

CLIPPINGS FOR TODAY MAY 16, 2024

MANILA BULLETIN:

ALLHC opens Sto. Tomas cold storage facility

BY [JAMES A. LOYOLA](#)

May 15, 2024 03:19 PM

AyalaLand Logistics Holdings Corporation (ALLHC) has recently opened its latest facility, ALogis Artico Santo Tomas within the Light Industry & Science Park III in Sto. Tomas, Batangas.

In a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange, the firm said this marks ALLHC's first cold storage facility constructed from the ground up, distinguishing itself from the company's previous acquisitions.



The 5,000-pallet position ALogis Artico Santo Tomas in Santo Tomas, Batangas is ALLHC's fourth cold storage facility

Adding 5,000 pallet positions to ALLHC's existing cold storage portfolio, ALogis Artico Santo Tomas now bolsters the company's capability to 15,300 pallet positions across four facilities.

Equipped with 16 cold rooms featuring temperatures ranging from 5°C to -25°C and powered by renewable energy, the facility underscores ALLHC's steadfast dedication to sustainable practices.

ALLHC said ALogis Artico Santo Tomas conveniently addresses the surging demand for cold storage solutions in the South Luzon region.

Its proximity to Manila via the South Luzon Expressway (SLEX) and the Southern Tagalog Arterial Road (STAR Tollway) ensures accessibility, while the Batangas Port being just an hour's drive away ensures efficient transportation of goods.



L-R: ALLHC Chief Operating Officer Patrick C. Avila, ALI-CMG Head Darwin L. Salipsip, NMIS Region 4A Director Dr. Fernando N. Lontoc, ALI President & Chief Executive Officer and ALLHC Chairman Anna Ma. Margarita B. Dy, Cold Chain Association of the Philippines President Anthony S. Dizon, ALLHC President and Chief Executive Officer Robert S. Lao, ALI Head of Strategy and Transformation Pauline Clarisse K. Feria-Darre, Bureau of Plant Industry Food Safety Officer/Inspector Julie Ann Aragonas, BOI Supervising Investment Specialist Aileen P. Macapagal, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Officer-in-Charge Fish Inspection Unit Sherry Mae Defiño

“We also aim to help address issues of food safety and security, and to support the country’s growing cold chain sector and its supply chain logistics,” said ALLHC President and CEO Robert S. Lao.

The company is looking forward to its latest development further energizing the city of Santo Tomas, and the whole of Batangas.

To ensure adherence to regulatory standards, the facility will be registered with key authorities including the BOI (Board of Investments), NMIS (National Meat Inspection Service), BFAR (Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources), and BPI (Bureau of Plant Industry).

Catering to clients from frozen meat, seafood, chemical industries, and beyond, ALogis Artico Santo Tomas is poised to become a key asset in the supply chain ecosystem.

“We, at NMIS, support the establishment of this kind of facility that can follow standard. I believe the more we have accredited cold storages, the more sources we have of safe meat. This is our aspiration for the protection of the meat-consuming public,” said National Meat Inspection Service Director (Region 4A) Dr. Fernando N. Lontoc.

Board of Investments Supervising Investments Specialist Aileen P. Macapagal noted that, “Food security is a top priority for the government, and the Board of Investments recognizes cold storage facilities as vital investments.

“These projects not only secure food for Filipino families but also generate jobs, having a transformative impact on our economy and national profile,” said Macapagal.



Ayala Land, Inc. President and CEO and ALLHC Chairman of Anna Ma. Margarita B. Dy said “Using the strength of Ayala Land’s strategically located landbank and financial stability, we aim to be a major player in the cold storage space.

“As a relatively new player in the market, our intention is to achieve consistent double-digit growth for this business line in the next 5 years.”

As the company continues to expand its footprint in the cold storage sector, it remains steadfast in its commitment to contributing meaningfully to food security and supply chain efficiency, aligning with broader national priorities.

“The team has high aspirations on what we can do to be a major player in the industry, and in the process, contribute to the country’s goals of food security, and hopefully, also to bring down food prices as we improve distribution all around the country,” Dy said.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/15/allhc-opens-sto-tomas-cold-storate-facility>

MANILA BULLETIN:

'Sana tablan sila': Acidre asks senators to empathize with Pinoys on rice issue

BY [ELLSON QUISMORIO](#)

May 15, 2024 05:44 PM

AT A GLANCE

- House Deputy Majority Leader Tingog Party-list Rep. Jude Acidre is hoping that senators would empathize with the situation of hungry Filipinos and act on the proposed amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).



Tingog Party-list Rep. Jude Acidre (Ellson Quismorio/ MANILA BULLETIN)

House Deputy Majority Leader Tingog Party-list Rep. Jude Acidre is hoping that senators would empathize with the situation of hungry Filipinos and act on the proposed amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).

Acidre had this to say in a press conference Wednesday, May 15, as he noted that time was running out for Senate action on the crucial measure in the second regular session of the 19th Congress.

“I hope that the Senate will join us, especially we have three more session days to go before we go on break for sine die. I hope that our senators, we appeal to their sense of empathy sa ating mga kababayan (for our countrymen) in ensuring ultimately...this is really about making sure na may pagkain sa bawat hapag-kainan ng bawat pamilyang Pilipino (that every Filipino family has food on their),” Acidre said.

The House of Representatives' version of the amendments measure, embodied in House Bill (HB) No.10831, was approved on second reading in plenary Tuesday. On Wednesday, it was momentarily recalled to plenary for minor revision and then re-approved on second reading.

HB No.10831 seeks to revise the five-year-old RTL and in turn give Filipinos the choice of cheaper rice in the market from the National Food Authority (NFA). It restores old functions of the NFA before the regime of tariffication.

But some senators have been lukewarm to this due to reported corruption in the agency.

Acidre insisted that the revising the RTL to empower the NFA was a viable solution. His colleagues have said that there are enough safeguards in HB No.10831 to address the senators' fear of corruption.

“I think the passage of the RTL especially on the part of the Senate is an important step for them to prove na sila din ay kaisa sa paggawa ng solusyon (that they are also part of the solution),” he stressed.

Acidre said that the House has taken a proactive stance of amending the RTL in order to stabilize rice prices, especially during inflation.

“Clearly, this would ensure that there’s a built-in mechanism for competition lalo na kung mataas ang presyo (especially if prices are high). Nandyang ang NFA para magkaroon ng access ‘yung ating ating mga kababayan sa mas murang bigas,” Acidre said.

(The NFA is there to give our countrymen access to cheaper rice.)

The House is poised to approved HB No.10831 oh third and final reading next week.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/15/sana-tablan-sila-acidre-asks-senators-to-empathize-with-pinoys-on-rice-issue>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Mindanao farmers, fishermen receive gov't aid

BY IVY TEJANO

May 15, 2024 06:21 PM

DAVAO CITY – Thousands of farmers and fisherfolk in Mindanao benefitted from financial aid distributed by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. during his visit last week to Zamboanga Peninsula and Sultan Kudarat.



MARCOS (FB)

Marcos spent two days in Mindanao, from May 9 to 10, distributing aid to those impacted by the El Niño phenomenon.

The President first visited Zamboanga Peninsula followed by the Sultan Kudarat province.

He gave P60 million in financial aid and various government services to farmers and fisherfolk in the Zamboanga Peninsula. Marcos turned over P80.9 million to Camp Navarro General Hospital in Zamboanga City for hospital equipment.

Of the P60 million, P10 million was allocated to the city government of Zamboanga, P14.6 million to the province of Zamboanga del Norte, P14.35 million to Zamboanga del Sur, and P20.3 million to Zamboanga Sibugay.

The following day, Marcos led the distribution of P10,000 cash assistance each to 30 beneficiaries from Region 12 in Sultan Kudarat. He also gave P10 million to the General Santos city government, P50 million to South Cotabato, and P50 million to Sarangani.

Marcos said Sultan Kudarat is proof that people of different religions or families can live peacefully. He added that the result of this is not only a peaceful society but also a prosperous economy.

The President assured Mindanao residents and local government units (LGUs) that his administration would explore every possible option to reduce the hardship caused by the El Niño.

He added that he will ensure that needed support is available to those affected by the drought.

In attendance during the two events were Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Laurel Jr., Presidential Assistant for Eastern Mindanao Leo Tereso Magno, Special Assistant to the President Ernesto Antonio Lagdameo Jr., Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Secretary Rex Gatchalian, Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Benhur Abalos Jr., Presidential Communication Office (PCO) Secretary Cheloy Garafil, and Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) Secretary Suharto Mangundadatu.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/15/mindanao-farmers-fishermen-receive-gov-t-aid>

MANILA BULLETIN:

DOF: RTL law tweaks must keep NFA debts in check

BY [XANDER DAVE CEBALLOS](#)

May 15, 2024 03:47 PM

The Department of Finance (DOF) will review the proposed amendment to the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) to ensure that the debts from the National Food Authority (NFA) do not inflate.

Finance Secretary Ralph G. Recto said that the law is working, however, he noted that some tweaks should be done to manage the debts of NFA.

“We're studying it right now. We're looking at it right now. But so far, I think the RTL is working. Okay. Maybe we can tweak it a bit to allow NFA for... for emergency purposes,” Recto told reporters late Tuesday, May 14.

“With the tweaking, we will make sure that the debts of NFA do not balloon,” he added.

In 2018, the debt incurred by the NFA reached P140 billion which it said was due to “cost of government’s commitment and policy to make rice available, affordable and accessible to the poor and marginalized sectors, and to stabilize palay and rice supply and prices at the farm and consumer levels.”

On the other hand, it cut its net loss by 38 percent in 2021 to P9.6 billion from P15.44 billion under the RTL, according to the data from the finance department.

The House of Representatives earlier approved on second reading the measure seeking amendments to restore the price stabilization and supply regulation functions of the NFA.

The bill proposes that the Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary, upon the recommendation of the National Price Coordinating Council (NPCC) or Local Price Coordinating Council (LPCC), may declare a food security emergency when there is a shortage in the supply of rice; sustained increase in the price of rice; or extraordinary increase in the price of rice.

Specifically, it aims to lower rice prices to less than P30 a kilo.

Based on data from the Philippine Statistics Authority, the farmgate price of palay increased to P24.06 per kilogram during the first quarter, up by 6.7 percent P22.56 per kilogram recorded previously.

Meanwhile, palay production stood at 5.23 million metric tons, which is an increase of 5.0 percent from the previous quarter’s 4.98 million metric tons.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/15/dof-rtl-law-tweaks-must-keep-nfa-debts-in-check>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Iloilo under state of calamity due to El Niño

BY [TARA YAP](#)

May 15, 2024 10:06 AM

ILOILO CITY — The province of Iloilo is now under a state of calamity due to the El Niño climate phenomenon.



A FARMER tends to his farm in Tubungan town, Iloilo province affected by the El Niño climate phenomenon. (Tara Yap)

The Iloilo Provincial Board approved the recommendation of the Iloilo Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council during its session on Tuesday, May 14.

Iloilo PDRRMC data said damage caused by El Niño to the agriculture and fisheries sectors in the 42 towns and the component city of Passi has ballooned to more than P1 billion.

Rice production sustained the biggest losses at more than P653 million while corn production suffered damages of P219 million.

There was also a P136-million damage to high-valued crops; P16 million to fisheries production, and almost P200,000 to livestock and poultry production.

