hazards.

As the country braces for the impact of La Niña, early preparations are crucial to mitigate its effects on communities and infrastructure.

The current El Niño, deemed one of the five strongest on record that is causing drought in various regions of the country, is now at its tail end. After it, comes another climatic challenge. The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) has already warned of an “increasing probability” of La Niña developing in June-July-August 2024. And the Department of Agriculture has warned that La Niña would cause more massive damage to agriculture.

So, this shift from El Niño to La Niña requires swift action to prevent potential disasters. And the House of Representatives, recognizing the need for proactive measures, lost no time in starting preparations for the impending challenge by swiftly shifting its focus from El Niño to La Niña.

Yesterday, May 14, Speaker Martin Romualdez convened a high-level meeting to begin crafting a master plan on flood preparation and mitigation, specifically targeting Metro Manila and other flood-prone areas in the country. Present were key officials of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), Department of Environment and

**Natural Resources (DENR), Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), and the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA).**

**The House initiative aims to foster a unified strategy that goes beyond immediate flood response. It seeks to integrate infrastructure development, environmental management, and community-based approaches to create a comprehensive flood mitigation framework.**

**Zeroing in on these three key areas of concern is a welcome development as these are crucial in mitigating the impact of the looming climatic challenge.**

**In infrastructure development, it is necessary to ensure that existing infrastructure can withstand heavy rainfall and potential flooding. This includes maintaining drainage systems, upgrading flood control structures, and identifying vulnerable areas.**

**In environmental management, it is crucial to ensure the protection of natural ecosystems that play a role in flood prevention. Reforestation, watershed management, and soil conservation are essential to attain this.**

**In a community-based approach, engaging local communities in disaster risk reduction is vital. Educating residents about flood preparedness, evacuation plans, and early warning systems is crucial.**

**Other key areas of concern that need to be boosted are food security, sufficient water supply, energy availability, public health, public safety, mobility, and interconnectivity.**

**Ensuring that food supplies remain accessible during floods, maintaining water availability even during heavy rains, preventing disruptions to power supply, safeguarding communities from waterborne diseases and other health risks, and keeping transportation routes functional are crucial.**

**The crafting of this unified strategy ahead of the La Niña is anchored on the earlier directive of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.: “Do everything necessary to ensure that communities are safe from harm.”**

**We hail the step taken by the House of Representatives. Early preparations for La Niña are not just prudent; they are essential. By acting now, we can minimize the impact of heavy rains, protect lives, and build resilience in our communities. Let us heed the call to be prepared and work together to face this climatic challenge head-on.**

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/15/early-preparations-key-to-mitigating-impact-of-looming-la-nina>

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# House OKs Rice Tariffication Law amendments bill on 2nd reading; solons urge Senate action

BY [DEXTER BARRO II](#)

May 14, 2024 06:27 PM

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## AT A GLANCE

- The House of Representatives has approved on second reading a measure seeking to amend Republic Act (RA) No. 11203, or the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), in a bid to lower rice prices.



House of Representatives (Ellson Quismorio/ MANILA BULLETIN)

The House of Representatives has approved on second reading a measure seeking to amend Republic Act (RA) No. 11203, or the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), in a bid to lower rice prices.

During the plenary session on Tuesday, May 14, the lower chamber passed House Bill (HB) No. 10381 via a voice vote.

The proposed amendments to the 2019 law include the restoration of the National Food Authority's (NFA) old mandate in the country's rice supply chain.

Under the bill, the NFA will be allowed to buy local milled rice as needed to maintain a rice buffer stock. In emergency cases, it will even be allowed to directly import rice with authorization from the President.

"I commend the approval on second reading of the bill amending the five-year-old Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), marking a significant stride towards strengthening our rice industry and ensuring broader access to affordable, high-quality rice for all," House Speaker Martin Romualdez said.

"This amendment is crucial in enhancing the competitiveness and resilience of our rice sector, ensuring that it can withstand challenges and continue to thrive," he said.

Romualdez further said that the bill wasn't "just a policy change; it is a powerful pledge to every Filipino". "We are committed to ensuring that rice—our staple food—remains affordable and accessible to all. By refining the RTL, we address its shortcomings and provide our farmers with the support they need to thrive in an increasingly competitive market," he said.

The RTL originally banned the NFA from buying and selling rice to bring down rice prices due to increased supply. But since the RTL's enactment, rice prices continued to increase.

Corruption worries surrounding the NFA is a primary concern for some members of the Senate, as they remain hesitant in supporting the proposed amendments.

Senator Cynthia Villar, in particular, raised concerns about corruption and the agency's inability to protect the welfare of rice farmers and consumers. Villar heads the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Food.

During Tuesday morning's regular press conference, lawmakers from the House of Representatives implored their colleagues in the Senate to expedite the passage of the proposed amendments in the upper chamber.

"I appeal to our friends in the Senate to please, please, please expedite the passage of this measure, of this very urgent and important measure," Nueva Ecija 1st district Rep. Mikaela Angela Suansing said.

"Because at the end of the day our primary objective is two-fold: one is mabigyan po natin ng access iyong mga pinakamahihirap na mga pamilyang Pilipino sa mas murang bigas; at pangalawa po ay matulungan natin iyong ating mga magsasaka na mapababa iyong cost of production nila," she continued.

(One, we can give the poorest Filipino families access to cheaper rice; and second, we can help our farmers to lower their cost of production.)

Bataan 1st district Rep. Geraldine Roman expressed confidence that Villar will find "in her heart" the value of the proposed RTL amendments as a "very, very good legacy for our farmers".

The solons said senators should follow the House's intent to put forward the needs of farmers.

"Let's walk the talk. Nakakasawa na kasi, di ba? Lagi na lang sinasabi the proverbial, ah itong ating magsasaka sila ang naglalagay ng pagkain sa hapag-kainan ng ating mga pamilyang Pilipino, mahalaga sila, but show the love," added Roman.

(It's tiring, isn't it? They always say the proverbial thing, that these farmers are the ones who put food on the dining table of our Filipino families, they are important, but show the love.)

The House is set to approve HB No. 10381 on third reading next week, before the second regular session of the 19th Congress adjourns sine die adjournment.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/14/house-o-ks-rice-tariffication-law-amendments-bill-on-2nd-reading-solons-urge-senate-action>



**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# One for all, all for farming: food security through urban gardens

This way, Filipinos are also guaranteed a steady local food supply.

BY [MB LIFESTYLE](#)

May 14, 2024 05:46 PM



Senators Cynthia Villar and Sen. Mark Villar with Barangay Captains Siony Aguilar of CAA and Josie Bumanlag of Talon 5 look at the Cookfest entries on May 2, in Las Piñas.

*“Ang urban gardening ay napakahalaga sa akin. Ito ay para palakasin ang food security dahil abot kamay ang masustansyang gulay dahil ito ay nasa tabing bahay lamang* (Urban gardening is very important to me. This strengthens our food security because nutritious vegetables are within reach right from our households),” began Sen. Cynthia A. Villar (CAV), chair of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Food, at the 9th Las Piñas Urban Gardening and Cooking Festival Inter-Barangay Competition held on May 2.

The senator, whose father was a long-time mayor of the same city, is also chair of the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources.

Through this competition that brought together thirteen barangays, 26 schools, and 22 homeowners’ associations (bringing participants to a total of 61), Sen. Cynthia A. Villar brought together her passion for agriculture and food, and environment and natural resources. It was the perfect way to bring together the best of both worlds.

And, of course, the unbeatable taste of Filipino cooking. This is why the event is also a CookFest, showcasing the participants' natural knack for cooking delicious food through local ingredients immediately available: meat, vegetables, fruits, and fish.

A reminder to eat our veggies

*“Ang pagkain ng gulay ay pagbibigay pansin din sa kalagayang pang-nutrisyon ng ating mga ka-pamilya at ka-barangay (Eating vegetables gives attention to the nutritional condition of families and barangays),”* continued CAV. *“Dahil ito ay may fiber, ito ay nakakatulong na matanggal at malinis ang ating intestinal tract, mapalago ng mga mabubuting bacteria sa ating katawan, mapabuti ng ating blood sugar level, lower blood pressure, at iba pa. (Since it has fiber, it helps clean the intestinal tract, encourages the growth of good bacteria, regulates blood sugar level, and lowers blood pressure, among others.)”*

CAV walks her talk: she has been eating more mindfully and making healthier eating choices since the pandemic. She is also a mother and grandmother, and this competition is an extension of her nurture and care to the city which she considers her home, and its residents her family.

Her legacy is after all farming, food security, and nutrition.

She continued by pointing out how vegetables lower the risk of heart disease, prevent cancer, and reduce the chances for a person to develop diabetes.

Support for food producers

Spend a day with CAV at her farm and you’ll see how her upbringing at the farm naturally comes out. This is why the competition was also her way of extending support and appreciation to food producers and reminding Las Piñas residents to do the same.

Without farmers and fishermen, what ingredients will we cook every day?

*“Ang pagsuporta sa local food producers o sa ating mga magsasaka at mangigisda ay diretsong tulong sa pamamagitan ng pagbibigay ng steady buyers ng kanilang mga tanim (Having steady buyers for their produce is extending direct support to local food producers or farmers and fisherfolk),”* said CAV. Through her years of public service, she has worked hard for the welfare of the farmers, speaking up when necessary.

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(It is worth noting that, on May 6, CAV issued a statement on the Rice Tariffication Law and National Food Authority issues plaguing the country. Her simple appeal: “We should urgently pass the Anti Agricultural Economic Sabotage Law to control the middlemen and traders from causing hardship to the farmers and the consumers.”)

Through consistent support to local food producers, they are encouraged and empowered to remain in agriculture and fisheries. This way, Filipinos are also guaranteed a steady local food supply. It’s simply Filipinos helping one another to survive and thrive.

The winner does not stand alone

Winners of the cooking competition received the following prizes:

Grand winner	-	P20,000.00	in	cash	and	a	trophy
1st runner-up	-	P15,000.00	in	cash	and	a	trophy
2nd runner-up	- P10,000.00 in cash and trophy						

For the urban gardening competition, the winners brought home:

P30,000.00	for	the	champion
P15,000.00	for	the	1st runner-up
P10,000.00	for	the	2nd runner-up

Here are the winners —



For urban gardening, Barangay Category: Talon 4, Champion; BF International CAA, 1st runner-up; Talon 2, 2nd runner-up



For Homeowners Association Category: Castillan Village, Talon 2, Champion; Marulas Tenants Livelihood Association, Inc., Manuyo 2, 1st runner-up; Almirante Neighborhood Association, Talon 2, 2nd runner-up.



For	School	Category:
	Las Piñas North National High School, Pulang Lupa 2	(reigning champion), Champion;
	Captain Albert Aguilar National High School, Barangay BF International	CAA, 1st runner-up;
	Las Piñas National High School, Barangay Daniel Fajardo;	2nd runner-up.
For Cookfest:	Barangay Talon Singko,	Champion; Barangay BF International/
	CAA, 1st runner-up; Barangay Talon Kwatro,	2nd runner-up.

CAV lauded Manuyo 2 for being inclusive in their urban gardening campaign. They involved women, persons with disabilities, solo parents, and even senior citizens. “Talagang nakakatuwa (It's delightful),” she said.

To end the competition, CAV went back to her motherly nurturing mode and gave a poignant reminder: “*Tayo ay dapat magtanim ng gulay at kumain into.* (We should all plant vegetables and eat them.)”

The Villar Foundation Farm School in Las Piñas - Bacoor will hold an Agricrops Production Training on May 21 to 24, in partnership with East West Seeds Foundation. Visit her Facebook page for the final schedule and other announcements, or [agridevt.ph](http://agridevt.ph). Tarpaulin announcements will also be posted throughout the city.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/14/one-for-all-all-for-farming-food-security-through-urban-gardens>

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# **IP associations in Bukidnon receive P500,000 livelihood aid from Hedcor**

BY [MANILA BULLETIN](#)

May 14, 2024 12:20 PM

Five indigenous peoples (IP) associations in the municipalities of Impasugong and Manolo Fortich in Bukidnon were given P500,000 worth of livelihood projects from Hedcor, a renewable energy subsidiary of Aboitiz Power Corp., and Aboitiz Foundation Inc.



THE Santiago Tribal Community Santrico Inc. and the Guilang-Guilang Apo Datu Nanikunan Association Inc. were among the recipients of livelihood assistance from Hedcor.

The aid included agriculture supplies and inputs, equipment and feeds for free-range chicken farming, and seedlings and planting materials for Abaca production.

