

CLIPPINGS FOR TODAY MAY 02, 2024

MANILA BULLETIN:

Was it effective? House panel begins review of Rice Tariffication Law

BY DEXTER BARRO II

May 1, 2024 12:30 PM

AT A GLANCE

- The House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture and Food launched on Tuesday, April 30, its evaluation on the effectiveness of the five-year-old Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) on the country's agriculture sector.
- Enacted in 2019 under Republic Act (RA) No. 11203, the RTL lifted quantitative restrictions on rice and introduced tariffs to protect local rice producers.



(Keith Baongco/MANILA BULLETIN)

The House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture and Food launched on Tuesday, April 30, its evaluation on the effectiveness of the five-year-old Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) on the country's agriculture sector.

The panel's chairman, Quezon 1st district Rep. Mark Enverga, underscored the need to revisit the law ahead of its mandatory review later this year.

“The clamor to revisit the law is overwhelming. Hence, prior to the mandatory review of the law before the year ends and upon the initiative of the Speaker [Martin Romualdez], we are considering the proposals to look into the gaps, the challenges, and the need to further enhance the effectiveness of the law,” said Enverga.

Enacted in 2019 under Republic Act (RA) No. 11203, the RTL lifted quantitative restrictions on rice and introduced tariffs to protect local rice producers.

This law established the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), which sought to enhance rice productivity and support farmers. It also mandated the National Food Authority (NFA) to manage a buffer stock sourced solely from local farmers.

On Monday, implementing agencies led by the Department of Agriculture (DA) briefed the Enverga panel on their respective achievements in fulfilling their mandates under the RTL.

However, the committee raised the need for further evaluation given the law’s deficiencies in addressing the challenges that face rice farmers and the agricultural sector as a whole.

“We cannot deny the fact that the law has accorded millions of rice farmers the much-needed assistance. However, the law is always challenged when it comes to rice supply and rice prices,” Enverga said.

Aside from its failure to reduce the cost of rice, critics of the RTL pointed out how the law only exacerbated the challenges faced by local farmers—as cheaper imports now inundate the market.

As such, calls for amendments to enhance the law’s responsiveness to public needs have gained momentum. One vocal proponent is none other than DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., who already submitted a proposal before the panel.

“With the proposal from the main implementer of the law, I think it is high time for us to revisit the law and its implementation,” Enverga said.

The DA’s proposed recommendations include modifications to import regulations to facilitate a more liberalized importation framework while maintaining safeguard measures.

"Five years into the [RTL], let us ask ourselves, have we really contributed to improving the lives of our rice farmers? Have we achieved the very purpose of the law?" the lawmaker asked. Enverga said that his committee has scheduled hearings on May 6, 7, and 8, aiming to conclude deliberations before the sine die adjournment on May 24.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/1/was-it-effective-house-panel-begins-review-of-rice-tariffication-law>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Gov't to aid workers affected by El Niño

BY JOSEPH PEDRAJAS

May 1, 2024 02:18 PM

Workers in the agriculture sector and those coming from sectors that are being adversely affected by El Niño will receive financial assistance from the government.

President Marcos on Wednesday, May 1, made the announcement as he said such move was part of the government's aid program amid the persisting drought.

“Sa susunod na araw ay magpapaabot tayo ng tulong pinansyal sa mga lubhang naapektuhan ng El Niño sa buong bansa – yaong mga nasiraan ng pananim at kabuhayan dahil sa tagtuyot (In the coming days, we will extend financial assistance to those hardly hit by El Niño in the country—those whose crops and livelihood are damaged because of drought),” President Marcos said in his speech during the 122nd Labor Day commemoration at the Malacañan Palace.

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Yummie Dingding/PPA Pool

The President said the financial aid will be an addition to the ongoing programs being implemented by the Department of Agriculture (DA), the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE).

He said the government will prioritize helping those affected in Mindanao.

President Marcos also led the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of the Labor Code of the Philippines, which was issued on May 1, 1974 by his father, former President Ferdinand E. Marcos Sr.

He also received commemorative stamps for the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Labor Code of the Philippines.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/1/gov-t-to-aid-workers-affected-by-el-nino>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Pentagon says water cannon endangered Filipino lives even as China justifies its action

BY JOSEPH PEDRAJAS

May 1, 2024 06:47 PM

The Pentagon asserted that China's latest action against two Philippine vessels endangered not only the lives but also of livelihood of Filipinos, even as the international community backed the Philippines in the latest sea incident.

Meanwhile, China justified the its Coast Guard's action when it fired a water cannon on the Philippines troops in the waters off Bajo de Masinloc.