With the state of calamity declaration, the administration of Gov. Arthur “Toto” Defensor Jr. can now utilize the Quick Response Fund (QRF) of P61 million.

The local government units (LGUs) of the towns of Sara, Estancia, Bingawan, Balasan, Dingle, Lemery, San Dionisio, Banate, Barotac Viejo, Ajuy, and Mina as well as Passi City had earlier declared state of calamities.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/15/iloilo-under-state-of-calamity-due-to-el-nino>

DA forms climate change panel

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

May 16, 2024 | 12:00am



The gloomy weather causes almost zero visibility at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport in Pasay City on May 13, 2024.

MANILA, Philippines — A climate change panel has been formed by the Department of Agriculture (DA) amid La Niña’s expected damage to the agriculture sector.

The climate resilient agriculture steering committee is tasked with providing strategic direction in mobilizing DA resources to address climate change.

“In exigency of service, the mainstreaming, integrating and implementing of climate-related policies, plans, projects and activities in our department shall be operationalized as a strategic approach to strengthen our climate resilience efforts, manage the risk of climate-related disasters and contribute to the stability of food supply and prices,” said Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

Tiu Laurel issued Special Order No. 703 to operationalize the DA Climate Resilient Agriculture Office, appointing Agriculture Undersecretary for policy, planning and regulations Asis Perez as head of the CRAO.

The committee would harmonize climate action in all DA operating units, including the application of digital technology, Tiu Laurel noted.

It is also authorized to monitor sector-wide climate action planning, he added.

“The CRAO may engage the services of science and technical experts who will form its pool of climate science experts, as may be required in the performance of the office’s role and functions, including the conduct of strategic policy and planning studies,” he said.

The DA is preparing for the worst-case scenario, especially in areas previously hit by La Niña, said Agriculture Assistant Secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa.

“Just like what we did during El Niño, we prepared for the worst. The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said that we will have a moderate El Niño but it said that there is a chance it will become strong to severe, so we prepared for the worst,” he said.

Around 120,000 hectares of plantations are expected to be affected in the worst-case scenario, he noted.

“So far, only half of our projected number of hectares were damaged. It’s a good preparatory procedure that we implemented,” he added.

De Mesa said based on PAGASA’s projection, the country will be hit by La Niña in the last quarter of the year.

“We are already preparing because, in the past, strong typhoons were already experienced as early as August. So number one that is being readied are irrigation systems,” he said.

The DA is coordinating with the National Irrigation Administration to ensure that irrigation systems are prepared.

Efforts are also being made to address possible flooding in case dams overflow.

“Small (water) impounding projects are ongoing and a big budget was allocated this year to implement this,” De Mesa said.

Based on historical data, areas severely affected by La Niña are those on the eastern side of the country, he noted.

“For El Niño, those affected were in the western side. For La Niña, normally, it is the eastern side: Cagayan, Bicol, Eastern Visayas and Eastern Mindanao. These are the potential areas that will be severely hit by La Niña,” he said.

Typhoon damage to the agriculture sector could reach between 500,000 and 600,000 metric tons during a normal year, De Mesa said.

Despite La Niña's threat, the DA expects total rice production of more than 20 million MT, he maintained.

“Our original projected output this year was 20.8 million MT. We reduced it to 20.4 million MT because of expected losses. We can still reach 20 million MT, which is a similar or a little over our projection,” he said.

El Niño's agricultural damage was only 134,000 MT compared to the projected 250,000 MT of losses covering 120,000 hectares, he noted. It also reached P6.3 billion, he said.

“Hopefully, we will not reach this (projection of 250,000 MT) as El Niño is about to end. For La Niña, our worst (projection) is between 500,000 to 600,000 MT (of losses),” De Mesa said.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/16/2355484/da-forms-climate-change-panel>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

DA eyes untapped West Philippine Sea areas to boost fish production

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

May 16, 2024 | 12:00am



This photo taken on Feb. 16, 2024 shows Filipino fishermen aboard their wooden boats (middle L and 2nd L) and Philippine Fisheries and Aquatic Resources personnel aboard their rigid hull inflatable boat (foreground C) sailing past a Chinese coast guard ship (top) near the China-controlled Scarborough Shoal, in disputed waters of the South China Sea.

AFP / Ted Aljibe

MANILA, Philippines — The Department of Agriculture is eyeing to develop untapped areas in the West Philippine Sea to boost the country’s fish production and lessen dependence on importation, a ranking official said yesterday.

In an interview with The STAR, Agriculture Undersecretary for policy, planning and regulations Asis Perez said that there are still unexplored resources in the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

“The fishers do not need to go in areas where there is a threat (of Chinese vessels). The West Philippine Sea is so vast so (the harassment of Chinese) should not deter us. What I am saying is, there are still areas that are relatively peaceful and unexplored. We can tap these areas if we have enough incentives for them (fishers) to do that,” he added.

Perez said commercial fishers should be encouraged to operate in the West Philippine Sea.

“There are not enough (commercial fishers) that operate in the West Philippine Sea. One of the limitations is the tax component these Philippine vessels need to pay to the government. We can assign these ships, private holders in those areas. They can fish there but again, the government needs to provide the incentive as the government is not involved in fishing,” he said.

Perez noted that millions of dollars are being spent every year to import fish.

“We should explore our untapped resources so that there is no need for us to import fish,” he noted.

Perez, a former director of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, vowed to push for the development of the WPS for fishing.

“We know our limitations, but within those limitations, there are areas with no limitations,” Perez said, referring to the presence of Chinese ships in the West Philippine Sea.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/16/2355490/da-eyes-untapped-west-philippine-sea-areas-boost-fish-production>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

DA wants P35 billion budget for rice program next year

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

May 16, 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 — The Department of Agriculture (DA) is seeking a 15 percent increase in the budget of its national rice program (NRP) next year to further boost local rice production and ensure country's food stocks.

The DA is proposing a P35.74 billion fund for the NRP in 2025, 15.7 percent higher than its P30.89 billion allocation this year, based on documents obtained by The STAR.

The NRP is one of the banner and regular programs of the DA focused on improving productivity and competitiveness of rice farmers. The program is separate from the rice competitiveness enhancement fund (RCEF) that was created under Republic Act 11203.

The bulk of the proposed NRP funding or P27.26 billion will still be used for production support services. The amount is 13.1 percent higher than the P24.11-billion allocation this year.

The DA is eyeing a 27.5 percent increase in the extension support services component to P2.61 billion.

Meanwhile, the department wants a P783.94 million fund for the research and development component of the NRP, 30.4 percent higher than its P601.05 million budget this year.

The DA is also proposing higher budget for the NRP's agricultural equipment and facilities distribution as well as irrigation network services program.

For farm equipment and facilities, the DA is seeking nearly P3.6-billion budget. It is also eyeing a P1.48 billion allocation for the irrigation network services program.

Agriculture Undersecretary Christopher Morales said the proposed increase in the budget next year aims expand areas planted with hybrid seeds, sustain hectarage planted with inbred seeds, as well as address issues on pests and diseases.

The department plans to expand the area planted with hybrid rice by 100,000 hectares next year from this year's 1.9 million hectares, Morales told The STAR.

The additional funding will also allow the DA to sustain its funding support to the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) for the estimated 500,000 hectares planted with inbred rice seeds.

According to Morales, the proposed budget factored in the recent increase in the prices of certified inbred seeds, which would increase the procurement costs of PhilRice.

The inbred rice seed areas covered by the funding are on top of the planted areas benefitting from RCEF.

In February, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. approved the P3.8 per kilogram increase in the selling price of certified inbred rice seeds to P41.8 per kilogram because of higher production costs by seed growers.

The higher NRP budget being sought by the DA will also support the expansion in rice farms in the vicinity of the Jalaur River multipurpose project. The expansion is expected to irrigate an additional 9,500 hectares of rice farms in Iloilo.

A portion of the NRP next year would be used to support the department's distribution of fertilizer, biofertilizer, soil ameliorants as well as intensification of monitoring and response against pests and diseases, Morales said.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/05/16/2355361/da-wants-p35-billion-budget-rice-program-next-year>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Fake witness, fake mayor, fake rice sufficiency



VIRTUAL REALITY - Tony Lopez - The Philippine Star

May 16, 2024 | 12:00am

Two Senate committees, on dangerous drugs and on women, are wasting valuable hours focusing on two things:

- One, a polluted witness, a dismissed former policeman, who claims Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. took cocaine 12 years ago; no less than the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency has disowned the witness’ so-called documents.

Senate committee on dangerous drugs chair Sen. Bato dela Rosa has given the witness valuable prime time audience, obviously to spite President Marcos who, he believes, has given the go-signal for him to be arrested one of these days for alleged human rights violations, by International Criminal Court agents.

Senator Bato was President Digong Duterte’s national police chief who enforced the previous regime’s bloody anti-drugs war. Casualties ranged from 6,200 to 30,000, depending on who you are talking to. In January this year, the hulky former police boss was ashen faced as he appealed to Marcos Jr., saluting him as a man who keeps his word after the President declared the Philippines would not cooperate with the ICC.

- Two, a Chinese woman who came out of nowhere to become mayor of Bamban, Tarlac in Central Luzon.

Per questioning by Senator Risa Hontiveros, Alice Guo, 38, has no record of birth, in China or in the Philippines; no record of having gone to school in the Philippines, no record of childhood and no record of who her parents were, except that her dad taught her fluent Mandarin while home schooling throughout her pre-adult life. In May 2022, she won as mayor of Bamban (pop. 78,000) with just a one percent margin, or by 468 votes.

My stand in this amazing case is this: if you believe the Philippines came from Malakas and Maganda, the first Filipinos, from out of a bamboo tree, why not a woman mayor manufactured from a sprawling illegal gambling complex at the back of Bambang's City Hall? If an entire archipelago can come out of a bamboo tree, why not a mayor coming right out of an online gaming operation? In gambling, there is such a thing as a jackpot.

Meanwhile, the Philippines does not have enough rice. Whatever rice stocks there are, are either hoarded by speculators or are priced so high they are beyond the reach of the common man.

Economic growth, while seemingly high, has stalled, thanks to – high food prices which trigger pesky inflation; Bangko Sentral's refusal to cut interest rates and geopolitical tensions with two major wars raging, in Ukraine-Russia and Gaza, Palestine, while the United States and China are engaged in internecine trade war.

In March 2024, rice prices spiked 25 percent to 56 percent, according to a PhilSTAR report citing Department of Agriculture data, from P32-P40 a kilo in March 2023 to P50 per kilo. The heat wave and El Niño could shave up to 2.6 million tons of milled rice from annual production.

Per Philippine Statistics Authority data, the rice shortage is 23 percent of demand, with a rice self-sufficiency ratio of 77 percent since 2022, the lowest in 20 years.

Since 2022, rice imports have kept climbing, by 30 percent. The world's largest rice exporter, India, has severely curbed rice exports (down 28 percent in the first quarter 2024), sending rice prices to multi-year high, which highs will last throughout this year.

Philippine inflation has been high, at 3.7 percent in March 2024 and 3.8 percent in April.

So the raging issue of the day is not about an anti-Marcos lying drug agent nor a small town Central Luzon mayor of doubtful Philippine citizenship and provenance. It is food.

Food is 50 points of the 100-point consumer basket of the poor. Of the 50 points of food, rice alone accounts for 15 points.