Hedcor President and Chief Operating Officer Rolando G. Pacquiao said that the donation is meant to strengthen the capabilities of the IPs.

Datu Santos Bayaon, tribal leader of Santiago Tribal Community Santrico Inc., thanked Hedcor and emphasized how farming is their main source of livelihood.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/14/ip-associations-in-bukidnon-receive-p500-000-livelihood-aid-from-hedcor>

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# Ombudsman lifts preventive suspension vs 72 NFA warehouse supervisors

BY [CZARINA NICOLE ONG KI](#)

May 14, 2024 11:24 AM

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The Office of the Ombudsman (OMB) has lifted the preventive suspension order earlier issued against 72 National Food Authority (NFA) warehouse supervisors who were reportedly involved in the low-priced sale of rice buffer stocks without the conduct of public bidding and prior approval by the NFA council.

The OMB did not identify the personnel whose suspensions were lifted. However, it said that they are warehouse supervisors in the National Capital Region (NCR), Iloilo, Antique, and Cabanatuan City.

Last March 1, the OMB issued six-month preventive suspension against 139 officials and employees of the NFA, including Administrator Roderico Bioco and Assistant Administrator for Operations John Robert Hermano. The 72 warehouse supervisors were among those preventively suspended.

The OMB said the main purpose of the preventive suspension is to prevent any prejudice which may be caused by their continued stay in office while state prosecutors conduct an investigation. However, the OMB said: "A closer evaluation of the case record, subsequent/additional compliances made to and pleadings submitted to office reveal that the documents/evidence pertaining to this case, which all of the afore-named warehouse supervisors from Region III, Region IV-A, MIMAROPA, Region V, Region VI, Region VII, Region IX, Region X, Region XII, Region XIII, and BARMM have control and custody, were already obtained by this office."

"Moreover, there is insufficient ground to believe that their continued stay in office may prejudice the investigation of the case filed against them. Thus, the continued preventive suspension of the afore-named warehouse supervisors is no longer necessary," it said.

The 23-page order that lifted the suspension of the warehouse supervisors was signed last May 13 by Special Prosecutor and Officer-in-Charge Edilberto G. Sandoval.

Earlier, Ombudsman Samuel R. Martires had lifted the preventive suspension issued against 23 NFA personnel after admitting that they dealt with faulty data.

Martires said during an interview with Dobol B TV that they were given a list filled with mistakes, and he suggested someone might have tried to fool their office.

When they asked the NFA about the list given to them, the NFA explained that they thought they were being asked about the members of the task force for El Niño. Martires wondered why, if the list was indeed for the task force for El Niño, did the NFA provide names of personnel who have already passed away.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/14/ombudsman-lifts-preventive-suspension-vs-72-nfa-warehouse-supervisors>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Marcos declares July as month for Filipino agriculturists

Philstar.com

May 14, 2024 | 11:33am



President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. and Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

Presidential Communications Office

**MANILA, Philippines** — President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has designated July of each year as Philippine Agriculturists' Month to recognize the contributions of agriculturists and highlight the importance of the agriculture sector.

“The celebration of the Philippine Agriculturists' Month will engage professional agriculturists in agricultural advocacy, policy research and formulation and provide an avenue for enterprise-building, communications training, and community development,” read Proclamation 544 signed by Marcos on May 10.

Marcos, who also served as the agriculture chief before handing the position to fishing tycoon Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., stressed that agriculture plays a “significant role in ensuring food security, as well as fostering environmental protection and balanced urban and rural development.”

The proclamation tasked the Department of Agriculture, and the Professional Regulation Commission and its Board of Agriculture to lead, coordinate, and supervise the observance of Philippine Agriculturists' Month.

The declaration comes in the wake of the El Niño phenomenon, which has caused around P6.3 billion worth of damage to the country's agricultural sector and affected 60,000 hectares of farmlands. — Gaea Katreena Cabico

[https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/14/2355035/marcos-declares-july-month-filipino-agriculturists#goog\\_rewarded](https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/14/2355035/marcos-declares-july-month-filipino-agriculturists#goog_rewarded)



**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Senators buck revival of NFA import power

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

May 15, 2024 | 12:00am



Photos show workers unloading sacks of rice from a truck along Dagupan St. in Manila on February 7, 2024.

STAR / Ernie Penaredondo

**MANILA, Philippines** — Several senators are opposing the proposal of the Department of Agriculture to restore the power of the National Food Authority (NFA) to import rice.

During yesterday's review of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) by the congressional oversight committee on agricultural and fisheries modernization, Senators Cynthia Villar and Imee Marcos said they would not support the call of the Department of Agriculture (DA) to allow the NFA to import rice again.

Villar, who chairs the Senate committee on agriculture, said President Marcos must have the special power to import rice during emergency situations and not the NFA.

As chairperson of the Senate committee on agriculture for the past 11 years, Villar said she has not seen the NFA's concern for rice farmers.

“I don’t want to give (special power to import rice during emergency situations) to the NFA. If they want, just give special power to the President,” Villar said.

Villar lamented that the NFA has not shown itself to be taking care of the welfare of rice farmers and consumers.

She reiterated her call for the passage of the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Law to prevent the middlemen and traders from causing hardship to farmers and consumers.

Marcos, meanwhile, has thumbed down the intention of the DA to restore certain powers of the NFA, such as the temporary authority to import rice during exigencies and the registration of warehouses.

She said the DA and the Department of Trade and Industry could be authorized to import rice.

As part of its mandate, the DA is tasked to handle the monitoring of warehouses.

“It is clear that warehousing is part and parcel of the support services that are alluded to. I think that it is part of your wide-ranging law-making power. It is up to you to take up the cudgels for all who attempt to cartelize and otherwise limit the use of warehouses,” Marcos said.

The two senators pointed out that the NFA leased warehouses to cartels instead of to farmers during the onion crisis in the country and sold rice to traders, which is prohibited under the Rice Tariffication Law.

Villar asked Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. to investigate the allegations that the DA imported hybrid rice seedlings that were rejected by other countries.

She said there were reports that other countries reject the hybrid rice seedlings because they don’t want to grow these varieties.

According to Villar, the imported hybrid rice seedlings are expensive at P250 per kilo, while local hybrid rice seedlings are only priced at P30 per kilo.

[https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/05/15/2355105/senators-buck-revival-nfa-import-power#goog\\_rewarded](https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/05/15/2355105/senators-buck-revival-nfa-import-power#goog_rewarded)

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# DA contests CA ruling on golden rice, Bt eggplant

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

May 15, 2024 | 12:00am



Agriculture Undersecretary Asis Perez said the DA has filed a motion for reconsideration before the appellate court against its ruling to stop the planting of the two genetically modified crops.

Businessworld / File

**MANILA, Philippines** — The Department of Agriculture (DA) has sought the reconsideration of the Court of Appeals (CA)'s decision against the commercial propagation of Bt eggplant and golden rice, an official said.

Agriculture Undersecretary Asis Perez said the DA has filed a motion for reconsideration before the appellate court against its ruling to stop the planting of the two genetically modified crops.

Furthermore, Perez said the DA intends to bring the petition up to the Supreme Court if its motion would be denied by the CA.

At the same time, Perez said the DA is heeding one of the rulings made by the CA that urged the government to improve its regulatory system concerning genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

“The court finds that the regulation is not sufficient to ensure the safety of the public. What we are doing now is to amend the regulation – just to make sure the regulation is robust enough,” Perez told the congressional oversight committee on agricultural and fisheries modernization yesterday.

During the committee’s hearing, Sen. Imee Marcos sought the DA’s comment and position regarding the CA ruling last month against Bt eggplant and golden rice.

Marcos said the CA decision is a setback that would greatly affect the country’s agriculture sector, particularly its goal of improving food production.

Earlier this month, The STAR reported that the DA has stopped the importation of Bt eggplant and golden rice in compliance with the CA decision.

However, the DA clarified that importation of other regulated GMOs must continue since they are not covered by the appellate court ruling.

## Agriculturists’ month

Meanwhile, to recognize the significant contribution of the country’s agriculturists to food security, President Marcos has declared July of every year as Philippine Agriculturists’ Month.

In issuing Proclamation 544, Marcos also underscored the important role of the agriculture sector in ensuring food security, as well as fostering environmental protection and balanced urban and rural development.

“Recognizing the contributions of agriculturists and highlighting their importance through a dedicated month will honor their hard work and dedication, and raise awareness about the significance of the agricultural sector in enhancing nationwide agricultural productivity and competitiveness,” the President said.

Marcos directed the DA and the Professional Regulation Commission and its Board of Agriculture to lead, coordinate and supervise the observance of Philippine Agriculturists’ Month and identify the programs, activities and projects for its annual celebration.

All agencies and instrumentalities of the national government, including government-owned or -controlled corporations, government financial institutions and state universities and colleges are directed, and all local government units and the private sector are encouraged, to render the necessary support and assistance for the effective implementation of Proclamation 544.

“The celebration of Philippine Agriculturists’ Month will engage professional agriculturists in agricultural advocacy, policy research and formulation and provide

an avenue for enterprise-building, communications training and community development,” it said.

Proclamation 544 was signed by Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin on May 10. —  
**Helen Flores**

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/15/2355160/da-contests-ca-ruling-golden-rice-bt-eggplant>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Ombudsman lifts suspension of 72 NFA officials

[Elizabeth Marcelo](#) - The Philippine Star

May 15, 2024 | 12:00am



National Food Authority rice stocks.

File photo courtesy of NFA

MANILA, Philippines — The Office of the Ombudsman has lifted the six-month preventive suspension it imposed on 72 of 139 officials of the National Food Authority (NFA) in connection with the allegedly anomalous sale of the government’s rice buffer stock to favored private traders.

In a 23-page order dated May 10, the ombudsman said the primary purpose of a preventive suspension is to preserve documents and pieces of evidence, which may be under the control or custody of the respondents.

Since it has obtained these documents or pieces of evidence from concerned NFA officials, the ombudsman said the continued preventive suspension of respondents “is no longer necessary.”

“They are ordered reinstated effective April 15,” the ombudsman’s order read. Although it was not stated in the order, the reinstatement date also pertained to the date of restitution of the salaries and allowances of suspended NFA officials.

The order was approved on May 13 by Special Prosecutor Edilberto Sandoval on behalf of Ombudsman Samuel Martires.

The office of Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. was directed to implement the reinstatement order. Ordered reinstated were warehouse supervisors in Central Luzon with 16; Soccsksargen, 14; Northern Mindanao, nine; Central Visayas, eight; Bicol, six; Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and Zamboanga peninsula with four each; Calabarzon, Caraga and Western Visayas with three each and Mimaropa, two.

On March 1, the ombudsman imposed a six-month preventive suspension on NFA administrator Roderico Bioco, assistant administrator for operations John Robert Hermano and 137 other officials and employees who are facing administrative charges of grave misconduct, gross neglect of duty and conduct prejudicial to the best interest of the service.

A week after, a similar order was imposed on newly appointed NFA officer-in-charge Piolito Santos and acting department manager for operation and coordination Jonathan Yazon, who were added as respondents in the administrative charges.

The ombudsman earlier lifted the suspension order against 23 warehouse supervisors after obtaining documents from them.

It clarified that all warehouse supervisors, whose preventive suspension has been lifted, are still included as respondents in the administrative case.

The charges stemmed from the allegedly anomalous sale of 75,000 bags of NFA rice, which was part of the government's buffer stocks, to private traders.

Republic Act 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law mandates the government to purchase from local farmers around 300,000 tons of rice as yearly buffer stock and for distribution in times of calamities and emergency situations.

In a letter of complaint submitted to the Office of the President in February, NFA assistant administrator for operations Lemuel Pagayunan said Bioco and the other NFA officials sold 75,000 bags of rice amounting to P93.75 million to G4 Rice Mill San Miguel Corp. and NBK San Pedro Rice Mill without the approval of the NFA Council.

During a recent hearing of the House committee on agriculture, it was revealed that the buffer stock was sold for only P25 per kilo even as the prevailing market price at the time was P70 per kilo.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/15/2355186/ombudsman-lifts-suspension-72-nfa-officials>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# British Chamber expects passage of anti-agricultural economic sabotage act

Philstar.com

May 14, 2024 | 10:39am



Authorities seized more than a thousand sacks of illegally imported white onions during an inter-agency operation by the PNP National Capital Region Police Office-Regional Special Operations Group (NCRPO-RSOG), Bureau of Customs and Bureau of Plant Industry at a stock room in Divisoria, Manila on December 3, 2022.