Vedant Patel, principal deputy spokesman of the US Defense Department, said at a briefing Tuesday, April 30 (Washington time), that the "repeated harassment" on the Philippine vessels was "detrimental to regional peace and stability."

"And our belief is that the Chinese coast guard installation of these barriers also endangers Philippine fisherfolk's livelihoods and prevents them from exercising their legal rights to fish in those waters," Patel said.

Patel was referring to the rights that he said "were set out in 2016 in a final and legally binding judgment in the Philippines-China arbitration brought to the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention, and consistently."

"And this is something that the Secretary made clear on his travels as well... we urge the PRC to respect the navigational rights and freedoms guaranteed to all states under international law," he added.

Meanwhile, Lin Jian, China's Foreign Ministry spokesman, said their move came after the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) vessel entered waters being claimed by China "without permission."

That "seriously infringed on China's sovereignty," Lin said.

"China Coast Guard took necessary measures to expel them in accordance with the law. China urges the Philippines to stop making infringement and provocations at once and not to challenge China's resolve to defend our sovereignty," he added.

On April 29, PCG's BRP Bagacay and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR)'s BRP Bankaw encountered dangerous maneuvers and obstruction from four China Coast Guard vessels and six Chinese Maritime Militia vessels.

Jay Tarriela, PCG spokesman, said Tuesday, April 30, the incident happened in the waters off Bajo de Masinloc while the two vessels were carrying out fuel and food supplies mission to fishermen at sea.

China's water cannon attack was condemned by many countries, including the United States, United Kingdom, Japan, France, Australia, South Korea, Germany, Canada, Norway, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the European Union. All of them expressed concern about the incident.

"Today we unfortunately witnessed other dangerous actions that are not in line with international law," Dutch Ambassador Mariella Geraedts stressed.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/1/pentagon-says-water-cannon-endangered-filipino-lives-as-china-justifies-action>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

DA readies cloud seeding in El Niño-hit areas

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

May 2, 2024 | 12:00am



Locals walk over the dry part of Intang Lake in Pantabangan, Nueva Ecija on April 22, 2024.

STAR / Walter Bollozos

MANILA, Philippines — Cloud seeding operations are being readied in areas affected by the El Niño phenomenon, according to a ranking official of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

In an interview with The STAR, Agriculture Assistant Secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa said the Bureau of Soil and Water Management and concerned DA regional directors are coordinating with the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA), Office of Civil Defense and Philippine Air Force on the cloud seeding activities.

“Cloud seeding is our last resort. So far, cloud seeding operations (have been) done in Quirino, Isabela, specifically in the Magat Watershed. They are still on standby for seedable clouds,” De Mesa said.

He noted that a standby fund was also allocated in Region 6 or Western Visayas for possible cloud seeding operations.

“If there will be seedable clouds, in coordination with PAGASA and Philippine Air Force, cloud seeding operations will be done,” the DA official said.

He added that Western Visayas was among El Niño’s hardest-hit regions as the total damage to the agriculture sector there has reached P1.02 billion.

De Mesa pointed out that cloud seeding operations were effective as rains were experienced in watersheds of the reservoir.

“Rains happened in the reservoir as before it was done, concerned officials checked on seedable clouds. Cloud seeding is good if rains will come in intended areas. It is a last resource as it is costly, that is why the chance of success should be high,” he said.

At least P2.26 billion worth of interventions have been provided to farmers and fisherfolk after the total damage of El Niño in 11 regions has reached P4.39 billion, according to the DA official.

“The department has provided P2.16 billion worth of interventions to our farmers and fishers, including P1.065 billion worth of rice farmers’ financial assistance. This is the P5,000 being given to farmers with two hectares, and then we also provided P638 million worth of inputs. These are seeds, fertilizers and the like,” he said.

He added that at least P295 million worth of small-scale irrigation projects were provided by the DA and P77.5 million in survival and recovery loans to affected farmers.

“The Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. provided indemnification to about 7,322 farmers, totaling about P68 million. Our livestock program provided more than 60,000 animals and our Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources has provided about 111 alternative livelihood projects for affected fishers,” he said.

Aside from Western Visayas, affected by El Niño are the whole of Luzon, including the Cordillera Administrative Region, Regions 1 (Ilocos), 2 (Cagayan Valley), 3 (Central Luzon), 4-A (Calabarzon), 4-B (Mimaropa), 5 (Bicol) and Mindanao, including Regions 9 (Zamboanga peninsula), 11 (Davao) and 12 (Soccsksargen).