“It's still all about rice. The inflation rates of all major commodities are in the single digits, except rice, and rice alone,” says Albay Rep. Joey Salceda, an economist, and chair of the House ways and means committee.

“The management of this rate – within our inflation targets, but still painful for the poorest households must be centered primarily on rice,” reckoned Salceda.

The House of Representatives under Speaker Martin Romualdez is leading the effort to amend Republic Act (RA) No.11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).

The proposed amendments include restoring the National Food Authority (NFA)'s power to directly sell relatively cheaper rice to the market and expected to give massive relief to consumers.

However, the Foundation for Economic Freedom (FEF) has cautioned Congress against amending the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL or RA 11203 of 2019), particularly on restoring the graft-ridden NFA's power to import and retail rice.

FEF insists on reducing rice tariff from 35 percent to 10 percent, which it claims "would lower the landed cost of imported rice and exert downward pressure on its wholesale and retail prices."

FEF hails the RTL as the most significant reform in the rice policy landscape since the 1970s.

RTL enabled the country to become fully compliant with the international commitment to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and eased NFA's staggering P170-billion debt incurred by its "buy high and sell low" strategy which FEF dismissed as a sure formula for bankruptcy.

RTL removed rent-seeking activities in the rice value chain, from procurement to the logistics, the handling and marketing of rice. RTL tamed rice inflation from 2019 up to 2022.

RTL generated around P80 billion in tariff revenues, which money was intended to enhance the productivity of small rice farmers, the poorest of the poor.

If indeed government must import rice, FEF suggests instead the Philippine International Trading Corporation (PITC), which is under the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). It was a dormant state corporation and therefore has no known record of corruption.

<https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2024/05/16/2355379/fake-witness-fake-mayor-fake-rice-sufficiency>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Reinstated NFA employees to receive backpay

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

May 16, 2024 | 12:00am



The National Food Authority-Negros Occidental.

pna.gov.ph / PNA Bacolod file photo

MANILA, Philippines — Employees of the National Food Authority whose suspension over the anomalous sale of the country’s rice buffer stock has been lifted by the Office of the Ombudsman will receive backpay upon their reinstatement, according to the NFA.

NFA acting administrator Larry Lacson yesterday said the computation of backpay of the 72 reinstated employees would start from the date of effectivity of their suspension.

“We are happy and thankful to the ombudsman for lifting the suspension,” Lacson told The STAR yesterday.

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.

“The submission by the NFA management of all documents to the ombudsman helped in the immediate lifting of the suspension,” Lacson said.

Reinstated employees will receive their salaries and other benefits starting from April 15, he said.

Lacson expressed hope the suspension of other NFA employees, who are not part of the controversy, would also be lifted.

“We want (other suspended) employees to return to work, especially if they are innocent,” he said.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said the ombudsman’s decision would allow the NFA to open warehouses that remain padlocked and help procure additional palay supply.

Tiu Laurel said the agency’s own investigation into the sale of buffer stocks should be completed soon, and the results would be submitted to the ombudsman.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/16/2355492/reinstated-nfa-employees-receive-backpay>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Farmers oppose allowing NFA to import rice anew

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

May 16, 2024 | 12:00am



So said the NFA failed to use its P8-billion budget for palay procurement last year, so the agency has P17 billion this year which it can use to procure 566,666 metric tons of palay or 351,333 MT of rice.

[Philstar.com / File](#)

MANILA, Philippines — Farmers' group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) chairman Rosendo So maintained that there is no need to give additional power to the National Food Authority as he opposed proposals to allow the NFA to import rice.

So said the NFA failed to use its P8-billion budget for palay procurement last year, so the agency has P17 billion this year which it can use to procure 566,666 metric tons of palay or 351,333 MT of rice.

“This is good for 10 days, or more than the required nine days buffer stock,” So said.

He added that while SINAG backed amendments of the Rice Tariffication Law or Republic Act 11203, it should only cover the increase in the funding allocated under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund from the current P10 billion to P30 billion.

“These include P12 billion for cash assistance to farmers tilling three hectares; P6 billion for inbred rice seed, development and propagation; P7 billion for rice farm machineries; P3 billion loan from Landbank and Development Bank of the

Philippines; P1 billion for expended rice credit assistance and rice extension services,” So said.

The RTL has nothing to do with the spike in the retail price of rice and the flooding of imported rice in the market, he said.

“If the government wants to sell rice at P30 per kilo, it can be done but it needs to be subsidized by at least P20 to P22 per kilo,” he said.

Meanwhile, Speaker Martin Romualdez said House Bill 10381 or the move to amend certain provisions in the RTL is aimed at making “high-quality rice affordable” to every Filipino.

This “marks a significant stride towards strengthening our rice industry and ensuring broader access to affordable, high-quality rice for all,” he 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,” Romualdez said.

HB 10381 was approved overwhelmingly through a voice vote in plenary session, whose objective is to amend provisions in the five-year-old RTL and bring back the power of NFA to import as well as sell the staple in the market.

Rep. Mark Enverga, chairman of the House committee on agriculture and food security, assured the senators and the public in general that they definitely have “safeguards” in restoring the power of the NFA in helping stabilize the price of rice.

“In fact, NFA will have a very limited presence here – only in case of emergency situations and importation is merely a last resort,” Enverga explained, assuaging fears raised by Sen. Cynthia Villar about the risks of giving back the power to NFA, which may be abused.

On the other hand, House Deputy Speaker David Suarez and Rep. Jude Acidre expressed hope the Senate will change its mind about giving the power back to NFA, citing the history of corruption the agency had in previous administrations.

“Let’s not forget this is not an issue of corruption, but rather an issue of food security and price of rice and we should bring our attention to the main agenda, which is the price of rice, which is food security, that should be our focus,” Suarez said.

For his part, Finance Secretary Ralph Recto also backed the proposal to amend the RTL, specifically returning the powers of the NFA to help in price stabilization.

“Maybe we can tweak it a bit to allow NFA [to buy and sell] for emergency purposes,” he said.

President Marcos has expressed his intention to certify RTL amendments as urgent.

Earlier this week, the Foundation for Economic Freedom (FEF) also bucked moves to bring back NFA powers, emphasizing that this would reverse reforms achieved by the RTL.

FEF maintained that higher rice prices are due to factors beyond the control of the RTL such as the Ukraine-Russia conflict, export ban of India and the intensifying conflict in the Middle East.

As of last month, rice inflation eased, but remained elevated at 23.9 percent.

“We want to reduce rice prices and I think global prices will be going down by September,” Recto said. – **Louise Maureen Simeon, Delon Porcalla**

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/16/2355520/farmers-oppose-allowing-nfa-import-rice-anew>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Put animal welfare under DA's meat office? Pets are not meat, says Poe

By: [Maila Ager](#) - Reporter / [@MAgerINO](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 04:59 PM May 15, 2024



Senator Grace Poe | PHOTO: Senate PRIB

MANILA, Philippines – Pet animals are not meat that can be placed under a meat inspection office of the Department of Agriculture (DA), according to Senator Grace Poe.

Poe made the remark during Wednesday's hearing of the Senate committee on agriculture on bills, strengthening the Animal Welfare Act.

At the start of the hearing, panel head Senator Cynthia Villar declared that animal welfare would fall under the National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS).

January Nones, an official of the NMIS, then explained that its current mandate that covers animal welfare is “the animal welfare for food animals.”

Nones added though that they would have a unit to focus on animal welfare policies, including those being proposed in the bills.

It was at this point that Poe questioned the idea [of placing the animal welfare under](#) the meat inspection office.

“Ma’am parang hindi yata maganda na nasa ilalim ng national meat inspection?” she said.

(It doesn’t seem right to place it under the national meat inspection)

“Please rename hindi lang sila meat...” she added.

(Please rename they are not just meat.)

In Senate Bill No. 2458, Poe proposes the [creation of a new animal welfare bureau](#). She, however, recognized during the hearing the administrative concerns against forming another agency focused on animal welfare.

“But to lump it under the National Meat Inspection kasi livestock parang sinasabi natin pagkain yung ibang mga animal e baka magkalituhan lang,”Poe said.

(But to lump it under the National Meat Inspection because it’s livestock seems like we’re implying that other animals are food, which might cause confusion.)

Her sentiment was shared by Heidi Caguioa, president of the organization Animal Kingdom.

“Yes, the great concern is putting animal welfare in one livestock agency or category. It’s the vision of animal welfare advocates to have a separate entity or group or even a division to really focus on animal welfare,” Caguioa.

But Villar argued it would be logical to put the animal welfare under the DA’s livestock, poultry and dairy office, and not on the agency’s plants and crops or the fishery divisions.

“Hindi ka naman pwede sa poultry, hindi naman kayo poultry, hindi naman kayo dairy. Ang logical sa inyo would be livestock kasi may mga variety ang livestock,” she explained.

(You can't be classified as poultry, you're not poultry, you're not dairy either. The logical classification for you would be livestock because livestock encompasses a variety of animals.)

Poe later advised the resource persons to think of a title “that will not confuse pets as livestock.”

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1940965/poe-rejects-idea-of-putting-animal-welfare-under-das-meat-office>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Cynthia Villar floats ‘population control’ for stray animals

By: [Maila Ager](#) - Reporter / [@MAgerINO](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 12:48 PM May 15, 2024



Feeding stray dog. (File photo courtesy of HYACINTH LUMAGBAS / Facebook)

MANILA, Philippines — Like human beings, the population of stray dogs and cats is growing and needs to be controlled, according to Senator Cynthia Villar.

Villar mentioned the possibility of implementing “population control” for [stray animals](#) when the Senate committee on agriculture tackled on Wednesday several proposal that seek to strengthen the country’s animal welfare law.

Presiding over the hearing as head of the panel, the senator expressed concern over the growing population of stray animals which, she said, “are mainly a human health hazard, because of the spread of diseases such as rabies, leptospirosis and other parasites.”

The senator cited a recent report that pegged the number of stray dogs and cats at 13 million.

This is why, she said, they have already started a free "Libreng Kapon at Ligate" project for dogs and cats in the cities of Las Piñas and Bacoor.

"Because there are plenty stray dogs around and I'm afraid that they will bite the people," Villar said during the hearing.

"Alam nyo, ang problema natin, marami tayong mahihirap and then, nanganak ng marami yung kanilang mga dogs and cats. Ang sabi a cat is capable of bringing 12 cats a year and dog daw, mga 4?"

(You know, our problem, we have many poor people, and then their dogs and cats give birth to many. It's said that a cat is capable of producing 12 kittens a year, and a dog, about 4?)

"So, pag mahirap at nanganak yung cat nila ng 12, at yung dog nila 4, ano naman ang ipapakain nila dun? So they become stray dogs and they are all around," she pointed out.

(So, if they're poor and their cat gives birth to 12 kittens, and their dog has four puppies. What will they feed them? That's why they become stray dogs and they are all around.)

Worse, she said, is when someone dies after contracting rabies from stray dogs.

This recently happened to a 13-year-old who died after [contracting rabies](#) from a dog bite months before.

"So, thats our problem so dapat para ring mga tao, we do population control especially for the poor kasi they won't have money to feed the dogs and cats born out of their dogs and cats..." Villar said.

Senator Grace Poe, meanwhile, inquired if there have been sufficient animal welfare programs in place and if communities, especially in rural areas, have adequate access to quality veterinary healthcare services.