STAR / Miguel de Guzman

The British Chamber of Commerce Philippines looks forward to the passage of the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act to further assist on inflation and food supply—echoing the government’s prioritization of imposing stringent measures to protect the local farmers and consumers.

Upon Congress’ resumption of session last 29 April 2024, Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri outlined the 20 priority bills and expects its passage before the end of the second regular session of the 19th Congress in June.

One of which is the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, which is awaiting bicameral conference committee approval—with both versions from the Senate and the House of Representatives being unanimously approved last year.

“The passage of the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act remains a key priority. We know there have been some discussions that could be passed, hopefully before the Congress adjourns in June. We have some concerns in terms of the amendment of import entries that should be looked at but overall, the need is to pass this act,” BCCP Executive Director/Trustee Chris Nelson said in an interview.



Last February 2024, the British Chamber expressed its concern on the initial reported changes on the minimum access volume (MAV) for pork imports—noting how it could impact inflation, domestic supply, and existing trade agreements under the World Trade Organization (WTO). This also echoed the sentiments of the MAV Advisory Council (MAC), meat importers and economists.



With the inflation having quickened in April 2024 at 3.8%, having been influenced by food and non-alcoholic beverages, the British Chamber consistently calls on the full implementation of the Executive Order No. 50, mandating the extension of lowered tariff rates on agricultural commodities including pork.

“Inflation remains the key issue and that has been remarked upon by Secretary Recto. If we can get inflation lower, this would certainly help the GDP. In that context, we strongly advocate the full implementation of the Executive Order No. 50 on the lower tariffs, particularly for pork. We work very hard on that to get quality pork from the UK here. The [GDP] numbers at 5.7% is still a good growth rate. Obviously, along with everybody, we want to see it higher. I think it's tracking the right way. The key is getting that inflation number, particularly on food, down,” Nelson further noted.

The British Chamber acknowledges the significance of the agricultural sector in maintaining the UK-PH trade at a high level and the overall Philippine economic growth, emphasizing towards its efforts in managing inflation and ensuring food security in the country.

[https://www.philstar.com/business/biz-memos/2024/05/14/2355028/british-chamber-expects-passage-anti-agricultural-economic-sabotage-act#goog\\_rewarded](https://www.philstar.com/business/biz-memos/2024/05/14/2355028/british-chamber-expects-passage-anti-agricultural-economic-sabotage-act#goog_rewarded)

## Going in circles



[DEMAND AND SUPPLY](#) - [Boo Chanco](#) - The Philippine Star

May 15, 2024 | 12:00am

To progress, one must move forward. The problem with our government is its propensity to make decisions that merely goes around in endless circles. Take the school calendar. They decided to slowly move it to open in September over a number of years. Now that we are more or less there, they are moving it back to June.

Then, our government wants to amend the law that bans NFA from importing and selling rice. The objective is supposedly to bring prices down. NFA was doing that before and it didn't work. Why will it be different this time?

Sen. Cynthia Villar who chairs the agriculture committee doesn't like it either. Villar recalled how she and other senators tried buying rice from the NFA for calamity victims in Mindanao, and they were told the NFA has no stocks, only to find out the agency sold the rice stocks to traders at a loss to the taxpayers.

"I'm worried about giving the mandate back to the NFA. I've not seen its sincerity. It has not proven itself to be taking care of the welfare of the rice farmers and the consumers," Villar said.

The BBM administration is in panic over the very high price of rice in the market and its inability to do anything about it. It has become a hot political issue. Their knee jerk solution is to go back to a failed system.

To the credit of Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, he acknowledged that the solutions to our perennial rice problem are long term in nature and will take at least three years. But in the long term, BBM risks being deposed by Duterte, taking advantage of the masa's anger over the unaffordable cost of their staple food.

Tiu Laurel told congressmen during a hearing last week that there are a lot of factors at play to lower rice prices, with logistics being a critical component. He mentioned possible action points such as distributing more fertilizers to farmers, decreasing post-harvest losses and improving the country's ports.

“In essence, if we can get all of these in place, I think we can bring down prices of rice by at least 20 percent after three years,” said Tiu Laurel. “Mag-target pa tayong libreng tubig, lalo na sa solar irrigation, all of that, pwedeng maging 30 percent less. But of course, depende sa magkano ‘yung inputs at that time.”

Tiu Laurel claims that there had been no major investment in agriculture for the last 27 years. The agriculture secretary said they would need P1.2 trillion for irrigation, P93 billion for post-harvest facilities and P24 billion for ports.

Agriculture experts say the BBM plan to make NFA buy rice at a high price from farmers and then sell low to consumers is a sure formula for bankruptcy. During the heyday of its operation, NFA incurred a debt of around P190 billion. No one has said anything about how much tax money will be lost in this new subsidy scheme.

Dr. Fermin Adriano, a former DA usec, wrote that “NFA’s rice importation activities were attended by graft and corruption. It was an open secret before that import licenses could be obtained for a fee. Hefty commissions were gained by officials involved in the procurement of rice from international wholesalers. Commissions could also be earned when acting as an agent of companies handling their logistics, from shipping, stevedoring and hauling to trucking, bagging, warehousing and fumigation of their stocks.

“The RTL did away with all those nefarious activities. It consigned the function of NFA to building a ‘buffer stock’ that is intended to respond to emergency situations... The first three years of RTL implementation saw rice prices stabilize. Hardly did the rice price contribute to total food inflation.”

But the Ukraine-Russian conflict caused fuel and fertilizer prices to soar. The rice export ban of India also contributed to rising food inflation in the Philippines. RTL is not to blame.

Dr. Adriano doubts restoring NFA’s price stabilization function – by allowing it to import rice, engage in rice trading once more and closely regulate operations of rice warehouses and retail outlets – will do much. He noted that the old NFA did all these functions but was largely ineffective and generated a lot of rent-seeking activities.

“We treat our agriculture programs and activities as a social welfare program. Thus, the predominance of dole outs instead of focusing on implementing measures that will increase the total factor productivity of our agricultural sector.”

Former Senator Kiko Pangilinan, who handled the rice situation under PNoy, called for farmer empowerment instead.

“Unless rice farmers become credit worthy, organized to achieve economies of scale and provided with a slew of support services to include mechanization, crop insurance, farm inputs, timely disaster/calamity relief assistance, warehousing/logistics and infrastructure funding among others, our rice farmers’ productivity will remain low and supply of food in the market insufficient and expensive.

“In this scenario NFA importing and selling inexpensive rice will be a subsidy that is a sure-fire formula for drowning the agency in crippling debt. Worse, if left unchecked it will be an opportunity for massive corruption and technical smuggling for high-ranking government officials, the NFA and the rice importers in the private sector. The public funds used to purchase imported rice and sell them cheap is better channeled directly to the farmers in intervention programs meant to increase farmers productivity.”

Actually, the DA should have been doing all those but didn’t. Small as DA’s budget had been, DA has only managed to spend at most 75 percent of it. What little budget they spent, was lost in corruption. Remember the fertilizer scam during the watch of former President Macapagal Arroyo?

Going around in circles makes sense for our officials. It provides the illusion that something is being done, kahit wala naman. We, Filipinos, fall for it all the time. Stupidity – plain and simple.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/05/15/2355098/going-circles>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# DA chief says RTL amendments won't restore 'full power' of NFA

By: [Charie Abarca](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 05:16 PM May 14, 2024



Department of Agriculture (DA) chief Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. clarifies on Tuesday, May 14, 2024, that the proposed amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) do not necessarily seek to bring back the “full power” of the National Food Authority (NFA). INQUIRER.net stock images

MANILA, Philippines — Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. clarified Tuesday that the proposed amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) do not necessarily seek to bring back the “full power” of the National Food Authority (NFA).

Speaking at the Senate’s Congressional Oversight Committee on Agricultural and Fisheries Modernization, Laurel said RTL amendments merely allow NFA to sell rice at a lower price if necessary.

Senator Cynthia Villar immediately flagged the proposed move, citing instances of alleged corruption hounding the NFA.

Earlier, Villar emphasized that no one wants to discard RTL but she expressed apprehension about empowering the NFA again.

“The real intention is not to give full power back to the NFA, but use NFA only as a conduit to operationalize certain moments of intervention maybe once or twice a year.

But not through the authority of anybody in the NFA,” explained the Department of Agriculture (DA) chief. The NFA is an attached agency of the DA.

“I also do not like what you’ve flagged about NFA—even I am allergic to that. If possible, we don’t want to use this provision by the authority. It’s only as a last resort that we need to import, but on the authority of the secretary or two secretaries of the Cabinet kung kinakailangan (if needed),” Laurel added in mixed English and Filipino. Senator Imee Marcos, who was also present during the meeting, said she agrees with Laurel.

“Yan din ang nirecommend din namin na kung maaari [ay] may kumpuni ng Presidential Commission on Rice Sufficiency. Kasi walang wala nang tiwala ang sinumang mambabatas dito sa Senado at gayon din ang mga magsasaka,” she said.

(That’s what we also recommended that if possible there’s a Presidential Commission on Rice Sufficiency. Because lawmakers here in the Senate and farmers no longer trust the NFA.)

Marcos emphasized that the NFA shouldn’t intervene, saying she is certain that discrepancies will occur once the NFA enters the picture.

“Hindi naman kailangan na sa pang araw-araw na pagtatakbo [ay] ang Pangulo ang makikialam. Maaari naman ‘yung ating kagawaran mismo ang tututok dyan. ‘Wag lang NFA kasi naririnig pa lang namin eh nangangatog na ang tuhod namin,” she said.

(There is no need for the President to interfere in the day-to-day operation. Maybe our DA will focus on that. Not just the NFA because merely hearing about it makes our knees shake.)

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1940497/da-chief-says-rtl-amendments-wont-restore-full-power-of-nfa>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Marcos declares July as ‘Philippine Agriculturists’ Month’

By: [Jean Mangaluz](#) - Reporter / [@JMangaluzINQ](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 10:35 AM May 14, 2024



**FILE PHOTO: President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. INQUIRER FILES**

MANILA, Philippines — President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has declared July every year as “Philippine Agriculturists’ Month” to increase awareness about the country’s agriculture center.

Marcos issued the order through Proclamation No. 544, signed on May 10. However, a copy of the proclamation was only made public on Tuesday, May 14.

“I, Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., President of the Philippines, by virtue of the powers vested in me by the Constitution and existing laws, do hereby declare the month of July of every year as ‘Philippine Agriculturists’ Month’,” states Proclamation No. 544.

“The celebration of the Philippine Agriculturists’ Month will engage professional agriculturists in agricultural advocacy, policy research, and formulation and provide an avenue for enterprise-building, communications training, and community development,” it also states.

Under Proclamation No. 544, the Department of Agriculture and Professional Regulation Commission, including its Board of Agriculture, shall lead and supervise the annual observance of the Philippine Agriculturists’ Month.

Marcos’ declaration comes as the El Niño phenomenon wreaked havoc on the country’s agricultural sector, with more than P6 billion worth of damage affecting around 60,000 hectares of land.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1940337/marcos-declares-july-of-every-year-as-philippine-agriculturists-month>



**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# House OKs proposed rice tariff law amendments on 2nd reading

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

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 04:49 PM May 14, 2024



**(INQUIRER FILE PHOTO / EDWIN BACASMAS)**

MANILA, Philippines — A proposal seeking amendments to Republic Act No. 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) has been approved on second reading by the House of Representatives.

During the session on Tuesday, House Bill (HB) No. 10381, which seeks to reinstate some of the National Food Authority (NFA) functions — in a bid to lower rice prices — was approved via viva voce or voice voting.

Under the proposal, the NFA would be given the “authority to oversee and ensure compliance with all pertinent standards and regulations, leveraging its established expertise and nationwide network to uphold the national interest in rice buffer stocking and food security” by placing a new Section 5 in R.A. No. 8178.

R.A. 8178 is the Agricultural Tariffication Act, which was amended by the RTL.

If HB No. 10381 is enacted, the agriculture secretary can likewise, upon the recommendation of the National Price Coordinating Council (NPCC) or Local Price Coordinating Council (LPCC), declare a food security emergency due to the following reasons:

- shortage in the supply of rice
- sustained increase in the price of rice
- extraordinary increase in the price of rice

During a food security emergency, the NFA could intervene and sell rice directly by purchasing grains from local farmers, with importation as a last resort.