Poe, one of those pushing for stricter measures against animal cruelty, noted a reported shortage of veterinary personnel in smaller municipalities.

“And even cities that have veterinarians have to contend with inadequate resources,” she said in her opening statement.

According to Poe, her proposed legislation — Senate Bill No. 2458 — would improve the capacity of the Department of Agriculture in addressing animal welfare issues.

She is suggesting the formation of a proper bureau for this purpose which would be given sufficient budget and permanent personnel.

“With the help of all stakeholders, I am sure we can come up with a law enabling the creation of a society where we can co-exist harmoniously with those beings which have provided us with much love and loyalty,” she said.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1940864/cynthia-villar-floats-population-control-for-stray-animals>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Senate starts review of Baguio charter

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 05:02 AM May 16, 2024



CROWDING Baguio City, the country's summer capital, has been dealing with problems associated with urbanization like crowding, dwindling water supply and diminishing forests and land. A new city Charter replacing the 1909 Charter crafted by the Americans hopes to address these problems. —EV Espiritu

BAGUIO CITY, Philippines — The Senate on Tuesday began correcting flaws in the modern Baguio City Charter (Republic Act No. 11689), which had upset sectors here for technically downgrading the city's status as an independent, highly urbanized local government and for granting another agency power in the titling of city properties.

The upper chamber is reviewing House Bill No. 7406 that was recently passed by the Lower House to amend erroneous passages of RA 11689 which lapsed into law on April 11, 2022, and replaced Baguio's original 1909 Charter (Republic Act No. 1963).

The first charter was penned by Supreme Court Justice George Malcolm when he codified statutes issued in the 1900s by the American colonial government when he served as a law clerk.

HB 7406 removes a section of RA 11689 which requires lawyer Brenner Bengwayan, the secretary to the city council, to transmit all actions taken by the council to the Benguet provincial board for review and approval.

Section 23, Paragraph C, No. 4 of the revised Charter says one of the tasks of the city council secretary was to “forward to the Sangguniang Panlalawigan (provincial board) copies of duly approved ordinances in the manner provided in Sections 56 and 57 of the Local Government Code of 1991, as amended.” By law, this provision downgraded Baguio to a component city of Benguet, the city council says.

At the Tuesday public hearing organized by the Senate committees on local government, on public works, on finance, and on electoral reforms and people’s participation, Vice Mayor Faustino Olowan criticized lawmakers who introduced this provision for their “carelessness.”

The revised Charter had been opposed by the majority of the city council since March 2022 when nine of its members asked then President Rodrigo Duterte to veto the law because of its mistakes.

Cut, paste

Baguio Rep. Marquez Go, coauthor of HB 7406 and the sponsor of the revised Charter, testified at the hearing that this provision was not in the original bill he filed and was “inadvertently and erroneously inserted by the House committee on local government during the preparation of its substitute bill.” Sen. JV Ejercito, who chairs the Senate’s local government committee, said he would study these errors which had been attributed by some officials to “cutting and pasting” paragraphs of the Local Government Code (Republic Act No. 7160).

Citing Baguio's position paper, Olowan also urged lawmakers to remove a provision separating the Camp John Hay reservation from the Baguio townsite as spelled out in Section 55 of the revised Charter.

The law states: "The Camp John Hay Reservation covering a total land area of 6,254,105 square meters (625 hectares) subject to final survey, which was transferred to the BCDA (Bases Conversion and Development Authority) by virtue of Republic Act No. 7227, as amended, otherwise known as the 'Bases Conversion and Development Act of 1992,' as amended, is not part of the Baguio Townsite Reservation." The townsite refers to Baguio lands that are alienable and disposable.

Section 55 was both "superfluous and an oddity" for a city Charter, Olowan said, adding there may have been an "implied advantage" given Camp John Hay's custodian, BCDA, when the Charter excluded only the former John Hay Air Station which has commercial value being a tourism destination and a special economic zone.

Territorial boundaries

He said the revised Charter did not mention other civil and military reservations that exist in Baguio, such as the Dairy Farm administered by the Department of Agriculture, or military camps governed by the Philippine Military Academy just outside the townsite.

He said referencing only Camp John Hay in the Charter could have been a way of legitimizing by law the former John Air Station's expansion from 570 ha as stipulated by the BCDA law (RA 7227) to 650 ha. By contrast, Section 3 of RA 11689 does not set the territorial boundaries of Baguio.

The revised Charter also makes BCDA's affiliate company a ranking member of a Special Committee on Lands. HB 7406 modifies this provision of the law by including BCDA's estate manager, John Hay Management Corp. (JHMC), in the land's committee only for matters related to Camp John Hay. But it elevates JHMC to the rank of vice chair in the committee, which the city council opposed.

But the council indicated it was “appreciative” of another HB 7406 amendment that restores Baguio’s entitlement to proceeds from the sale of townsite lands, which was enshrined in the 1909 document and removed by RA 11689.

Councilor Arthur Allad-iw also asked Ejercito to hold a public consultation in Baguio regarding a second Charter revision because it would impact on all of its residents. — Vincent Cabreza

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1941081/senate-starts-review-of-baguio-charter>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Padilla seeks amendments to rice tariff law to restore NFA's role

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

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 12:06 PM May 15, 2024



Workers stack rice at a National Food Authority (NFA) warehouse on Visayas Avenue in Quezon City on Wednesday, January 15, 2020. (INQUIRER file photo / GRIG C. MONTEGRANDE)

MANILA, Philippines — Senator Robin Padilla wants the rice tariffication law amended as he seeks to restore the role of the National Food Authority (NFA) in managing the country's supply chain.

Padilla's amendatory measure—Senate Bill No. 2672—was filed on Tuesday.

He emphasized that reinstating the NFA's power would stabilize the rice price, adding that supply functions “will be regulated.”

“Ultimately, access to cheaper rice will be more feasible for poor Filipinos,” Padilla's measure reads.

In line with this bid, the senator seeks to grant the following functions to NFA:

- Require the registration of all grains warehouses and maintain a national database of such registrations;
- Inspect warehouses as necessary to ensure compliance with standards related to rice quality and supply;
- Collect and analyze data on rice trade activities for informed policy and operational decisions;

Besides reinstating the power of the NFA, Padilla also seeks to increase the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund and extend its validity for another six years.

Padilla's measure was lodged in light of the House of Representatives' ongoing push for amending the Rice Tariffication Law.

Senators Cynthia Villar, Sonny Angara and Nancy Binay earlier said the government needs to carefully study plans to reinstate the mandate of NFA to buy and sell rice.

The three senators recalled how corruption hounded the agency when it still had the power to sell rice, supposedly at a cheaper price.

However, agriculture chief Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. clarified that the proposed amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law do not necessarily seek to bring back the "full power" of the NFA.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1940833/padilla-seeks-amendments-to-rice-tariff-law-to-restore-nfas-role>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Senators told: House open to questions on rice tariff law amendments

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

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 11:57 AM May 15, 2024

MANILA, Philippines — Nueva Ecija 1st District Rep. Mikaela Angela Suansing has assured senators that her communication lines would be open to questions on the proposed Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) amendments. She said that the Senate and the House of Representatives can work together to lower rice prices.

Suansing said in a press briefing that the Senate can help the House improve House Bill (HB) No. 10381, which contains the proposed RTL amendments.

“I would like to again appeal to our friends in the Senate to please pass the [...] amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law. From our side, we have been working very hard on the part of the House, we held marathon hearings, deliberations in the plenary, so that the debates would be finished,” Suansing said on Tuesday.

“Please, please, please po, and our communication lines are open. We are here, anything we can do for us to work together, to craft the best version of the bill. Our communication lines are open,” she added.

According to Suansing, the RTL amendments would make the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund more effective in boosting farm productivity.

Under HB No. 10381, some of the National Food Authority (NFA) functions will be restored, like monitoring warehouses and regulating rice prices, especially during emergencies. The NFA is also mandated to buy local grains, with importation being the last option.

“It (amendments) would greatly benefit the poorest of the poor families. Allowing them to gain access to cheaper rice in the market. So, we appeal, from a personal stand

and as the representative of the first district of Nueva Ecija, which is the rice granary of the country,” Suansing said.

“So I wish our friends in the Senate would help pass the proposed amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law so that the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund will be more effective in improving the productivity and assistance to the agricultural sector and to our farmers,” she added.

Suansing’s appeal comes after some senators feared that giving back some of NFA’s mandates might lead to corruption again. According to Senator Cynthia Villar, the RTL was crafted for the purpose of liberalizing trade and preventing corrupt activities in NFA.

“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,” she said.

During Tuesday’s session, [HB No. 10381 was approved on second reading](#) via viva voce or voice voting.

If the proposal is enacted into law, a new Section 5 in R.A. No. 8178 would be placed, giving 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.

The Agriculture Secretary can also, 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.

For his part, House Speaker Ferdinand Martin [Romualdez believes the amendments can bring down rice prices](#) by P10 to P15 per kilogram by June if enacted.

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

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1940830/senators-told-house-solon-open-to-questions-on-rice-tariff-law-amendments>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Bill seeking to amend Rice Tariffication Law sent back to House plenary

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

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 04:34 PM May 15, 2024



Marikina Rep. Stella Quimbo during one of the deliberations in the House of Representatives. File photo / From a video posted on the Facebook page of the House of Representatives

MANILA, Philippines – The bill seeking amendments to Republic Act No. 11203, or the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) , was brought back to the House of Representatives plenary on Wednesday for additional changes.

During the session, Marikina 2nd District Rep. Stella Quimbo asked that Page 8 of House Bill (HB) No. 10381, which was approved on second reading on Tuesday, be changed.

Page 8 of HB No. 10381 seeks amendments to Section 13 of R.A. 8178, the Agricultural Tariffication Act, as amended by RTL in 2019. It specifically discusses the excess in annual tariff revenues generated from rice importation.

“On page 8, delete lines 16 to 18 and in lieu thereof, put after the words ‘shall be earmarked by Congress and included in the General Appropriations Act (GAA) of the following year’,” Quimbo said.

“The paragraph shall now read as ‘Provided, furthermore, that if the annual tariff revenues from rice importation exceeds P15 billion in any given year, within a six-year period following the effectivity of this act, the excess tariff revenues shall be earmarked by Congress and included in the General Appropriations Act (GAA) of the following year’,” she added.

Nueva Ecija 1st District Rep. Mikaela Angela Suansing accepted the amendments pushed by Quimbo. The bill, including the new amendments, was again approved on second reading.

HB No. 10381 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.

If HB No. 10381 is enacted, the Agriculture Secretary can also, upon the recommendation of the National Price Coordinating Council (NPCC) or Local Price Coordinating Council (LPCC), may 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.

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

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1940952/bill-seeking-to-amend-rice-tariffication-law-sent-back-to-house-plenary>

BUSINESS WORLD:

GMO crops pushed to counter climate disasters

May 15, 2024 | 9:03 pm



RENZO D SOUZA—UNSPLASH

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

THE PHILIPPINES should consider cultivating crops classified as genetically modified organisms (GMOs) to mitigate the impact of climate disasters like typhoons and El Niño.

“When you look at the scale of damage that’s been caused, then I think it’s important for the sector to look at ways in which they can combat that,” Rory O’Donnell, an agriculture and trade expert for business solutions firm Penta, told *BusinessWorld*.

He added that GMO crops are already being planted in parts of Europe to alleviate drought conditions.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. has ordered the Solicitor General to seek clarification and reconsideration of the decision to ban on the use of GMOs.

Mr. Marcos said that the decision would have a “widespread” impact on agriculture and food security.

“It basically is a means of accelerating natural genetic changes in crops,” Mr. O’Donnell said.

“The idea behind that is to develop crops that are drought resistant or more resistant to pests and therefore reduce the requirement for pesticides and other artificial additions,” he added.

The Court of Appeals (CA) revoked the biosafety permits for the commercial propagation of Golden Rice and Bt Eggplant, citing the potential risk to the environment and the health of consumers.

It also stopped field testing and imports until all measures were taken to ensure they were safe.

In a Senate hearing on Tuesday, the Department of Agriculture said it is also seeking reconsideration of the CA's decision.

"There is a general communications problem around GMOs and new genomic techniques, where it's very easy for people who are against them to say that there is a theoretical risk that is hard to assess and therefore, we shouldn't do anything," Mr. O'Donnell said.

He added that the agriculture industry continues to face the impact of climate change worldwide.

"The degree of climate change and the implications that's having across the world for agriculture — I think we have to start looking at all the tools that are available. That's not to say you don't have to have rigorous scientific processes in place to ensure they're safe," Mr. O'Donnell said.

Damage and loss caused by El Niño have hit P6.35 billion as of May 8, with rice and corn the most affected crops. The total affected area was 111,702 hectares, impacting 121,389 farmers and fisherfolk.

Additionally, the DA said that it is currently preparing for above normal rainfall brought about by La Niña in the second half of the year.

PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration), the government weather service, said there is a 62% chance of La Niña setting in between June and August.

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/05/15/595351/gmo-crops-pushed-to-counter-climate-disasters/>

ABANTE:

NIA tiniyak P29 kada kilo ng bigas sa Agosto

- **Abante News**
- **May 15, 2024**



Makakaasa ang publiko na may pagkukunan ng supply sa ipinangakong P29 kada kilo na presyo ng bigas sa buwan ng Agosto.

Ito ang tiniyak sa Bagong Pilipinas public briefing ni Administrator Eduardo Guillen ng National Irrigation Administration sa harap ng pagdududa ng ilang grupo na baka ningas kugon lamang ito pagsapit ng Agosto.

Ayon kay Guillen, inaasahan ng ahensiya na makakapagbigay ng 100,000 kilo ng bigas pagdating ng Agosto o katumbas ng 10,000 sako ng palay na maibebenta sa outlets ng Kadiwa ng Pangulo.

“May contract farming po ang NIA ngayon, around 40,000 hectares. So ang expected nation na output po nation dito is more than 100,000 kilograms of rice. So kapag ten kilograms per sack ay mga 10,000 sacks ano po,” ani Guillen.

Ang P29 kada kilo ng bigas ayon sa opisyal ay inisyatiba ng irrigators association bilang pasasalamat sa tulong ng gobyerno sa kanilang sektor partikular ang mga kagamitang pansaka at rice processing systems na ibinigay sa kanilang sektor. (Aileen Taliping)

<https://www.abante.com.ph/2024/05/15/nia-tiniyak-p29-kada-kilo-ng-bigas-sa-agosto/>

NFA misses Q1 quarter palay procurement target

By Janine Alexis Miguel

May 16, 2024

THE National Food Authority (NFA) missed its palay (unmilled rice) procurement target for the first quarter of 2024, securing only 4,353.3 metric tons (MT) or 6.48 percent of its goal.

In its quarterly accomplishment report, the NFA said that the total procured palay is equivalent to 87,067 bags, lower than the target purchase of 1.343 million, or 67,145 MT, from January to March of this year.

The latest figure also indicates a 71.14- percent decline from the 301,770 bags or 15.088.5 MT of palay purchased for the same quarter last year.

"The low procurement can be attributed to the active participation of traders offering higher farm gate price that is above the government support or buying price," the NFA said.

As of March 31, the agency recorded a total expected milled rice inventory at 41,553 MT.

The NFA said that it will continue to provide the best service to farmers and farmers organizations, to entice them to sell their produce to the government.

Last month, the NFA started procuring palay from farmers at higher prices as part of its effort to increase its rice buffer stocks.

The NFA Council approved on April 11 a higher buying price for palay, ranging from P17 to P23 per kilo (kg) for fresh or wet palay and from P23 to P30 per kg for dry.

The latest prices are higher than the previous P23 per kg for dry and P19 per kg for wet. The NFA said that it ditched the single pricing system, and there will be no uniform price nationwide like before.

Based on the data from the Philippine Statistics Authority, the average farmgate price of palay increased annually by 30.5 percent in April or to P24.52 per kg from P18.79 per kg.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/16/business/top-business/nfa-misses-q1-quarter-palay-procurement-target/1946751>

Recto: NFA debt won't balloon with RTL changes

By Niña Myka Pauline Arceo

May 16, 2024

FINANCE Secretary Ralph Recto has given an assurance that the debt of the National Food Authority (NFA) will not increase with the proposed amendments to Republic Act (RA) 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).

Recto told reporters on Tuesday that they are "more or less" in favor of restoring the NFA's authority to import and sell rice to help reduce or stabilize prices of the staple but said that they do not expect NFA's debts to balloon.

"We should not allow that. [Even] with the tweaking, we will make sure that the debts of NFA do not balloon," he said.

Recto mentioned they are currently studying the proposal, noting that the RTL is generally effective but may need slight adjustments to allow NFA involvement during emergencies.

"We're looking at it right now. So far, I think the RTL is working...maybe we can tweak it a bit to allow NFA for emergency purposes," he said.

"We want to reduce rice prices and I think global prices will be going down by September. If you look at the market, the prices are going down. Between now and then, it [tweaking] is still timely," he added.

The Foundation for Economic Freedom has raised concerns about the proposed changes to RA 11203, particularly the restoration of the NFA's authority to import and sell rice at lower prices.

The group said the RTL helped the country meet the country's commitments to the World Trade Organization, reduce the NFA's debt by over P170 billion, generate around P80 billion in tariffs, and curb rice inflation until 2022.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/16/business/top-business/recto-nfa-debt-wont-balloon-with-rtl-changes/1946750>

Damaged industry to affect Negros

By Eugene Y. Adiong

May 16, 2024

BACOLOD CITY – Negros Occidental Gov. Eugenio Jose Lacson expressed concern over the impact of a drought on the sugarcane industry and the economy of the province.

Lacson said the drought "will impact on Negros Occidental because sugar is still our primary agricultural product."

"So we can expect less purchasing power from consumers," he said.

He said that Negros Occidental incurred the biggest damage to sugarcane because it is the biggest sugar producer in the country.

"But if rain comes soon, it will minimize the damage because sugarcane is a sturdy crop," Lacson pointed out.

The Sugar Regulatory Administration last week reported that the drought damage to sugar and molasses in Western Visayas has reached P215,700,114.

Negros Occidental was the hardest hit in the region with damage at P200,178,856.

Negros Occidental supplies 60 to 65 percent of the domestic sugar consumption.

In a radio interview, United Sugar Producers Federation President Manuel Lamata supported the decision to import sugar during the "gap" between the El Niño and the rainy season.

Lamata said El Niño created exceptionally dry conditions that affected sugar production.

He said the current season was something he had never seen before, and that he isn't sure if farmers could recover.

"If you look at crops, you'll feel pity. It's like it's been burned. It is dried up. I don't know if they can recover even if it rains. Really, really bad," lamented Lamata.

The situation may have delayed the production of sugar, Lamata said.

Nevertheless, he expressed confidence that the farmers would begin to replant once the rains arrive.

But there would be a "gap" while waiting for the harvest, during which imports could enter the market.

"If it rains within the next few weeks, the replanting will begin. I saw on the ground that there would be a lack of supply... The call to import 185,000 to 200,000 metric tons of sugar is correct," Lamata said.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/16/regions/damaged-industry-to-affect-negros/1946779>

DUE TO EL NIÑO DAMAGE

Iloilo placed in state of calamity

By Rjay Zuriaga Castor

May 16, 2024

ILOILO CITY – The provincial government of Iloilo has declared a province-wide state of calamity due to the staggering agricultural loss and water shortage caused by the El Niño phenomenon and the ongoing dry season on Tuesday, May 14.

The provincial board, in its regular session on Tuesday, approved the April 29 resolution of the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (PDRRMC) recommending the declaration.

The declaration will allow the provincial government to utilize its P75.78-million budget from the PDRRMC trust fund for its El Niño mitigation, response and recovery programs.

The budget is allocated to the affected sectors, including agriculture, environment, veterinary and health.

The agriculture sector received the largest portion of the budget, with P42.78 million intended for the provision of alternative livelihoods to affected farmers, crop insurance assistance, and the procurement of pump and engine sets.

Meanwhile, the environment sector received P20 million for the construction of large-scale cisterns in the provincial district hospitals and the establishment of small-scale water impounding dams or micro-mini hydropower plants.

The veterinary sector has been allocated P3 million, while the health sector received P10 million.

Meanwhile, the resolution requesting the reprogramming of the PDRRMC's 2020–2023 trust fund amounting to P215 million has been sent to the provincial board's Committee on Disaster Relief for further review.

According to PDRRMC data, the El Niño phenomenon has caused significant damage in Iloilo province, totaling P1.025 billion.

Rice crops have lost P653 million, corn crops with P219 million and high-value crops with P136 million. The fisheries sector has reported P16 million in damages, and the livestock and poultry sectors have lost P196,552.

As of May 12, 15 out of the 43 towns in the province have declared a state of calamity in response to the severe impacts of the El Niño phenomenon.

Iloilo, being the hardest-hit area in Western Visayas, is the second province in the region to declare a province-wide state of calamity, following Antique's declaration on April 18.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/16/regions/iloilo-placed-in-state-of-calamity/1946782>

PhilRice: Use heat-tolerant varieties

By Leander C. Domingo

May 16, 2024

THE Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) under the Department of Agriculture is encouraging farmers to plant heat-tolerant varieties that can yield up to 7 tons per hectare (tons/ha) or above the national average of around 4 tons/ha.

"This is in preparation for the projected temperature increases," DA-PhilRice said, urging farmers to test the adaptability of these rice varieties to withstand high temperatures in their localities.

Career scientist Norvie Manigbas of PhilRice said that data spanning 50 years suggests a temperature increase of 1–2 degrees Celsius in the future, highlighting the need to utilize National Seed Industry Council (NISC) Rc 600 and Rc 602 to the fullest as these varieties can endure temperatures up to 38 C. Both heat-tolerant rice varieties were developed by PhilRice.



Manigbas said NISC Rc 600 and Rc 602, the country's first high-temperature-tolerant rice seeds, display exceptional traits crucial for resilience in high-temperature conditions.

"These can withstand temperatures up to 37 C and even up to 38 C in controlled environments like glasshouses," he said.

Manigbas explained that the NSIC Rc 600 under heat stress yields 6.3 tons/ha and, in normal conditions, between 6.5 and 7 tons/ha. This rice variety matures in 110 days and exhibits resistance to both deadhearts and whiteheads.

On the other hand, he said NSIC Rc 602 yields 6.2 tons/ha, matures in 109 days and shows resistance to a whitehead.