The House leadership, including Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez, believes that the following amendments [can lower rice prices by P10 to P15 per kilogram.](#)

The bill, however, is facing opposition in the Senate amid fears by senators that giving back some of NFA's mandates might lead to corruption anew.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1940488/fwd-breaking-proposed-rice-tariff-law-amendments-okd-in-2nd-reading>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# 72 suspended NFA officers reinstated

By: [Kathleen de Villa](#) - Reporter / [@kdevillaINQ](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 04:50 AM May 15, 2024



**Inquirer photo/Grig C. Montegrando**

MANILA, Philippines — Another batch of suspended National Food Authority (NFA) officers assigned to various regional warehouses has been ordered reinstated by the Office of the Ombudsman after it found “insufficient ground to believe their continued stay in office may prejudice the investigation of the cases filed against them.”

In a May 10 order released only on Tuesday, Ombudsman Samuel Martires directed the lifting of the six-month suspension slapped against 72 NFA warehouse supervisors in March over their possible role in the questionable sale of rice buffer stocks to private traders in 2023.

**The** Ombudsman order also noted that state prosecutors had already secured the documents and pieces of evidence needed in the ongoing investigation of the allegedly irregular sale of aging milled rice to “preselected” traders without the NFA Council’s approval and with no public bidding.

“Thus, the continued preventive suspension of the ... warehouse supervisors is no longer necessary,” Martires said in his order which he directed Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. to comply with.

Reacting to the order, Tiu Laurel welcomed the lifting of the suspension, saying in a statement he had instructed the NFA to immediately implement it.

He added that this would allow the NFA to open still-padlocked warehouses and help in the procurement of additional palay supply. He also reported that results of the Department of Agriculture’s own investigation into the rice sale should be completed soon, and its results would be shared with the Ombudsman.

The suspended supervisors were assigned to NFA warehouses in the regions of Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol, Western Visayas, Central Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Northern Mindanao, Soccsksargen, Caraga, and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.



Ombudsman Samuel Martires and Agriculture Sec. Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

They were in addition to the 24 warehouse managers who were also ordered reinstated in mid-March, Martires told the Inquirer.

## 45 still serving penalty

This meant that only 45 of the total number of 141 suspended NFA warehouse managers have yet to be reinstated.

Still suspended are NFA Administrator Roderico Bioco, officer in charge Piolito Santos and acting department manager for operation and coordination Jonathan Yazon.

They were charged with grave misconduct, gross neglect of duty and conduct prejudicial to the best interest of the service over the sale of supposedly deteriorating rice stocks totaling P93.75 million for only P25 per kilo.

The investigation was based on the letter-complaint dated Feb. 12, 2024, which was filed by NFA Assistant Administrator for Operations Lemuel Pagayunan in the Office of the President.

On March 14, a total of 108 NFA employees, mostly warehouse staff and some branch and regional managers, asked the Office of the Ombudsman to rethink their suspension, arguing that they were merely assigned with “ministerial duty” and did not wield discretionary powers in the agency.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1940647/72-suspended-nfa-officers-reinstated>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Romualdez: Rice tariff law amendments to keep rice affordable, accessible

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

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 08:20 PM May 14, 2024



(INQUIRER FILE PHOTO / GRIG C. MONTEGRANDE)

MANILA, Philippines — House of Representatives Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez believes the proposed amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) is a pledge to Filipinos, that the government will do everything possible to make food accessible.

In a statement on Tuesday, shortly after House Bill (HB) No. 10381 was approved on second reading, Romualdez said the proposed changes to the RTL will ensure competitiveness in the rice sector.

HB No. 10381 seeks to amend Republic Act No. 11203 or the RTL, by reinstating some of the National Food Authority (NFA) functions, which lawmakers believe would make the market more competitive as the NFA can monitor warehouses and in a way, regulate rice prices.

“This amendment is crucial in enhancing the competitiveness and resilience of our rice sector, ensuring that it can withstand challenges and continue to thrive,” Romualdez said.

“This bill is not just a policy change; it is a powerful pledge to every Filipino. We are committed to ensuring that rice — our staple food — remains affordable and accessible to all. By refining the RTL, we address its shortcomings and provide our farmers with the support they need to thrive in an increasingly competitive market,” he added.

Earlier, during the plenary session, HB No. 10381 was approved via viva voce or voice voting.

Under the proposal, a new Section 5 in R.A. No. 8178 would be place which would give NFA the “authority to oversee and ensure compliance with all pertinent standards and regulations, leveraging its established expertise and nationwide network to uphold the national interest, in rice buffer stocking and food security”,

R.A. 8178 is the Agricultural Tariffication Act, which was amended by the RTL in 2019.

If the bill is signed into law, the Agriculture Secretary can, upon the recommendation of the National Price Coordinating Council (NPCC) or Local Price Coordinating Council (LPCC), declare a food security emergency due to the following reasons:

- shortage in the supply of rice
- sustained increase in the price of rice
- extraordinary increase in the price of rice

When a food security emergency is declared, the NFA would be allowed to buy from local farmers — or import, as a last resort — and eventually directly sell cheap rice to the public. Romualdez believes the amendments [can bring down rice prices by P10 to P15 per kilogram](#) by June, if enacted.

“I commend the approval on second reading of the bill amending the five-year-old Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), marking a significant stride towards strengthening our rice industry and ensuring broader access to affordable, high-quality rice for all,” Romualdez said.

While the mood at the House regarding the proposed amendments was optimistic, some senators fear that giving back some of NFA’s mandates might lead to corruption again.

Senators Cynthia Villar and Sonny Angara in previous statements have raised concerns about allowing the NFA to directly import and sell rice again.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1940571/romualdez-on-proposed-rice-tariff-law-changes-a-promise-to-keep-food-accessible>

## BUSINESS WORLD:

# House OK's rice tariffication law

## amendments on 2<sup>nd</sup> reading

May 15, 2024 | 12:34 am



The House of Representatives on Tuesday approved on second reading a bill amending the Rice Tariffication Law, in an effort to address spiraling prices of rice. — PHILIPPINE STAR/RYAN BALDEMOR

By Kenneth Christiane L. Basilio

THE HOUSE of Representatives on Tuesday approved on second reading a bill that seeks to allow the National Food Authority (NFA) to sell rice at subsidized prices during emergencies including shortages.

Philippine congressmen through a voice vote agreed to expand the agency's regulatory functions over the rice industry through House Bill No. 10381 amid spiraling prices of the staple.

The bill seeks to amend the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), which gave private traders full control over rice imports in 2019.

The measure also extends the validity period for the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) for six more years and increases its budget to P15 billion from P10 billion, congressmen said during plenary debates.



“The House’s expeditious action on the Rice Tariffication Law amendments comes from... the current rice price crisis,” Albay Rep. Jose Maria Clemente S. Salceda told *BusinessWorld* in a Viber message. “It has exposed the shortcomings of the global rice trade and why domestic support remains crucial.”

The House of Representatives is expediting its deliberations on the rice law to address the expensive costs of rice in markets by allowing the NFA to restore its price stabilization and supply regulation functions.

Retail prices of staple grain range between P50 and P65 per kilo, according to latest Philippine Statistics Authority data.

House Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez said amending the Rice Tariffication Law would reduce rice prices to less than P30 a kilo.

“By amending the RTL, we aim to bring about tangible reductions in rice prices,” Mr. Romualdez said in a statement. “Lowering rice prices to less than P30 is a crucial step towards ensuring food security and economic stability.”

Under the bill, the NFA would be allowed to intervene in the market under the direction of the National Price Coordinating Council — comprised of state economic managers — during food security emergencies caused by rice shortages and sustained increases in the price of the staple grain.

“An empowered NFA really would have a role to play in ensuring food and especially rice security,” IBON Foundation Executive Director Jose Enrique A. Africa told *BusinessWorld* in a Viber message before the bill’s approval.

He said addressing rice inflation requires the government to look beyond reinstating NFA’s regulatory functions.

In April, rice inflation surged by 23.9%, but easing from the 24.4% a month prior as world rice prices declined.

Mr. Africa said the Philippines should reduce its dependence on imported rice given the peso’s weakness.

“The import content of palay is over 30%, and a large part of rice inflation is through this channel,” Mr. Africa said. “Reducing the import content of food and the vulnerability of food prices to foreign exchange movements goes far beyond the NFA.”

Developing the industrial capability of the agriculture sector is needed to strengthen the domestic production of rice, he added.

Amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law would also modify how RCEF is allocated. Around 53.5% of the fund would go to farm mechanization projects, up from the current 50%. This increase would help in modernizing the country’s rice sector, according to proponents of the measure.

The allocation for the propagation and distribution of rice seeds under the bill was reduced to 29.7% from the current 30%, while rice seed allocation was trimmed to 29.7% from 30% currently.

Farm credit assistance for farmers has been cut to 6% from 10% while extension services for agricultural training was reduced to 3.3% from 10% of the rice fund.

During the bill's period of amendments, Albay Rep. Edcel C. Lagman, Sr. moved for the deletion of a provision allowing the NFA to regulate foreign investment in the rice and corn industry, which the House adopted.

"This deletion will also send the message that as much as practicable, the rice and corn industry must remain with Filipino farmers and entrepreneurs to protect the production and sale of the Philippines' staple grain and cereal from foreign influence," Mr. Lagman said.

Action for Economic Reforms Coordinator Filomeno S. Sta Ana, III. agreed with Mr. Lagman's amendment to the bill, saying that is not part of the NFA's role.

<https://bworldonline.com/top-stories/2024/05/15/595108/house-oks-rice-tariffication-law-amendments-on-2nd-reading/>

## BUSINESS WORLD:

# SRA preparing to meet US export quota

May 14, 2024 | 8:53 pm



VICTORIAS MILLING COMPANY, INC. FACEBOOK PAGE

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said it is undertaking the initial preparations to help the industry meet the US raw sugar export quota.

“Right now, there is a push from the (Private Sector Advisory Council) and from the refiners and millers, and also exporters, to meet the 24,700 metric tons (MT) quota,” SRA Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona said in a briefing.

He added that the regulator is readying the initial paperwork to allow the export of sugar, with an initial shipment targeted for June.

“Our exporters have pre-qualified for the program because they participated in Sugar Order No. 2. These will be the same people who will be involved in the export program if it happens,” Mr. Azcona added.

Sugar Order No. 2 called for the voluntary purchase of domestically produced sugar in order to stabilize farmgate prices. Participants were eligible to avail of an allocation for a future import program.

The Philippines last shipped raw sugar to the US market during the crop year 2020-2021, amounting to 112,008 MT of commercial weight raw sugar.

The Philippines has not exported sugar to the US since, due to domestic supply concerns.

During the 2023-2024 crop year, raw sugar production hit 1.92 million MT as of May 5.

The US granted the Philippines an additional export quota of 25,300 metric tons raw value (MTRV) of raw sugar, on top of the 145,235 MTRV quota for the year.

Mr. Azcona said earlier that millers and traders were volunteering to export 30,000 or 60,000 MT of raw sugar to the US.

Last week, PSAC's agriculture group had also recommended importing raw sugar and refining it for export.

"If we ship to other countries who accept refined sugar and they don't specify where the raw sugar comes from, it's possible," Mr. Azcona added. — Adrian H. Halili

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/05/14/595100/sra-preparing-to-meet-us-export-quota/>

## BUSINESS WORLD:

# Catch landed at fishports up 13% in Q1

May 14, 2024 | 8:52 pm



PHILSTAR

THE catch landed at regional fishports (RFPs) rose 13% year on year during the first quarter, according to the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA).

In a report, the PFDA said the landed catch was 134,746.84 metric tons (MT) during the three-month period, up from 118,419.49 MT a year earlier.

On a quarter-on-quarter basis, fish volumes fell 6.7% compared with the fourth quarter of 2023.

“This January to March 2024 period, the PFDA opened the year with significant numbers in terms of fish unloading and handling,” it said, citing the effects of the closed fishing season on fish volumes.

Republic Act No. 8550 or the Fisheries Code imposes a three-month closed fishing season to repopulate certain fish species. The season typically ends during the first two months of the following year.

Fishing bans are declared in Northern Palawan, Ilocos, Negros Occidental, Capiz, and Cebu during the fourth quarter of the year.

“During (the first quarter), all PFDA RFPs maintained a positive trend both in terms of the quarterly number of vessel arrivals and the number of clients served,” it said.

The PFDA added that the daily average of fish unloaded rose 12% year on year to 1,480.73 MT. The average was down 5.6% from a quarter earlier.