"These varieties demonstrate intermediate resistance to blast, bacterial leaf blight, sheath blight, brown planthopper and green leafhopper," Manigbas said.

The DA-PhilRice is encouraging farmers who are interested in testing the varieties to inquire and access them through PhilRice's Business Development Division.

Manigbas also explained that heat stress during the vegetative phase can cause leaf discoloration and accelerated growth, potentially reducing the yield potential of heat-sensitive rice varieties.

"Temperatures exceeding 35 C during the reproductive stage can lead to yield reductions starting at 14 percent, escalating to 14 to 20 percent as temperatures rise further," he added.

Manigbas also advocates for intensified promotion and deployment of these varieties to increase adoption.

"With the challenges of climate change, PhilRice is continuously developing rice varieties that can tolerate high temperatures," he said, adding that this is with the support of the Tsukuba, Japan-based Institute for Agro-Environmental Sciences of the National Agriculture and Food Research Organization.

According to PhilRice, more breeding materials are being tested to develop high-temperature tolerance varieties.

It said the flowering stage of these materials is planned between April 15 and May 15, a period typically experiencing the highest temperatures during the dry season based on 15 years of weather data.

"The development of high-temperature-tolerant seed varieties is a meticulous process involving years of breeding and testing. Researchers evaluate various characteristics, including grain filling, fertility and resistance to pests and diseases, to ensure the viability and effectiveness of the selected varieties," Manigbas said.

Varieties including NSIC Rc 600, NSIC Rc 480, and IR (International Rice) 64 are being studied in flooded and controlled irrigation using the Micrometeorological Instrument for Near-Canopy Environment of Rice (Mincer).

Mincer records temperature and humidity data every two minutes and calculates the heat index once flowering begins.

Manigbas said they have advanced materials in observational nursery trials, some of which were nominated for national cooperative tests in high-temperature ecosystems.

"We aim to acquire new varieties within two years, but for now, let us encourage more farmers to adopt NSIC Rc 600 and 602 in areas with high temperatures," he said.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/16/business/agribusiness/philrice-use-heat-tolerant-varieties/1946704>

SM Foundation trains 72 more farmers

By The Manila Times

May 16, 2024

SM Foundation continues to empower local communities through its Kabalikat sa Kabuhayan (KSK) on Sustainable Agriculture program, with the foundation holding its Moving Forward ceremony at SM City Baguio, celebrating the graduation of three KSK batches from Benguet.



Culminating their 14-week hands-on training under the Kabalikat sa Kabuhayan program of SM Foundation, farmers proudly harvest their crops at a recent harvest festival. SM FOUNDATION PHOTO

The event recognized the accomplishment of 72 graduates from Sitio Liwliw, Barangay Camp 4, Tuba, and Sitio Calamay, Barangay Bayabas, Sablan in Benguet, as well as Purok 1, Happy Hollow, Baguio City.

The farmers completed a 14-week comprehensive training on sustainable farming and business techniques, equipping them with

the knowledge and skills to contribute to local food production and security.

"Through the KSK program, the SM Foundation aims to uplift vulnerable Filipino farmers by enhancing agripreneurship and economic opportunities and ensuring food security in communities across the Philippines," the foundation said in a statement.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/16/business/agribusiness/sm-foundation-trains-72-more-farmers/1946702>

50% mechanization coverage of rice farms proposed

By The Manila Times

May 16, 2024

THE extension of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) for another six years should ideally result in the mechanization of the country's rice farms by around 50 percent, according to the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech).

PHilMech Director and Scientist IV Dionisio Alvindia said that ideally, a 50-percent mechanization coverage should be attained for the country's rice farms if the extension of RCEF pushes through.

He added that a 50-percent mechanization coverage for the country's rice farms will make the cultivation of the staple more competitive and lessen the need for imports.

"The current RCEF-Mechanization Program spearheaded by PHilMech will result in rice farms having a 20-percent coverage in terms of mechanization after the six years of its implementation. Hence, we at PHilMech back moves to extend RCEF to ensure that 50 percent of rice farms are covered by mechanization. This would be a very good goal in making the country's rice industry more competitive," Alvindia said.

He said that PHilMech is well-prepared for the extension of the RCEF-Mechanization Program as the agency has put in place the systems to bid out, acquire and distribute farm machines to qualified beneficiaries who are farmers cooperatives and associations (FCAs), and local government units (LGUs). Also, PHilMech has been training qualified FCAs and LGUs on the operation and maintenance of farm machines, ensuring their long-term utilization.

Alvindia said the extension of RCEF and its mechanization component will also encourage more FCAs and LGUs to acquire their own farm machines and to mechanize agriculture as they will witness the benefits of transitioning to modernized agriculture for another six years.

"One very good benefit of the RCEF-Mechanization Program is the beneficiaries were able to demonstrate the advantage of farm mechanization and modernization. Before the RCEF-Mechanization Program started in 2019, most rice farmers in the country were hesitant to mechanize their operations and preferred to stick to the traditional labor-intensive system of cultivating the staple," he added.

"But with farm labor getting scarce in many regions, the need to mechanize rice farming becomes imperative. Also, the RCEF-Mechanization Program allowed qualified FCAs and LGUs to get farm machines that would otherwise be hard to acquire because of cost," Alvindia said.

PHilMech has also been getting requests from the FCAs and LGUs that got their farm machines under the program to extend RCEF so more rice farmers can also get their farm machines at no cost.

Alvindia and the PHilMech family is also thankful to those who are advocating for the extension of RCEF, which include Sen. Cynthia Villar, the primary author of Republic Act (RA) 11203 that created RCEF; Nueva Ecija 3rd District Rep. Rosanna Vergara; Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.; and Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan, also the head of the National Economic and Development Authority.

Under RA 11203, PHilMech gets P5 billion annually from 2019 to 2024 to distribute various agricultural equipment to qualified FCAs and LGUs. The P5 billion is sourced from tariffs applied on rice imports and is channeled to a fund called the RCEF. All the agricultural equipment distributed by PHilMech under the RCEF-

Mechanization Program are in-kind or grants, or are at no cost to qualified beneficiaries nationwide.

At the end of February 2024, PHilMech has already obligated P24.9 billion for the procurement of farm machines under the RCEF-Mechanization Program. The agency intends to complete the distribution of P30 billion worth of farm machines under the program.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/16/business/agribusiness/50-mechanization-coverage-of-rice-farms-proposed/1946701>

Rice wastes eyed for bioenergy

By Leander C. Domingo

May 9, 2024

A PROJECT to utilize waste from rice farms as biofuel has taken off the ground through a collaboration involving the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca) and three more entities.

The Rice Straw Biogas Hub (RSBH) project also involves Straw Innovations Ltd., Koolmill Systems and Aston University in the United Kingdom.

Searca Center Director Glenn Gregorio said this groundbreaking collaborative project aims to significantly reduce greenhouse gases (GHG) by transforming agricultural rice production residue and straw into clean energy resources such as biogas through cutting-edge technologies.



Participants learn about the circular connection of waste segregation, anaerobic digestion, composting and greening programs at the Environmental Sanitation Center in Tunasan, Muntinlupa City. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

According to Searca, the project will help reduce 300 million–400 million tons of rice straws, or "dayami," burned every year across Asia, which is a source of GHG.

It cited a Philippine Rice Research Institute report in 2016 showing that 70 percent of rice farmers in the Philippines burned rice straws despite the environmental laws prohibiting the improper disposal of such wastes. The laws include the Solid Waste Management Act of 2000 (Republic Act 9003) and the Clean Air Act of 1999 (RA 8749).

"The RSBH project, beyond introducing advanced technological development, emphasizes understanding the farmers' viewpoints and involving them as crucial partners in the global fight against climate change," Gregorio said.

Biogas can also be an alternative to liquefied petroleum gas and other fossil-based energy sources commonly used for household cooking.

Earlier this year, the Emerging Innovation for Growth Department (EIGD) of Searca conducted a two-day event, "Training on Biogas Production from Agricultural Wastes," focusing on imparting the technical know-how of converting and utilizing rice straw and other agricultural wastes into useful energy.

Participated by 19 agricultural officers and lead farmers from Laguna and Nueva Ecija, the training included lectures at Searca's Umali Auditorium in Laguna and practical and hands-on sessions on biogas production at the Pacwood Site's biogas facility in Tunasan, Muntinlupa.

During the training, Nur Azura Binti Adam, Searca deputy director for programs, highlighted the economic uses of rice straw, stating that "burning dayami is burning money."

Searca EIGD program head Eric Reynoso also gave an overview of the RSBH initiative and introduced the center's role in analyzing the

rice value chain from pre-planting to marketing and creating an enabling environment to improve rice straw management.

In his lecture, a biogas expert, Victor Luis Jr., explained that converting rice straw into renewable energy anaerobically or without oxygen is possible, citing the use of acid- and methane-forming microbes.

In an interactive discussion of how different anaerobic digesters work, Luis said that although any organic material could be a potential substrate, dried leaves such as rice straws are among the raw materials that can produce burnable biogas.

Viable digester model from Vietnam

Ngo Th  Thanh Truc, Faculty of Environment and Resource Economics deputy head in the School of Economics at Can Tho University in Vietnam, presented her team's farmer-friendly digester utilizing rice straw and water hyacinth as inputs.

She said the university's digester model, made from high-density polyethylene or HDPE and called Subprom, can potentially replace digesters made from concrete and plastic.

Truc said that Subprom requires low maintenance, has been proven more sustainable, and costs just a little more than \$400, with a lifespan of up to 15 years.

She said this is unlike common digesters that need animal manure from cows or swine because Subprom digesters can run up to two months with hyacinth and rice straw as feedstocks.

"This is an impressive innovation, especially for households that own less than three swine or none," said Truc, adding that Subprom digesters are being adopted by Vietnam's Ministry of Agriculture and Development.

Along with EIGD program specialist Lichelle Dara Carlos, Luis suggested partnering with Truc's team to introduce Subprom digesters to the Philippines.

Looking at Muntinlupa's model

At Tunasan, the RSBH team and the participants from Nueva Ecija and Laguna learned more about the biogas conversion process through the waste management initiative of the city's Environmental Sanitation Center (ESC).

Engineer Vincent Alon, Muntinlupa's ESC Solid Waste Management Division head, demonstrated the city's waste segregation and management initiatives.

In essence, Muntinlupa's initiative to attain a circular economy also includes using kitchen, market, and sometimes industrial and agricultural wastes for the consumption of animals and as feedstock for its portable digester.

Specifically, feedstocks and animal manure are converted to biogas that can be used for cooking, while the digestate can be turned into compost or fertilizers for use in vegetable or horticultural gardening. Its 1-cubic meter biogas digester undergoing pilot testing was designed by the Department of Science and Technology's Industrial Technology Development Institute (DoST-ITDI).

"The digester can process 210 kilograms of the substrate into methane, fueling half an hour of cooking," said David Herrera, DoST-ITDI senior engineer.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/09/business/agribusiness/rice-wastes-eyed-for-bioenergy/1945276>

Letran students oriented on farming

By Leander C. Domingo

May 16, 2024

STUDENTS and faculty members of the Colegio de San Juan de Letran Calamba participated in the first run in the Philippines of the series titled "Sowing Seeds: Cultivating Youth's Future in Agriculture," a career orientation organized by the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca).

Searca Director Glenn Gregorio said the career orientation on May 2, through the center's Partnerships Unit, was participated by 175 senior high school students who were accompanied by 10 faculty members of the Colegio de San Juan de Letran Calamba.

The initiative is part of the Searca's Center's Young Forces for Agricultural Innovation (#Y4AGRI) program.



Some 175 senior high school students from the Colegio de San Juan de Letran Calamba, Philippines, accompanied by 10 faculty members, participate in the first run of the Sowing Seeds: Cultivating Youth's Future in Agriculture, a career orientation organized by the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate

Study and Research in Agriculture through its Partnerships Unit as part of the Center's Young Forces for Agricultural Innovation or #Y4AGRI program on May 2, 2024. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Gregorio said Sowing Seeds aims to step up efforts in promoting agriculture not only to young Filipinos but also the youth sector in Southeast Asia.

"The orientation also seeks to spotlight its potential as a promising career path by showcasing the opportunities awaiting those who pursue higher education in agriculture and related disciplines," he said.

During the event, Gregorio highlighted agriculture's interdisciplinary nature and how it intertwines with diverse fields, such as engineering, law, business and communications. He also explained its significance in shaping economies, innovation and society.

Rico Ancog, one of the Outstanding Young Scientists of 2019 and The Outstanding Young Men in 2022, served as the event resource person, underscoring the role of agriculture in ensuring food security and contributing to economic growth.

Also a professor and the dean of the School of Environmental Science and Management in University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB), Ancog provided a glimpse of the status of the Philippine agriculture sector, including its ironies, such as the country heavily depending on agriculture but facing substantial job losses.

"One contributing factor is the youth's disinterest in agriculture," he said.

"The youth is moving from rural to urban cities for more lucrative opportunities. We want you to realize what you, as a youth, can do about agriculture because your role and contribution to the sector is valuable," Ancog said.

He explained that young people perceive agriculture as outdated, labor-intensive and financially unrewarding. To change that mindset, he said the youth should know what agriculture has in store for them.

Ancog also said that agriculture offers a wide range of career paths beyond traditional farming, including in research, technology, marketing and international development.

The students also were given a tour of the Searca Hub for Agriculture and Rural Innovation for the Next Generation (Sharing) and a robotics demonstration at the Sharing Café, the International Rice Research Institute, the UPLB National Institute of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology or Biotech, Milka Krem, and the UPLB Accelerating Growth through One Research and Extension in Action Techno Hub and One-Stop Shop.

Gregorio said the Sowing Seeds orientation will also run across other Southeast Asian countries.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/16/business/agribusiness/letran-students-oriented-on-farming/1946703>

DOF open to tweaks in rice tariffication law

By Angela Celis

May 16, 2024



RTL clipped the functions of NFA as a buffer-stocking agency, procuring local palay for emergency rice stocks. (NFA file photo)

The Department of Finance (DOF) is open to the proposed amendments of the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), specifically to allow the National Food Authority (NFA) to sell rice during emergency situations.

Finance Secretary Ralph Recto told reporters the DOF is studying the proposed amendments to the RTL.

“We’re looking at it right now. We do have a position. But so far, I think the RTL is working. Maybe we can tweak it a bit to allow NFA (to sell)... for emergency purposes,” Recto said.

The President earlier said he would certify as urgent the proposed amendments to Republic Act No. 11203 or the RTL to lower rice prices in the country.

House Speaker Martin Romualdez has been pushing for the RTL amendment to allow the NFA to sell rice in the markets.

The House recently approved on second reading the proposed amendments to the law.

Asked if he is in favor of the provision, Recto said: “More or less. But we don’t expect that the NFA debts will balloon. So, we should not allow that. With the tweaking, we will make sure that the debts of NFA do not balloon.”

Meanwhile, Recto also told reporters that policy rates are likely to remain steady.

“The way I see it, unless something changes between now and then, I think more or less, steady,” Recto said.

“But I expect, moving forward, I expect rates to go lower. Maybe not this Monetary Board meeting, but it’s possible that within the end of the year, there could be a possible reduction in rates,” he added.

https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/dof-open-to-tweaks-in-rice-tarrification-law/

Big debate over rice

By Malaya Business Insight

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May 16, 2024

BEING the staple food of most Filipinos, rice is the country's most important crop. Yet our leaders, from the President to the lawmakers in Congress, seemed clueless on what really should be done to stabilize the price of rice and to ensure its adequate supply for the population.

It used to be that the National Food Authority (NFA) had the authority to import rice from abroad whenever it thought that the nation's buffer stock was nearing danger levels. The NFA also buys "palay" from local farmers during the harvest season, helping both the farmers and the consumers by doing away with middlemen.

'As things stand, and with President Marcos' backing, it is likely that the RTL amendments will pass both the House and the Senate, despite the objections from Villar.'

They took that mandate away from the NFA by passing the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL). The objective of this law is to ensure enough supply of grain by easing its importation by private businessmen, with the view of lowering rice prices. It did not happen because the price of rice in the market is much higher than when the RTL was not yet around.

Now President Marcos Jr. wants to amend the Rice Tariffication Law to revive the NFA's power to import rice, even promising to certify the bills to this effect as urgent. House Speaker Martin Romualdez, who has a tight control of the congressmen, dutifully complied.

On Tuesday, the House of Representatives approved on second reading the measure seeking amendments to the RTL. The chamber approved in plenary through voice voting House Bill (HB) 10381, which seeks to restore the price stabilization and supply regulation functions of the NFA.

The bill proposes that the Agriculture Secretary, upon the recommendation of the National Price Coordinating Council or Local Price Coordinating Council, may declare a food security emergency when there is a shortage in the supply of rice; a sustained increase in the price of rice; or extraordinary increase in the price of rice. When such cases occur, the NFA may use existing inventory, primarily intended for buffer stocking, to supply areas where price increases or supply shortages occur.

It also mandates the maintenance of sufficient buffer stock requirements sourced from local farmers' organizations and cooperatives. If the buffer stock requirement is still not sufficient, the NFA is allowed to, in the following order: purchase locally milled rice; purchase up to a maximum of 30 percent brought in by accredited importers at cost; and, as a final recourse, once all domestic sources have been exhausted, directly import rice, subject to explicit authorization from the agriculture secretary.

In the Senate, Sen. Cynthia Villar immediately flagged the proposed move, citing instances of alleged corruption hounding the NFA. Villar, who chairs the Senate's panel on agriculture, food, and agrarian reform and is also one of the proponents of the law, said only importers and middlemen are veering themselves away from the RTL. She noted that the measure, which is set to expire in 2024, has to be renewed.

Villar emphasized that no one wants to discard RTL but she expressed apprehension about empowering the NFA again in selling and buying rice. Even Sen. Imee Marcos expressed concerns about the idea of returning to the NFA the responsibility of importing rice, still citing the agency's long history of corruption and inefficiency. The NFA is an attached agency of the DA, and even when President Marcos was the DA secretary, bad elements in that agency continued their nefarious activities without letup, as news reports and legislative investigations proved.

This prompted Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel to explain thus: "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."

As things stand, and with President Marcos' backing, it is likely that the RTL amendments will pass both the House and the Senate, despite the objections from Villar. We are on the cusp of trusting the NFA again in the highly sensitive rice trade, and we can only hope that this time, this agency will not fail the public.

https://malaya.com.ph/news_opinion/big-debate-over-rice/

P6.55B ‘AgriNegosyo’ loan program drying up from under collection

By Peter Tabingo

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May 16, 2024

STATE auditors have expressed concern about the continuity of the P6.55 billion “AgriNegosyo” loan program of the Department of Agriculture (DA) for small farmers and fisherfolks (SFFs) after data in the last four years showed dismal collections out of the P4.947 billion that has been loaned out.

This was revealed in the 2023 audit of the Agricultural Credit Policy Council (ACPC), an attached DA agency.

The AgriNegosyo lending program, launched by the Duterte administration in 2020, was supposed to fast-track growth in the agriculture sector and help in the country’s economic recovery from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Specifically, the program aims to provide accessible and affordable credit to eligible borrowers for the financing of their capital requirements that will enable them to boost the efficiency, productivity and profitability of their farm as well as non-farm income-generating activities,” the audit team said.

AgriNegosyo offers SFFs and micro and small enterprises (MSEs) zero interest loans payable up to five years.

Individual farmers or fisherfolks may avail of a maximum loanable amount of P300,000; micro enterprises up to P3 million; small enterprises up to P15 million and farmer and fisherfolk cooperatives up to P15 million.

Program records obtained by the Commission on Audit showed up to P6.55 billion have been released by the ACPC to “partner lending conduits (PLCs)” from 2020 to 2023, of which P4.95 billion was reported to have been borrowed by SFFs and MSEs.

Auditors said P38.24 million was borrowed in 2020, P1.624 billion in 2021, P1.59 billion in 2022, and P1.689 billion in 2023 for a total of P4.947 billion representing 75.49 percent of the amount released to partner lending conduits.

However, as of December 31, 2023, the COA noted that only P965.63 million has been collected or only 19.52 percent of the loan exposure.

https://malaya.com.ph/news_news/p6-55b-agrinegosyo-loan-program-drying-up-from-under-collection/

DA tackles risk of climate-linked disasters

Ada Pelonia May 15, 2024



Department of Agriculture Secretary Franciso Tiu Laurel Jr.

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) is bolstering the government’s climate resilience efforts and rolling out initiatives to manage the risk of climate-related disasters.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. issued Special Order (SO) 703 which ordered the operationalization of the Climate Resilient Agriculture (CRA) office through a steering committee that would “provide strategic direction and oversee in mobilizing the department’s resources and capacities in the implementation of functions and responsibilities.”

The order took cues from the DA’s Memorandum Circular (MC) 4, Series of 2020 which institutionalized the CRA office to “respond to the growing requirements on disaster and climate resiliency for agriculture and fishery sector.”

The CRA steering committee will be composed of these DA offices: the Undersecretary for Policy, Planning, and Regulations as Chairperson and the Undersecretary for Operations and Undersecretary for Special Concerns and for Official Development Assistance (ODA)-Foreign Aid/Grants as Co-Chairpersons.

The following bureaus will also be part of the committee as members: Bureau of Agricultural Research, Bureau of Soils and Water Management, Bureau of Agriculture and Fisheries Standards, Field Operations Service, Planning and Monitoring Service, Policy Research Service, Project Development Service, and Office of the Initiative on Identified Special Concerns.

In addition to the functions stated in MC 4, the committee shall:

- Strengthen, harmonize, and mainstream climate action in all DA operating units, including the application of digital technology in coordination with the Field Programs Operational Planning Division of the Field Operation Service;**
- Conduct monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of sector-wide climate action planning, programming, budgeting, and implementation, and knowledge generation and management, including foresight modeling and green financing in coordination with the Planning and Monitoring Service;**
- Coordinate and harmonize policy-related advocacy activities with the Food, Agriculture, and Fisheries Policy Division of the Policy Research Service;**
- Perform other tasks as instructed by the Secretary.**

“The CRAO may engage the services of science and technical experts who will form its pool of climate science experts as may be required in the performance of the Office’s role and functions, including the conduct of strategic policy and planning studies,” the order read.

SO 703 will also establish the DA’s respective Regional Executive Directors (RED) as regional climate focals to complement the enhanced climate action planning and implementation at the central level, further creating the Regional Climate Action Facilitation Focal (RCAFF) which would serve as CRAO counterpart at the regional level.