“The ports opened their doors to 25,200 vessel arrivals and attended to 10,869 clients throughout the quarter,” it added. — Adrian H. Halili

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/05/14/595099/catch-landed-at-fishports-up-13-in-q1/>

**REMATE:**

## **DA: Pagbabalik ng kapangyarihan ng NFA 'di layunin sa mga pagbabago sa RTL**

May 14, 2024 15:34



MANILA, Philippines- Sinabi ni Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu-Laurel Jr. noong Martes na walang intensyon na buhayin ang kapangyarihan ng National Food Authority na tinanggal sa NFA matapos ang pagsasabatas ng RTL, ito'y makaraang tumestigo sa harap ng Senado sa Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) na itinatadhana sa ilalim ng Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).

Nabatid sa pagdinig ng Congressional Oversight Committee on Agricultural and Fisheries Modernization hearing, nagbabala sina Senator Cynthia Villar at Senator Imee Marcos sa masamang track record at “dismal history” ng NFA.

Kugnay nito iginiit ni Villar, principal sponsor ng RTL sa Senado, ang kanyang pagtutol sa pagpapanumbalik ng dating kapangyarihan ng NFA at iminungkahi na ibigay sa Pangulo ang awtoridad na bumili at magbenta ng bigas sa panahon ng emergency.

Samantala, tinanong ni Senador Francis Tolentino kung hinahangad ng executive department na ibalik ang dating kapangyarihang ipinagkaloob sa NFA sa pamamagitan ng mga iminungkahing pag-amyenda sa RTL, subalit ipinaliwanag ni Laurel na ang mga amendment na kanilang hinahangad sa RTL ay batay sa kung paano sila makialam sa merkado sa panahon kung kailan tumataas ang

presyo ng bigas sa lahat ng oras at sa gitna ng mga kondisyon tulad ng El Niño kung kailan apektado ang produksyon ng bigas.

Higit pa rito, sinabi ni Laurel na magkakaroon ng mga sitwasyon kung kailan kailangang mamagitan upang “panatilihin tapat ang mga mangangalakal.”

“Ang tunay na intensyon ay hindi ibalik ang buong kapangyarihan sa NFA, ngunit gamitin ang NFA lang bilang isang conduit para maisakatuparan ang ilang sandali ng interbensyon, maaaring minsan o dalawang beses sa isang taon. Ngunit hindi sa pamamagitan ng awtoridad ng sinuman sa NFA,” aniya.

Habang bukas siya sa ideya ni Villar na ibigay ang awtoridad sa Pangulo, nangangamba si Laurel na baka huli na ang emergency response kung ibibigay ang kapangyarihan sa Chief Executive.

“Ang sinasabi namin is kung pwedeng ibigay ang authority sa DA Secretary. Mas maganda ho actually si presidente ho ‘di ba? I agree with you. But ang tingin ko lang, the president is very busy with so many things baka maging reaction is late na” sabi niya.

“Kami, sa DA, well mino-monitor namin ito araw-araw. We can technically foresee or kung anong mangyayari and act accordingly,” patuloy ng opisyal.

Iminungkahi niya ang pagbibigay ng naturang awtoridad sa dalawang Cabinet secretary. **Santi Celario**

<https://remate.ph/da-pagbabalik-ng-kapangyarihan-ng-nfa-di-layunin-sa-mga-pagbabago-sa-rtl/>

**REMATE:**

## **Regulasyon ng magic sugar isinusulong ng SRA**

May 14, 2024 18:24



MANILA, Philippines- Dapat kontrolin ang pagkalat ng artificial o magic sugar sa mga lokal na pamilihan upang ingatan ang kalusugan ng mga consumer, ayon sa Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) nitong Lunes.

“Mayroon tayong tinitingnan na high fructose syrup, iyong mga chemical sweeteners. Lahat po pinapatingnan po ng SRA iyon. Who regulates it? Ano po iyong agency involved? And of course, we want to regulate it as well,” pahayag ni SRA Administrator Pablo Luis Azcona sa isang panayam.

Paliwanag ni Azcona, ang magic sugar, kilala rin bilang aspartame, ay isang chemical compound sweetener cna karaniwang ginagamit sa refresher drinks na maaaring magdulot ng banta sa kalusugan.



“Number one concern diyan is iyong health ng consumers. Number two, kung di natin alam saan galing, talagang delikado,” wika ng opisyal.

Subalit, karaniwang nagbebenta o gumagamit ang mga negosyante ng artificial sugar bilang mas murang source ng pampatamis, aniya.

Bagama’t hindi sigurado ang SRA kung puslit ito o hindi, ang supply ng magic sugar ay 100 porsyentong imported, pahayag ni Azcona. RNT/SA

<https://remate.ph/regulasyon-ng-magic-sugar-isinusulong-ng-sra/>

**REMATE:**

# Hulyo idineklarang PH Agriculturists' Month

May 14, 2024 11:47



MANILA, Philippines – IDINEKLARA ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. ang buwan ng Hulyo bilang Philippine Agriculturists' Month bilang pagkilala at pagdakila sa dedikasyon ng mga agriculturists at itaas ang kamalayan ng kahalagahan ng agricultural sector.

“The celebration of the Philippine Agriculturists’ Month will engage professional agriculturists in agricultural advocacy, policy research and formulation and provide an avenue for enterprise-building, communications training, and community development,” ang nakasaad sa Proclamation No. 544, nilagdaan ni Pangulong Marcos nito lamang Mayo 10.

Mababasa rin sa proklamasyon ang naging ambag ng mga agriculturists at binigyang-diin ang kanilang importansiya sa pamamagitan ng “dedicated month” na “will honor their hard work and dedication, and raise awareness about the significance of the agricultural sector in enhancing nationwide agricultural productivity and competitiveness.”

Ayon sa proklamasyon, “The Manila School of Agriculture, established in July 1989, will provide theoretical and practical education to skilled farmers and overseers, and promote agricultural development in the Philippines by means of observation, experiment and investigation towards deeper awareness and understanding of Philippine agriculture, thereby paving the way for agriculture to formally become an educational course in the Philippines.”

Samantala, ang Department of Agriculture (DA) at ang Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) at Board of Agriculture nito ay inatasan na pangunahan, makipag-ugnayan at pangasiwaan ang pagdiriwang ng Philippine Agriculturists’ Month at tukuyin ang mga programa, aktibidad at proyekto para sa taunang selebrasyon.

Sinabi pa rin ng proklamasyon na ang lahat ng ahensiya at instrumentalities ng national government kabilang na ang government-owned or -controlled corporations, government financial institutions, state universities and colleges at maging ang local government units at pribadong sektor ay sinabihan at hinikayat na magbigay ng kinakailangang suporta at tulong. *Kris Jose*

<https://remate.ph/hulyo-idineklarang-ph-agriculturists-month/>

**REMATE:**

## **DA: Walang oversupply sa mangga**

May 14, 2024 10:00



MANILA, Philippines – Walang oversupply sa produksiyon ng mangga sa bansa, tiniyak ng Department of Agriculture (DA) nitong Lunes, kasunod ng viral online post ng mangga na itinatapon sa San Mateo, Isabela.

“Not necessarily oversupply, pero ito iyong panahon ng peak harvest,” paliwanag ni Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa sa isang panayam.

“Iyong mga nakita niyo sa video, halos sira na, bulok na, o maliit na. Ito na iyong mga huling bahagi siguro ng harvest,” dagdag niya.

Gayunman, sinabi ni De Mesa na maaaring tumugon ang mga magsasaka ng mangga sa naunang alok ng rehiyon ng DA-Cagayan Valley para sa deployment assistance, sa halip na i-post ang pagtatapon.

Hinimok niya ang mga magsasaka na makipag-ugnayan sa mga lokal na tanggapan ng DA para sa deployment ng mga trak at maiwasan ang pag-aaksaya.

Paki-usap namin sa kanila, pwedeng i-coordinate sa LGU (local government unit), sa aming mga municipal and city agriculturists, i-coordinate natin sa region,” sabi ni De Mesa.

Ang farmgate price ng mangga, samantala, ay patuloy na bumababa sa gitna ng peak harvest season.

Mula PHP30 hanggang PHP55 kada kilo, ang farmgate price ay mula PHP10/kg hanggang PHP15/kg.

<https://remate.ph/da-walang-oversupply-sa-mangga/>

**REMATE:**

## **Pinas pinag-aaralang mag-angkat ng asukal**

May 14, 2024 08:31



MANILA, Philippines – Pinag-aaralan na ng Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) ang posibleng pag-angkat ng asukal para maiwasan ang pagtaas ng presyo sa retail market.

Sa isang panayam, sinabi ni SRA Administrator Pablo Azcona na kanilang isinasaalang-alang ang buffer stock at market demand trend.

”Iyong pini-prevent po namin is iyong August 2022 situations where your stocks ng refined sugar natin is bumagsak to 27,000 MT (metric tons). Dahil diyan, lumipad iyong retail, naging insecure,” anang opisyal.

Sa nasabing taon, umabot sa PHP130/kg ang retail price ng asukal.

Ang target na import volume ay mula 185,000 metric tons (MT) hanggang 200,000 metric tons ayon sa tagubilin ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., ani Azcona.

Gayunpaman, sinabi ni Azcona na mayroong “trigger point” sa mga antas ng stock bago ang pag-activate ng plano sa pag-import.

“Ang natukoy na trigger point ay humigit-kumulang tatlong buwan na supply kaya ibabase ito sa aktwal na pag-withdraw ng demand,” sabi ni Azcona, na binanggit ang mga pagsasaalang-alang sa timeline ng pagpapadala, inspeksyon at pagpapalabas mula sa Thailand at iba pang mga bansa.

Samantala, tiniyak ng SRA na may sapat na stock ng asukal, at matatag na supply at presyo ng tingi.

Noong Biyernes, nanatili sa P73/kg hanggang sa P100/kg ang umiiral na presyo ng refined sugar sa sa Metro Manila.

Noong Mayo 5, ang bansa ay may humigit-kumulang 1.1 milyong MT ng pisikal na stock ng asukal, katumbas ng 583,694.10 MT ng pisikal na pinong stock at 568,734 MT ng pisikal na hilaw na stock ng asukal.

Sa mga tuntunin ng produksyon, iniulat ng SRA na ito ay nasa 1.918 milyong MT na may ilang mga gilingan pa rin ang ani. Mas mataas ito kaysa sa produksyon ng asukal noong nakaraang taon na 1.799 MT.

Kulang pa ito sa 2.2 million MT hanggang 2.4 million MT demand sa bansa. *Santi Celario*

<https://remate.ph/pinas-pinag-aaralang-mag-angkat-ng-asukal/>

**REIMATE:**

## **3,000 kilo ng mangga itinapon na lang ng magsasaka**

May 14, 2024 08:18



ISABELA, Philippines – Tinapon na lang ng isang magsasaka sa San Mateo ang humigit-kumulang 3,000 kilo ng hinog na mangga dahil sa labis na suplay.

Sinabi ni Frederick Cayaban sa isang ulat na nawalan siya ng hindi bababa sa P84,000 mula sa mga itinapong mangga.

Ang ani ay bahagi ng 15,000 kilo ng prutas na inihatid nila sa Metro Manila.

“Pagdating sa Metro Manila masyadong mahaba ang pila dahil marami na po ang supply sa planta,” ani Cayaban. “Inabutan po siya ng hinog doon kasi nakulog po, closed van po kasi ang pinagkargaan namin kaya nahinog na rin.”

Bumaba ang presyo ng mangga sa San Mateo sa P5 hanggang P7 kada kilo mula sa P55 kada kilo noong Marso, ani Cayaban.



Gayunpaman, ang presyo sa Metro Manila ay nasa P30 hanggang P95 kada kilo.

Sinabi ni Cayaban na nakipag-coordinate siya sa DA at nakapagbenta siya ng 800 kilo ng mangga para sa mga tindahan ng Kadiwa. **RNT**

<https://remate.ph/3000-kilo-ng-mangga-itinapon-na-lang-ng-magsasaka/>

## REMATE:

# Ayuda sa mga magsasaka, mangingisdang hagip ng El Niño umabot na sa P2.37B

May 14, 2024 07:52



MANILA, Philippines – Nagbigay na ang pamahalaan ng humigit-kumulang P2.37 bilyong halaga ng tulong sa mga magsasaka at mangingisda na apektado ng El Niño phenomenon.

Sa isang pahayag na inilabas noong Linggo, sinabi ng Department of Agriculture na sa ngayon ay namahagi na ito ng P1.26 bilyon sa mga magsasaka sa Cagayan Valley, Mimaropa, at Soccsksargen sa pamamagitan ng Rice Farmers Financial Assistance (RFFA).

Kasama sa iba pang mga interbensyon ang humigit-kumulang P658.22 milyon para sa suporta sa produksyon tulad ng farm inputs, fertilizers, at biologics; P294.46 milyong halaga ng mga proyektong patubig mula sa

National Irrigation Administration; P77.50 milyong halaga ng Survival and Recovery (SURE) Aid Loan; P67.93 milyong halaga ng indemnification; PHP65.35 milyon na halaga ng composting

facilities; P8.99 milyong halaga ng makinarya sa dagat; P8 milyong halaga ng makinarya at kagamitan ng bigas; at P5.19 milyong halaga ng mga punla ng niyog, bukod sa iba pa.

Ipinamahagi din ang 66,039 katutubong hayop at 111 sari-saring alternatibong kabuhayan; pati na rin ang pag-install ng 616 water pump; mga pagpapatakbo ng cloud seeding; at ang desilting at concretion ng mga irigasyong kanal.

Sa pinakahuling ulat nito, sinabi ng DA-Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) Operations Center na umabot na sa PHP6.35 bilyon ang kabuuang pinsala sa agrikultura dahil sa El Niño, na nakakaapekto sa 1221,389 na magsasaka at mangingisda.

May kabuuang 111,702 ektarya ng mga lupang sakahan ang naapektuhan, na may 31,568 ay., o 28.16 porsiyento, na walang pagkakataong makabangon.

Ang pinakamataas na pinsala ay sa sektor ng palay, na may 60,772 ektarya na apektado, at ang kabuuang pinsala ay nasa PHP3.30 bilyon.

Sinundan ito ng mais sa PHP1.94 bilyon; mataas na halaga ng mga pananim, PHP1.07 bilyon; PHP33.83 milyon sa pangisdaan na nakakaapekto sa 2,261 mangingisda; PHP3.25 milyon sa kamoteng kahoy; at PHP7.93 milyon sa mga alagang hayop at manok. *Santi Celario*

<https://remate.ph/ayuda-sa-mga-magsasaka-mangingisdang-hagip-ng-el-nino-umabot-na-sa-p2-37b/>

**MANILA STANDARD**

# **NFA to intervene to arrest rising price of rice—DA**



Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr.

By Macon Ramos-Araneta & Othel V. Campos

May 15, 2024, 12:45 am

**Agriculture Sec. Francisco Tiu Laurel on Tuesday said the National Food Authority (NFA) should intervene in the market amid the rising cost of rice.**

**“That’s the basic thought during this times that the price of rice is 15-year high in the world,” said Laurel in response to the query of Sen. Francis Tolentino.**

**During the public hearing of the Senate committee on agriculture and food chaired by Sen. Cynthia Villar, Tolentino quizzed Laurel on the real intention of the Executive Department to restore the previous powers granted to the NFA.**

**The House is set to start its deliberations on proposed amendments to the RTL to restore the NFA power to import and sell rice to consumers.**

**Tiu Laurel also raised concern that the El Niño phenomenon might affect our rice production.**

**“And if we are to make computations on the current price of rice and its retail price,” Laurel said, “there appears to be a need for intervention to keep traders honest.”**

**While the NFA will have to arbitrate during these times, Laurel clarified the real intent is not to give full power back to the NFA.**

**But the plan here is to use NFA as a conduit to operationalize. He said the intervention may be once or twice a year, but under the supervision of two secretaries from the Department of Agriculture (DA).**

**“But not through the authority of anybody in the NFA. What we were saying is that if we can give the authority to the DA Secretary.”**

**Laurel said he agrees with Villar that authority can also be granted to President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. , but he said the latter is “very busy with so many things.”**

**“Perhaps, reactions might be late. And we, in the DA, can conduct monitoring every day. We can technically foresee whatever may happen so we can act accordingly.”**

**He also doesn’t like what happened to the NFA when its power was clipped due to some irregularities. The Ombudsman suspended 139 NFA officials and employees.**

**Saying he is allergic to anomalies, Laurel said the NFA has a new administration. Also, he will not tolerate any corruption under his administration.**

**Villar has been strongly objecting to giving back powers to the NFA due to bad experiences. She said the agency has been hounded with several controversies and issues, and failed to help the country’s small farmers. She suggested to hand over the power to the President rather than the NFA.**

**Sen. Imee Marcos said they have lost trust in the NFA because of “kababalaghan.”**

**She recommended the creation of a presidential commission or task force on rice sufficiency aside from the DA or the Department of Trade and Industry and the National Price Council that would focus on the rice needs of the public.**

**Meanwhile, Secretary Tiu Laurel urged lawmakers to support the extension of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) – a key component of the Rice Tariffication Law beyond its 2025 expiration.**

**Tiu Laurel’s report to the Congressional Oversight Committee on Agricultural and Fisheries Modernization chaired by Senator Cynthia Villar said the RCEF has allowed the government to leverage significant tariff from imported rice to enhance farmers’ productivity and incomes.**

**“The RTL has leveraged tariff revenues to fund critical initiatives that have brought transformative changes to our agricultural landscape. Notably, the provision of high-quality seeds and modern machinery through the RCEF has led to a remarkable increase in rice yields and a reduction in production costs,” Tiu Laurel said.**

**The Rice Fund “has provided a substantial revenue stream for the government to finance essential development projects aimed at improving the competitiveness of the rice sector in the Philippines.”**

**The DA seeks the extension of RCEF until 2030 and some additional changes to the fund’s allocation set to improve efficiency and optimize its impact.**

**The Rice Fund allocates P10 billion a year, from which a million farmers have benefited since 2019, for the distribution of farm machineries and seeds, among others, with excess tariff collection distributed to farmers as financial assistance.**

**The Rice Tariffication Law is up for revision to accommodate a few amendments, particularly on initiatives to improve the livelihoods of Filipino farmers.**

**The President earlier said he would certify as urgent the bill proposing to amend RTL to allow the government control over or influence in the local rice market.**

**<https://manilastandard.net/news/314446987/nfa-to-intervene-to-arrest-rising-price-of-rice-da.html>**

# **Ombudsman lifts suspension of 72 NFA warehouse heads**

By Rio N. Araja May 14, 2024, 10:55 pm

**THE Office of the Ombudsman has lifted the preventive suspension of 72 personnel of the National Food Authority implicated in the irregular sale of rice buffer stock to private traders.**

**In lifting the order, the Ombudsman cited it imposed the preventive suspensions to prevent the respondents from influencing the investigation and to preserve pieces of evidence that could be under their control and custody.**

**The documents under the warehouse supervisors' control were already with the Ombudsman.**

**“Moreover, there is insufficient ground to believe that their continued stay in office may prejudice the investigation of the case filed against them,” the Ombudsman’s resolution read.**

**“Thus, the continued preventive suspension of the afore-named warehouse supervisors is no longer necessary,” it said.**

**The 72 warehouse supervisors were among 139 NFA officials and employees placed under a six-month preventive suspension on March 1.**

**The suspension arose from administrative charges of grave misconduct, gross neglect of duty and conduct prejudicial to the best interest of the service in connection with the sale of NFA rice to traders at a low price and without public bidding or authorization from the NFA Council.**

**The supervisors were assigned to warehouses in Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Western Visayas, Central Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Northern Mindanao, Soccskargen, Caraga, and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.**

<https://manilastandard.net/news/314446933/ombudsman-lifts-suspension-of-72-nfa-warehouse-heads.html>

# Pagsibol 2024 and the blossoming of PH horticulture and urban agriculture



First Lady Louise Araneta-Marcos with some of the exhibitors

By Manila Standard

May 14, 2024, 5:38 pm

**Nearly 800 plant breeders, growers, sellers, and government policymakers convened at the newly opened Space at One Ayala Mall in Makati from May 3 to 5, 2024, for the inaugural Philippine Horticulture and Urban Agriculture Summit, which marks the flowering of the country's horticulture sector.**

**Supported by none other than First Lady Louise Araneta-Marcos, who graced the opening ceremonies, and various agencies under the Department of Agriculture dealing with plant cultivation and trade, the event provided a platform for the horticulture sector to address crucial issues hindering its growth.**

**Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, in his keynote speech, emphasized the pivotal role of the horticulture and urban agriculture sector in the country's diversification and its potential as a major export opportunity.**



**“Horticulture, with its focus on cultivating high-value crops and ornamentals, offers a pathway to diversity. Our agricultural landscape is currently limited, but with this, we will definitely diversify and meet the evolving demands of domestic and international markets,” he stated.**

#### Potential for Ornamentals

**The breeding and cultivation of ornamental plants constitute a fast-growing industry in the Philippines with vast potential. Mike Rimland, vice president of Costa Farms in Miami, Florida, highlighted that the ornamental plant business is a multi-billion-dollar industry that is even bigger than growing coffee or tea. He said the Philippines, with its diversity of plants, could serve as a source of various plant species in high demand in the Western world.**

**Dr. Teresita Amore, a breeder of orchids and anthurium from the University of Hawaii, affirmed that Filipinos possess the talent and capacity to breed new varieties that could become the next big thing in horticulture.**

**“The market is always seeking something new, something thrilling. And this could be any of the plants we have here in the Philippines,” she remarked.**

#### Conservation by Cultivation



**Dr. Surawit Wannakraioj, an expert in plant hybridization from Thailand, meanwhile, urged the Philippine government, especially the Department of**

**Environment and Natural Resources, to allow “conservation by cultivation” or the protection of wild plants through responsible propagation.**

**“You will never know if a natural disaster such as a volcanic eruption or a forest fire could wipe out all these wild plant species. For example, the orchid *Vanda Luzonica* was destroyed by Mount Pinatubo eruption. Fortunately, I have saved some of it and brought here tissue samples for local growers to cultivate,” he said.**

From Pandemic to Plantdemic

**The Covid-19 pandemic unexpectedly benefitted the Philippine horticulture and urban agriculture sector. With Filipinos spending more time at home, cultivating plants became a popular pastime, leading to increased plant purchases.**

**Boyet Ganigan of Arids and Aroids noted that the hobby market transformed the pandemic into a “plantdemic,” bolstering the plant-growing business in areas such as Guiguinto in Bulacan, Bay in Laguna, and Silang in Cavite.**

**From this “plantdemic” emerged the trend of garden tourism, with destinations like Perlas ng Silang in Cavite and Bukid Amara in Lucban, Quezon, becoming instant favorites among plant enthusiasts.**

 Growing Market in Landscaping

**Another aspect of horticulture highlighted in Pagsibol 2024 was landscaping, with speakers from the country’s major real estate developers underscoring the substantial demand for plants and trees.**

**Noreen Lizano, Landscape Manager of Ayala Land Premier, and Norina Ocampo, Landscape Division Head of the Villar Group of Companies, expressed their perpetual search for suppliers of quality plants and trees for their real estate projects.**

**“We are collaborating with communities who are now growing for us,” stated Lizano.**

**Ocampo, on the other hand, mentioned that apart from suppliers, the Villar Group is establishing its own nurseries and aiming to cultivate millions of trees and plants for both outdoor and indoor use. She emphasized the necessity for a quality standard for planting materials, which the industry can develop.**

The Rise of Urban Farming

**On its third day, Pagsibol 2024 focused on the growing trend of urban farming.**

**Louie Gutierrez of Urban Farmers Ph observed that an increasing number of Filipinos have recognized the importance of growing their own food right where they reside, leading to the establishment of community farms throughout Metro Manila.**

**Bureau of Plant Industry Director Glenn Panganiban remarked that these developments are evidence that horticulture and urban agriculture in the country are no longer just aspirations.**

**“We used to merely talk about it. But now it’s happening. Sumisibol na! (it’s now blooming). With this summit, we hope to foster a spirit of cooperation among the various sectors so we can continue to cultivate this industry and ensure food security for our people,” he concluded.**

**Pagsibol 2024 was co-organized by the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Plant Industry (DA-BPI), Bukid Amara, Manila Bulletin, the High Value Crops Development Program, the National Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture Program, and the Agricultural Training Institute.**

<https://manilastandard.net/spotlight/314446737/pagsibol-2024-and-the-blossoming-of-ph-horticulture-and-urban-agriculture.html>

# Declare agri in a state of crisis, then write new policies

By Marlen Ronquillo

May 15, 2024

THEY are grand policies with innocuous names. In Europe, the prime examples are the European Green Deal, Horizon 2020, and the Strategic Forum for Important Projects of Common European Interests. The US versions are the CHIPS and Science Act, the Inflation Reduction Act, and the Infrastructure and Industrial Jobs Act. China has Made in China 2025 and several other similar programs.