“The proposed structure will standardize currently varying organization arrangements to plan and implement climate action at the regional level,” it read.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/05/15/da-tackles-risk-of-climate-linked-disasters/>

Excess tariff take from RTL for Congress earmarking

Jovy Rodriguez (Lyceum of the Philippines University), Jasper Emmanuel Y. Arcalas Cai U. Ordinario & Jovee Marie N. Dela Cruz

May 15, 2024

THE House of Representatives on Wednesday reconsidered the second-reading approval of House Bill (HB) 10381 amending the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) in order to reinstate a previously deleted amendment.

Marikina Rep. Stella Luz Quimbo said the reconsidered version of HB 10381 now specifies that excess tariff revenues will be earmarked by Congress and included in the General Appropriations Act.

This adjustment also removes the earlier provision that granted the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA) the authority to determine where these excess funds should be allocated.

The measure extends the validity of the RCEF for another six years and increases 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).

House Committee on Agriculture and Food Chairman Mikaela Angela Suansing, one of the bill's authors, said an average of P29 billion annually from tariff revenues is expected.

Meanwhile, leaders of the House of Representatives on Wednesday called on the Senate to take swift action on proposed amendments to RTL, aimed at easing the burden on Filipinos struggling with high rice prices.

In a press conference, Deputy Speaker David Suarez expressed hope that the Senate would act promptly on the RTL amendment bill, which includes provisions to stabilize rice prices and ensure the viability of the local rice industry.

With rice prices steadily increasing, Suarez emphasized the need for government intervention to curb excessive hikes.

“Without government intervention, there will be no regulatory function or balancing activity to counteract traders and importers of rice,” Suarez said, emphasizing the government’s crucial role in maintaining market stability.

The House is expected to approve the bill on third reading before adjourning next week.

Some senators have opposed the bill due to concerns about the provision stating NFA regaining authority to sell and import rice, citing past corruption allegations.

Food security, not corruption

While acknowledging concerns about corruption within the NFA, Suarez urged senators not to lose sight of the primary objective, which is ensuring food security and affordable rice prices for all Filipinos.

“I totally understand where the senators are coming from, given the recent reputation of certain NFA officials, but let’s not forget this is not an issue of corruption but rather an issue of food security and the price of rice,” Suarez pointed out.

Further addressing allegations of corruption and anomalies within the NFA, Suarez expressed confidence in the government’s ability to investigate and prosecute wrongdoings.

“Regarding corruption and alleged anomalies within the NFA, I’m sure the proper government agencies can investigate and prosecute those responsible. Congress can also use its oversight functions to address these issues,” he said.

In the same press conference, House Deputy Majority Leader Rep. Jude Acidre underscored the urgent need for Senate collaboration to address the pressing issue of rising rice prices, which continues to burden Filipino households.

“We often hear from our friends in the Senate that addressing the continuous rise in the prices of essential goods, especially rice, is a priority,” said Acidre, who also chairs the House Committee on Overseas Workers Affairs.

“Passing the RTL amendments in the Senate is an important step in proving their commitment to finding solutions,” he stressed.

Acidre said the House has taken a proactive stance of amending the RTL in order to stabilize rice prices, especially during inflation.

Acidre appealed to senators to prioritize the welfare of Filipinos by supporting the RTL amendment bill. “We have three more session days before the sine die break. I hope our senators will show empathy for our citizens by ensuring there is food on every Filipino family’s table,” Acidre said.

Lanao del Norte 2nd District Representative Mohamad Khalid Dimaporo, chairman of the House Committee on Muslim Affairs, called on the Senate to explore alternative solutions if necessary.

“If we need the NFA to achieve these goals, then the Senate should consider a better alternative,” he added.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/05/15/excess-tariff-take-from-rtl-for-congress-earmarking/>

‘Costly imports drive up prices of local palay’

Ada Pelonia

May 16, 2024



Despite the sweltering summer heat, a resident of Barangay Burgos in Pakil, Laguna, checks on a palay farm in Estaca port, ready for harvest in the next three months, embodying hope for a fruitful yield despite challenging conditions.

The average farmgate price of unmilled rice jumped by nearly a third in April, according to the latest data released by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Data from the PSA indicated that the farmgate price of palay went up by 30.5 percent to P24.52 per kilo in April, from P18.79 per kilo a year ago.

“Farmgate prices refer to the prices received by farmers for the sale of their produce at the first point of sale net of the total marketing cost paid by the farmers,” the PSA said.

“These prices are determined at the farmgate or first point of sale transactions and are also known as ‘producer prices’.”

Roehlano Briones, a senior research fellow at the Philippine Institute for Development Studies, said the surge in global rice prices made local palay more expensive.

“Simply put import prices, the price of rice in the world market has also gone up. Philippines is the world’s biggest importer, importing something like almost 30 percent of our rice requirement,” Briones told the BusinessMirror in a phone interview.

“Definitely kapag nagmahal sa pandaigdigang merkado, mamahal din ‘yung bigas locally and kapag nagmahal locally, it will cascade down the supply chain. They will be scrambling for more palay to mill into rice locally and that will drive up palay price.”

On a monthly basis, however, the average farmgate price of unmilled rice in April dipped slightly from the P24.55 per kilo recorded in March.

PSA data showed that the highest increase was recorded in Western Visayas, where the average price registered a year-on-year growth of 40.7 percent. The average palay farmgate price in Western Visayas reached P27.48 per kilo in April 2024, higher than the previous year’s P19.53 per kilo.

The slowest year-on-year increase in farmgate prices was recorded in the Bicol Region at 18 percent. The average palay price went up to P22.19 per kilo in April 2024 from P18.80 per kilo in the same period last year.

On a month-on-month basis, the highest increase in April was recorded in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

Data also showed that the average farmgate price in the Caraga region contracted by 6.1 percent to P21.57 per kilo in April from P22.96 per kilo a month ago.

The highest average palay farmgate price in Ilocos Region reached P27.98 per kilo in April, higher than the previous year’s P20.40 per kilo.

This was followed by Western Visayas where farmgate prices averaged P27.48 a kilo; Central Luzon, P25.81; Cagayan Valley, P25.62; Cordillera Administrative Region, P25.60; and BARMM, P25.57 per kilo.

The lowest average palay farmgate price was registered in Eastern Visayas where it reached P19.78 per kilo; Caraga, P21.57; Calabarzon, P23.34; Soccsksargen, P23.61; Zamboanga Peninsula, P24.23; and Mimaropa, P24.67 per kilo.

The PSA said the monthly data on the farmgate prices of palay are obtained from the results of the Farm Price Survey for Palay conducted on the last five days of the reference month.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/05/16/costly-imports-drive-up-prices-of-local-palay/>

NTA more worried about impact of La Niña on tobacco farms

Ada Pelonia

May 16, 2024

La Niña is more harmful to tobacco than El Niño as heavy rainfall and floods could cause extensive damage to crops, according to an official of the National Tobacco Administration (NTA).

“When it rains for 24 hours and the standing tobacco crops are soaked, they will die,” NTA-Pangasinan branch manager Roger Madriaga said in a radio interview.

He said, however, that El Niño also caused damage to standing tobacco crops and increased the production cost of farmers who had to use more irrigation water.

Madriaga said farmers in Pangasinan who delayed their planting were hit hard by the weather phenomenon. Some of the affected plantations are in Alcala and San Fabian, according to NTA.

“In Alcala, NTA recorded 110 hectares (ha) out of 592 ha of tobacco plantations that were affected by El Niño. In San Fabian, some 50 has were affected.”

Madriaga said, however, that these areas represent only 6 percent of Pangasinan’s 2,426 ha of tobacco farms.

“The affected areas had low yield because their tobacco was stunted by the lack of water from their shallow tube well source.”

Meanwhile, Madriaga said the NTA considers the rampant smuggling of cigarettes as the agency’s “biggest challenge.”

“The (country) has already lost billions of pesos in cigarette taxes due to smuggling.”

Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) Commissioner Romeo Lumagui Jr. earlier ordered the agency’s officials to step up their campaign against illegal vape and cigarette traders, who are considered tax evaders.

“It is criminal in nature. The nationwide forces of the BIR have their orders to continue raiding and filing criminal cases against any individual or business that is involved in the illicit vape and cigarette trade,” Lumagui was quoted as saying in a statement.

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) indicated that tobacco production in the first quarter rose by 9.5 percent to 11,360 metric tons (MT) from the previous year’s 10,370 MT.

In a report on industrial crops it published last June 2023, the PSA said Virginia tobacco was the most produced variety in the first quarter of 2023.

“The bulk of tobacco production came from Ilocos Region with 9.26 thousand metric tons or 89.3 percent share to the total tobacco production for this quarter, while

Cordillera Administrative Region came next with 9.0 percent share.”

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/05/16/nta-more-worried-about-impact-of-la-nina-on-tobacco-farms/>

ABANTE TONITE

Balik NFA rice nakabitin sa isyu ng korapsiyon

May 15, 2024

Hiniling ng mga kongresista sa mga senador na aksyunan ang panukala na mag-aamiyenda sa Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) upang bumaba ang presyo ng bigas.

Sa isang press conference nitong Miyerkoles, Mayo 15, sinabi ni House Deputy Speaker at Quezon Rep. David Suarez na kailangang manghimasok na ang gobyerno upang matugunan ang labis na pagtaas sa presyo ng bigas.

“Ngayon, kung walang government intervention tayong gagawin, that will serve as some sort of competition to the traders and the importers of rice. There won’t be a regulatory function or a balancing activity to be done by government,” paliwanag ni Suarez.

Sa ilalim ng panukala, muling bibigyan ng kapangyarihan ang National Food Authority (NFA) na magbenta ng bigas sa panahon ng emergency gaya ng kung mayroong kakulangan sa suplay sa mga palengke.

Nagpahayag ng pagtutol sa panukala ang ilang senador dahil sa mga nakaraang alegasyon ng korapsiyon sa NFA.

Aminado naman ukol sa isyung ito si Suarez subalit nagpaliwanag ang mambabatas na ang isyu aniya rito ay tungkol sa seguridad ng pagkain at presyo ng bigas.

“Pagdating naman po sa corruption at mga alleged anomalies na nangyari sa NFA, I’m sure the proper agencies of the government can look into this, can persecute them to put them behind bars,” dagdag pa nito.

Iginiit naman ni House Deputy Majority Leader at Tingog party-list Rep. Jude Acidre ang kahalagahan na magkasundo ang Kamara at Senado upang matugunan ang isyu ng mataas na presyo ng bigas na lubhang nakakaapekto sa mga mahihirap na pamilya.

Ito na aniya ang pagkakataon para patunayan ng Senado na kaisa sila sa paggawa ng solusyon sa mga problema ng bansa.

“I think the passage of the RTL especially on the part of the Senate is an important step for them to prove na sila din ay kaisa sa paggawa ng solusyon,” dagdag pa ni Acidre.

Pahayag naman ni House committee on Muslim affairs chairperson at Lanao del Norte Rep. Mohamad Khalid Dimaporo na kung ayaw ng Senado na muling mag-import at magbenta ng bigas ang NFA, dapat itong magbigay ng mas magandang alternatibo. (Billy Begas)

<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2024/05/15/balik-nfa-rice-nakabitin-sa-isyu-ng-korapsiyon/>