Scrap the veneer of seeming innocuousness and probe deep into the programs that emerged from these policies, and you will find out what they really are. They are the industrial policies that many of the economically powerful countries have designed in the wake of the geoeconomic fragmentation to protect and promote their own niche industries. Employing tools that remind the world of the dreaded word "protectionism." Tools such as production subsidies, tariffs, tax incentives, loans, and domestic content rules were last deployed in a bygone era. In many ways, these industrial policies are a rebuke of the grand tenets of globalization, which, ironically, these major economic powers themselves foisted on the world, starting with the General Agreements on Tariff and Trade (GATT).



After the accession to the World Trade Organization of countries big and small in the last decade of the past century — our own Senate ratified our accession to the WTO in the dying days of 1994 — much of the world fully embraced globalization and free trade. So firmly footed was unfettered free trade that most prominent trade economists thought the words subsidies, loans, tax incentives, and domestic content rules that fall under the ambit of industrial policies and are anathema to free trade have been written off for good.

Today, as the broader world comes to terms with the reality that the era of efficiency — the idea that everything countries and households need can be sourced quickly and cheaply because the manufacturing centers are awash with them and the supply chain is as efficient — is over; the siren call of resilience has gained traction. Major economic powers and regional blocs such as the EU have been crafting their own industrial policies, the grand, animating principles of free trade be damned, because of the uncertainty of the supply chain, wars and other geopolitical tensions. The primary disruptors were the Covid pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war. Right now, we have the Red Sea attacks on commercial vessels and the longer travel time for ships moving anything from cars to oil to food supplies.

What are the lessons that the lesser economic powers, the Philippines included, can learn from these initiatives of the major economies that

defy the grand principles of free trade and smack of protectionism? First is this. No global trade rules are sacrosanct and inviolable, whether we are talking of industrial policy or agricultural policy. In the Philippine context, and this is the second lesson, we should ask ourselves these questions. Should we remain committed to our agricultural trade commitments both to the WTO and the regional trade agreements? Or, is now the perfect time to write our own agricultural policies because our almost slavish adherence to global and regional agricultural trading rules has brought us nothing but misery?

During the 1994 debates in the Senate on the question of WTO accession, the anti-accession coalition led by then-senator Wigberto "Bobby" Tañada said the underwhelming fundamentals of the agriculture sector, or the general unreadiness of our agriculture sector to compete globally, was enough to pause the then giddy sentiment in the Senate to join the WTO.

The anti-accession coalition stated in no uncertain terms that the backward state of Philippine agriculture guaranteed only one thing: under the WTO rules, the Philippines would be the dumping ground of every imaginable agricultural product from the various seaports of the world in the immediate future.

Seven years after the accession, a review done by trade and agricultural economists on the impact of the accession made the following findings:

- The promise of accession was the surge in agricultural jobs. Seven years later, hundreds of thousands of agricultural jobs were lost, exacerbating the migration of the rural poor into the cities.
- The accession promised a surge in agricultural exports. It was food imports that surged to historic levels seven years after the accession.
- The accession promised an increase of several folds in agriculture's gross value-added. Seven years later, a major drop in agriculture's GVA was the result.

Not one of the quack economists who provided the senators with the rosy Panglossian impact of the accession on agriculture was held accountable despite the big letdown. The Philippines, starting in the last five years of the past century, indeed became the dumping ground for every food import imaginable: from rice — the staple food — to yellow corn, sugar, and even fish and soy sauce. Accurately stated, from atis to patis.

The 21st century institutionalized one tragic development — our national food security became dependent on food imports. The Rice Tariffication Law was passed in 2019, the climax of the long, deliberate effort to defenestrate the agriculture sector. From 2019 to the present, we were either the No. 1 or No. 2 global rice importer. Not content with the RTL, the Duterte administration did more tariff-cutting on rice, pork and corn, which the Marcos Jr. administration has adopted.

Recently, Administrative Order 20, which eliminated all non-tariff barriers to food imports, was implemented, which probably sealed the total collapse of the agri sector.

The National Economic Development Authority, according to farm groups, is now the National Importation Development Authority. The Department of Agriculture is now the Department of Importation.

Time to declare a state of crisis in the agriculture sector and a total rewrite of its bungled policies.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/15/opinion/columns/declare-agri-in-a-state-of-crisis-then-write-new-policies/1946380>

# Suspension of 72 NFA supervisors lifted

By Ma. Reina Leanne Tolentino

May 15, 2024

**(UPDATE)** THE Office of the Ombudsman has lifted its order to preventively suspend 72 National Food Authority (NFA) warehouse supervisors.

The suspension order was issued while investigating an alleged anomalous sale of rice buffer stock.

But in an order it issued recently, the Ombudsman lifted the preventive suspension "in the interest of justice and fair play."

## □ [PH ships to prevent Escoda 'reclamation'](#)

The 23-page order was signed on May 13, 2024, by Special Prosecutor Edilberto Sandoval.

"A closer evaluation of the case record, subsequent/additional compliances made to and pleadings submitted to Office reveal that the documents/evidence pertaining to this case, which all of the afore-named Warehouse Supervisors from Region III, Region IV-A, MIMAROPA, Region V, Region VI, Region VII, Region IX, Region X, Region XII, Region XIII and BARMM have control and custody, were already obtained by this Office," it said.

"Moreover, there is insufficient ground to believe that their continued stay in office may prejudice the investigation of the case filed against them," the Ombudsman said.

"Thus, the continued preventive suspension of the afore-named Warehouse Supervisors is no longer necessary," it said.

The 72 include Arace Buenaventura, Luigi Balbin, Catherine Magcalas, Rodol de Vera, Michael Soriano, Luzille Pineda, John Richard Atayde, Raul Balbuena, Ma. Sherwin Camille Paulo, Baby



Esguerra, Amparo Gaspar, Mia Kristel Chico, Rosalina Naguit, Lauro Castro, Richard Ildefonso, Gemarie Asturias, Cherryhill Mejico, Gemini Hernandez, Allen Marvin de Leon, Rubelyn Landicho, Angelo Gregorio Ortega, Jovino Paje 3rd, Vevencio Balaoro, Jonathan Cabrillas, Ronald Undecimo, Rex Francis Zantua, Kevin Guevarra, Glen Saldevia, Irah Razote, Marianne Alit, Janice Marie Pabe, Raquel Carredo, Genesis Zaspas, Jowel Antiquina, Dexter Navarro, Andriano Sorobin, Leticia Medel, Lumerito Macugay, Jason Lim, Rosemarie Miro, Rosaro Rendon, Alemar Celecious, Marco Sergio Bodingan 3rd, Judie Ann Bongawan, Almer Sunga, Romulo Namurag 3rd, John Ver Chua, Junrie Dumas, Catherine Torregosa, Roque Ubias, Jeremy Caballero, Cristina Carcel, Rose Baito, Emily de los Reyes, Peter Nulia, Gladys Breteña, Rita Porto, Abraham Cahucom, Maribel Balbin, Marjorie Aline de la Cruz, Joel Valenzuela, Jennevive Romero, Joy Cabrera, Pepito Jumamoy, Meriam Akas, Anna Marie Amores, Jayson Inso, Amelia Leysa, Asmara Bancola, Al-Jade Alfonso, Ma. Susan Pawah, and Kenney Guerrero.

The 72 were among the 139 that the Ombudsman ordered suspended.

Last March, the Ombudsman also lifted the suspension order on 23 NFA officials.

Also, the anti-graft body lifted the preventive suspension of 23 of the 139.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/15/news/national/suspension-of-72-nfa-supervisors-lifted/1946224>

# Bamboo textile hub soon to rise in Ilocos

By The Manila Times

May 15, 2024

**A BAMBOO textile hub is likely to be established in Vintar town, Ilocos Norte.**



**ALL ABOUT BAMBOO** Vintar Mayor Richard Degala (center) poses with stakeholders, including Dr. Teresita Tabaog (6th from left), regional director of the Department of Science and Technology in Region 1, after last month's discussion of the requirements of a bamboo textile hub which is being planned to be established in the Ilocos town. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Department of Science and Technology Region 1 (DoST-1), through the Provincial Science and Technology Office-Ilocos Norte (PSTO-IN), has already convened with Vintar Mayor Richard Degala to discuss the establishment of a bamboo textile hub and to explore opportunities for assistance through science, technology and innovation (STI) in various sectors.

Present during the meeting held on April 15, 2024 were Dr. Teresita Tabaog, DoST-1 regional director; Brian Rasco, supervising SRS of PSTO-IN; Gerald Gabriel, senior SRS of PSTO-IN; Sheeren Engada, SRS 1 of PSTO-IN; Mayor Degala; Maricel Serano, municipal agriculture officer of Vintar; and Jogie Jimenez from the provincial government of Ilocos Norte ENRO.

Tabaog provided insights into the requisites for setting up the bamboo textile hub, and explained its purpose and potential impact.

Once operational, the hub's output would find a market through DoST-PTRI, offering a promising income-generating opportunity for the people of Vintar.

Degala affirmed the municipality's unwavering commitment to the initiative, pledging full cooperation and support from the local government.

The discussion extended to the exploration of Vintar's diverse agricultural landscape, including its abundant mango and cacao resources.

The mayor expressed enthusiasm for revitalizing additional sectors, such as the honey bee and sugarcane industries, with the support of DoST-1's technical expertise and training programs.

Tabaog assured assistance from DoST-1, offering technical support and training programs for commodities through initiatives like the Innovation, Science and Technology for Accelerating Regional Technology-Based Development (iStart) program.

The iStart program aims to support the development of local government units by accelerating regional growth through science, technology and innovation. The program will also aid in STI planning processes. The meeting concluded with both parties committing to collaborate closely to advance STI in Vintar.

DoST-1, through PSTO-IN, reaffirmed its dedication to providing solutions to create more opportunities in the municipality.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/15/regions/bamboo-textile-hub-soon-to-rise-in-ilocos/1946417>

# DA chief says NFA to be used only as ‘conduit’ to import rice

By **Raymond Africa**

May 15, 2024

**AGRICULTURE** Secretary Francisco Tiu-Laurel yesterday told senators the proposed amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law is not intended to give back to the National Food Authority (NFA) the power to import rice but use the agency only as a “conduit” to import rice when needed.

Tiu Laurel made the clarification during the meeting of the Congressional Oversight Committee on Agricultural and Fisheries Modernization that was held to review the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) pursuant to RA 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law.

The DA leader said the plan to use the NFA to import rice “maybe once or twice a year” is aimed at bringing down the market price of the grain.

“The real intention is not to give full power back to the NFA, but use (it) as a conduit to operationalize certain moments of intervention, maybe once or twice a year, but not through the authority of anybody in the NFA,” Tiu-Laurel said.

He said the authority to import will be with the President, but said the “reaction” may come late since the Chief Executive has his hands tied up with other pressing matters.

In lieu of the President, he said the authority maybe given to the secretaries of the DA or the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

“It’s only as a last resort na kung kailangan mag-import, but on the authority of the secretary or even two secretaries of the Cabinet (It’s only as a last resort if we need to import rice [but it should be] on the authority of the secretary or even two Cabinet secretaries),” he added.

Sen. Imee Marcos agreed with Tiu-Laurel’s proposal, even as she floated the idea of creating a presidential commission for the specific purpose of rice importation.

“Kung maaari yung DA, DTI pakialaman na rin ang NFA, Kadiwa, FTI, tatal sila rin ang nagkakalat diyan. Puwedeng task force, puwedeng commission pero hindi naman kailangan na sa pang araw-araw na pagpapatakbo ang Pangulo ang makikialam. Maaari naman yung ating kagawaran mismo ang tututok diyan. Emergency lang po, huwag lang ang NFA kasi naririnig pa lang namin eh nangangatog na yung tuhod namin (If possible, the DA and DTI can oversee the NFA, Kadiwa [stores] and the FTI [Food Terminal Incorporated] since it [NFA] is the one messing things up. This can also be done through a task force or a commission but the President need not run it on a daily basis. It can be run by your

department. We will just import during emergency situations but please do not give it to the NFA because we tremble [in fear] everytime that agency is mentioned),” Marcos said.

She said the DTI can be included in rice importation since the department is also concerned with the pricing of basic commodities.

Tiu-Laurel said it is also their position that the DA should take the lead in rice importation, “not NFA.”

He also proposed during the meeting that the NFA be given the authority to monitor rice stocks in government warehouses, a proposal which was shot down by Sen. Cynthia Villar, chairperson of the Committee on Agriculture who said that monitoring warehouses is a mandate of the DA.

“So ibig sabihin, dapat iniimbentaryo niyo yung mga warehouse na binigay sa mga cooperatives kasi imbes na ipagamit sa cooperative eh pinapa-lease sa trader, tapos yung mga cooperatives are forced to sell their goods nang napakamura kasi mabubulok (So, this means that you [DA] should conduct an inventory of the warehouses given to cooperatives because instead of allowing cooperatives to use them, the people in-charge lease them to traders which forces the cooperatives to sell their goods at much lower prices since their produce will rot),” Villar said.

[https://malaya.com.ph/news\\_news/da-chief-says-nfa-to-be-used-only-as-conduit-to-import-rice/](https://malaya.com.ph/news_news/da-chief-says-nfa-to-be-used-only-as-conduit-to-import-rice/)

# Poultry industry's tech investments pay off, shielding our growers from El Niño's impact

BusinessMirror Editorial

May 15, 2024

Chicken is one of the favorite protein sources of Filipinos. Just look at the number of restaurants currently offering various poultry dishes in the Philippines. Both young and old Pinoys especially love fried chicken, a popular fare offered by fastfood chains in the country.

That is why the poultry industry is considered a major contributor to the country's farm output. In the first quarter, data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed that it accounted for 16 percent of agricultural output.

What was pleasantly surprising about the latest data on farm output is that the poultry subsector buoyed the sector's performance in January to March. **(See, "Q1 farm output inches up 0.05% despite El Niño," BusinessMirror, May 9, 2024).** This is because the crops subsector, which accounted for nearly 58 percent of output in terms of value, contracted by 0.3 percent. The poultry subsector practically prevented the agriculture sector from slipping into negative territory in January to March, when El Niño had already started to unleash its fury in local farms.

While the hot weather torched crops and prevented fishers from increasing their catch, a senior research fellow from government think tank Philippine Institute for Development Studies told this newspaper that investments made by commercial poultry growers in technology shielded their flock from the ill effects of El Niño. This investment may have been initially costly, but they are now reaping the gains. Other food producers incurred huge losses during the period, but their investment in the right technology cushioned the impact of the adverse weather condition on their bottomline.

The experience of commercial poultry growers underscores the importance of investing in technology and innovation to increase food production and eventually shield consumers from price spikes. The continued reliance on old methods of food production will not help the cause of the country to achieve food security. Unfortunately, the country's spending on research and development (R&D) is still miniscule at less than 1 percent of gross domestic product. Even the target of the

government for this year will not even reach 0.5 percent of GDP. **(See, “PHL R&D spending to rise to 0.4% of GDP,” BusinessMirror, February 2, 2024).**

The country’s gross domestic expenditure on R&D (Gerd) was pegged at only 0.322 percent of GDP in 2018, based on data from Unesco, which had recommended that Gerd should be at 1 percent of GDP. The country’s R&D spending pales in comparison to that of Vietnam (1.9 percent of GDP) and Malaysia (1 percent of GDP). The two Southeast Asian nations have a vibrant agri-food sector and are exporters of key farm commodities, such as rice and palm oil.

It would do well for the government to step up its investments in technology and other innovative means of raising agricultural output to achieve food security. Sans these investments in technology and R&D initiatives, the Philippines will be hard pressed to reduce waste and improve the productivity of farms. Worse, the failure to raise incomes by improving agricultural productivity will continue to discourage the youth from going into food production.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/05/15/poultry-industrys-tech-investments-pay-off-shielding-our-growers-from-el-ninos-impact/>

# DA chief asks lawmakers to back RCEF extension

Ada Pelonia

May 15, 2024



Department of Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

AGRICULTURE Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. has urged lawmakers to support the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) extension.

In his report to the Congressional Oversight Committee on Agricultural and Fisheries Modernization led by Senator Cynthia Villar, Laurel called the Rice Fund a “dynamic economic strategy” that bolstered farmer’s productivity and incomes through the tariffs.

“The RTL has leveraged tariff revenues to fund critical initiatives that have brought transformative changes to our agricultural landscape. Notably, the provision of high-quality seeds and modern machinery through the RCEF has led to a remarkable increase in rice yields and a reduction in production costs,” the agriculture chief was quoted as saying.



“Specifically, our data shows that from 2019 to 2023, palay production across the 57 RCEF provinces increased by approximately 7 percent,” he added.

The RCEF allocates P10 billion for farm mechanization (P5 billion), inbred seeds (P3 billion), rice credit assistance (P1 billion), and rice extension service (P1 billion). However, the DA earlier proposed to increase the Rice Fund to P15 billion.

The additional fund would be earmarked for other components such as soil health improvement, pest and disease management, and the creation of the Rice Industry Development-Program Management Office.

According to Laurel, the Rice Fund “provided a substantial revenue stream for the government to finance essential development projects aimed at improving the competitiveness of the rice sector in the Philippines.”

He added that the Rice Fund has helped over a million Filipino rice farmers since its implementation five years ago.

Aside from its proposal to add P5 billion to the Rice Fund, the department has sought the extension of the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) to 2030.

The DA also proposed several changes to the RTL regarding the mandate of the National Food Authority (NFA). Among these is providing the NFA temporary powers to intervene in the rice market when necessary to correct significant price disparities and perform its price stabilization function during food security emergencies and sudden price hikes.

**The department also proposed the creation of an office that would coordinate various rice programs of the government and strengthen regulatory functions particularly targeting anti-competitive practices such as rice hoarding and price manipulation to protect consumers and ensure market fairness.**

“These strategic enhancements aim to bolster the resilience and sustainability of the Philippine rice industry, securing long-term food security and economic stability for the nation,” the DA said in a statement.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/05/15/da-chief-asks-lawmakers-to-back-rcef-extension/>

# Bill amending RTL gets House 2nd-reading OK

Jovee Marie N. de la Cruz

May 15, 2024



A worker at a rice warehouse in Divisoria, Manila, takes a break from loading rice sacks onto a truck. The Philippines is expected to import a higher amount of rice than initially estimated this year, solidifying its position as the world's leading importer of this staple grain. According to the latest report by the United States Department of Agriculture, the projected rice import for the Philippines is 3.9 million metric tons this year, up from the earlier estimate of 3.8 million MT in January.

THE House of Representatives on Tuesday approved a bill on second reading that seeks to amend the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).

Lawmakers passed House Bill 10381 through a voice vote, aiming to enhance the government's ability to stabilize rice prices and prevent manipulative pricing and hoarding during periods of market volatility.

The bill grants the National Food Authority (NFA) to require the registration of all grain warehouses to ensure compliance with relevant standards and regulations. Additionally, it allows the NFA to inspect these warehouses to maintain standards related to rice quality and supply.

House Bill 10381 restores the NFA's functions of price stabilization and supply regulation and gives the NFA the power to regulate foreign investment in the rice and corn industries.

The NFA is mandated to maintain sufficient buffer stock sourced from local farmers and cooperatives. If local sources are insufficient, the NFA is authorized to: (1) purchase local milled rice; (2) buy up to 30 percent from accredited importers at cost; and (3), as a last resort, directly import rice with authorization from the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

The bill also enhances the regulatory powers of the Bureau of Plant Industry, allowing it to inspect warehouses to ensure compliance with sanitary, phytosanitary, and food safety standards.

Moreover, the measure authorizes the DA Secretary, upon recommendation from the National Price Coordinating Council or the Local Price Coordinating Council, to declare a food security emergency under conditions of rice supply shortage, sustained price increases, or extraordinary price hikes.

The bill extends the period of validity of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) for another six years.

The proposed amendments extend the validity of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund for another six years and increase its annual appropriation from P10 billion to P15 billion. The fund allocation will now be divided as follows: 53.5 percent for farm mechanization, 29.7 percent for seed components, 3.3 percent for training, 6 percent for rice credit assistance, 4 percent for soil management, 2 percent for pest management, and 1.5 percent for the Rice Industry Development Project Management Office (PMO).

The bill empowers the President, through the recommendation of the DA Secretary, to reallocate the P15 billion rice fund and the excess tariff revenues to the core programs should the need arise.

It also establishes the Rice Industry Development Program Management Office to oversee the effective implementation of rice programs.

Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez expressed the goal of having the RTL amended by July, targeting a reduction in rice prices to below P30, making it more

affordable for Filipino families. Currently, rice prices range between P40 and P45, sometimes exceeding P50.

### **Address issues; support farmers, consumers**

For his part, House Committee on Ways and Means Chairman Joey Sarte Salceda said the bill seeks to address several pressing issues within the rice industry and ensure continued support for rice farmers and consumers alike.

“The House’s expeditious action on the RTL amendments stems from three critical factors,” Salceda explained. “First, the current rice price crisis has exposed the shortcomings of the global rice trade and underscored the importance of domestic support. Second, the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund [RCEF] is set to expire in 2025 and requires a thorough review and renewal. Third, the National Food Authority [NFA] still plays a crucial role in making affordable rice accessible to the poorest of the poor.”

Meanwhile, Salceda and other House leaders are calling on the Senate for prompt action by passing the measure to address the urgent needs of the rice sector and secure the economic stability and food security of the nation.

“President Marcos has achieved record palay yields, but clearly, even the best isn’t good enough. I’m glad that he recognizes this problem and is working to solve the policy issues that underlie it,” Salceda added.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/05/15/bill-amending-rtl-gets-house-2nd-reading-ok/>

**ABANTE TONITE**

# **Ombudsman binawi suspensiyon sa 72 tauhan ng NFA**

May 14, 2024

Binawi na ng Office of the Ombudsman ang suspensiyon sa 72 tauhan ng National Food Authority (NFA) kaugnay ng isyu sa iregular na pagbebenta ng rice buffer stocks sa mga pinapaborang trader.

Pinatawan ang mga ito ng anim na buwang preventive suspension ng Ombudsman ngunit inalis na ito ng NFA dahil hindi na raw ito kailangan dahil naisumite na ang lahat ng dokumento at ebidensiya tungkol sa kaso.

Na-reinstate ang lahat ng warehouse supervisor mula Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol Region, Western Visayas, Central Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Northern Mindanao, Soccsksargen, Caraga Region, at Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

Matatandaan na nasa 141 opisyal at tauhan ng NFA ang sinuspinde dahil sa anomalya.

Kabilang dito sina administrator Roderico Bioco at assistant administrator for operations John Robert Hermano. (Natalia Antonio)

<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2024/05/14/ombudsman-binawi-suspensiyon-sa-72-tauhan-ng-nfa/>

**ABANTE TONITE**

# Mga cong iraratsada pagsusog sa Rice Tariffication Law

May 14, 2024

Pasado na sa ikalawang pagbasa ng Kamara de Representantes ang panukalang amiyenda sa Rice Tariffication Law (Republic Act 11203).

Ang House Bill 10381, na naglalayong matiyak na mayroong sapat na suplay at abot-kaya ang presyo ng bigas, ay ina-prubahan sa pamamagitan ng viva voce voting.

Pinuri ni Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez ang pag-apruba sa panukala na magpapa-lakas sa lokal na industriya ng bigas.

“This amendment is crucial in enhancing the competitiveness and resilience of our rice sector, ensuring that it can withstand challenges and continue to thrive,” sabi ni Romualdez.

“This bill is not just a policy change; it is a powerful pledge to every Filipino. We are committed to ensuring that rice—our staple food—remains affordable and accessible to all. By refining the RTL, we address its shortcomings and provide our farmers with the support they need to thrive in an increasingly competitive market,” dagdag pa nito. Sa ilalim ng panukala, palalaksin ang National Food Authority (NFA) upang masiguro na sapat ang suplay ng bigas at mapangalagaan ang interes ng mga Pilipino.

Target ng Kamara na aprubahan sa ikatlo at huling pagbasa ang panukala bago ang sine die adjournment sa susunod na linggo.

Samantala, umapela naman si House Assistant Majority Leader at Nueva Ecija Rep. Mikaela Angela Suansing sa mga senador na ikonsidera ang agarang pagpasa ng panukala.

“I appeal to our friends in the Senate to please, please, please expedite the passage of this measure, of this very urgent and important measure,” sabi ni Suansing, pangunahing may-akda ng panukala. (Billy Begas)

<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2024/05/14/mga-cong-iraratsada-pagsusog-sa-rice-tariffication-law/>