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/02/2351957/da-readies-cloud-seeding-el-nio-hit-areas>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

El Niño trims palay harvest in Q1

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

May 2, 2024 | 12:00am



Local palay output from January to March declined by two percent to 4.68 million metric tons from the 4.78 million MT recorded volume in the same period last year, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). STAR / File

MANILA, Philippines —The country's palay or unmilled rice production contracted by two percent in the first quarter as farms were unable to withstand the effects of warmer and drier climatic conditions due to El Niño.

Local palay output from January to March declined by two percent to 4.68 million metric tons from the 4.78 million MT recorded volume in the same period last year, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

The actual palay output in the first three months was 2.8 percent lower than the 4.82 million MT earlier projected by the PSA.

Experts blamed El Niño as the primary reason behind the decline in palay output during the reference period.

Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. president Danilo Fausto said the slight contraction in palay output was expected due to El Niño.

El Niño has affected some 34,264 hectares of rice farms in the first quarter, resulting in production loss amounting to about 72,733 MT, according to a report of the Department of Agriculture.

The DA noted that most of the damage and losses recorded on rice were in reproductive and maturity stages.

It said 24,995 hectares of rice farms affected during the reference period could recover, while 9,269 hectares had no chance of recovery.

Raul Montemayor of the Federation of Free Farmers said there were reports of “high” incidence of immature grains and “increased” pest infestation that affected local harvest during the three-month period.

Montemayor noted that the drop in the production of irrigated farms was bigger than that of rainfed areas in the first quarter.

“Some farmers replanted early late last year and harvested in the first quarter in anticipation of El Niño, but even that was not enough to at least maintain quarterly output,” he said.

The palay production of farms with irrigation facilities declined by 2.3 percent to nearly 3.6 million MT from 3.68 million MT, while rainfed palay output decreased slightly to 1.08 million MT from 1.09 million MT.

PSA data showed that palay production in 10 regions in the first quarter posted contractions, while six regions recorded increments.

Central Luzon remained that country’s top palay producing region but its output declined by 10.5 percent to 775,643 MT from 868,083 MT.

Cagayan Valley region posted the highest increase in palay output at 14.8 percent to 754,832 MT from 657,636 MT it recorded last year.

With the increase, Cagayan Valley surpassed Western Visayas as the second largest palay producer in the country for the first quarter.

The DA targets to produce about 20.88 million MT of palay this year, surpassing the record-high volume of 20.06 million MT booked in 2023.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/05/02/2351862/el-nio-trims-palay-harvest-q1>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Rice tariff collections soar by 60% to P11 billion

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

May 2, 2024 | 12:00am.



Workers unload sacks of rice from a delivery truck along Dagupan Street in Tondo, Manila on January 22, 2024. Ernie Penaredondo / The Philippine STAR

MANILA, Philippines — The state’s tariff collections from rice imports soared by 60 percent to over P11 billion in the first quarter on the back of higher import volume and declared value of shipments.

Preliminary data from the Bureau of Customs (BOC) showed that rice tariff collections amounted to P11.461 billion from January to March, about P4.3 billion higher than the P7.159 billion in the same period in 2023.

BOC data showed that rice imports during the quarter jumped by 42 percent to 1.14 million metric tons from last year’s 805,675 MT.

The declared value of rice imports averaged \$511.53 per MT, almost 43 percent higher than the \$357.82 per MT average price in the first quarter in 2023.

Global rice prices this year remain elevated as a result of a tight world market supply triggered by India's export ban on non-basmati rice worsened by the effects of El Niño in rice-producing countries.

The World Bank has projected that rice prices would increase by eight percent this year due to tight global market supply underpinned by India's continued export restrictions.

The average foreign exchange rate in the first quarter also contributed to the higher tariff collections as peso depreciated by 1.64 percent to P55.9: \$1 level from last year's \$55: \$1, based on BOC data.

With the rice tariff collections to date, the government will now have at least P1 billion to fund its financial assistance to rice farmers tilling two hectares and below next year.

Under existing rules and regulations, rice tariffs collected in excess of P10 billion would be used for the Department of Agriculture's rice farmers financial assistance program wherein beneficiaries receive P5,000 each.

Rice tariff collections have been critical in bankrolling various government programs aimed at improving local farmers' competitiveness after the state deregulated and liberalized the industry in 2019.

Rice tariff collections hit at least P29 billion in 2023. This would mean that some P19 billion would be distributed this year to rice farmers as financial assistance, based on existing rules and regulations.

The landed cost of rice, which includes the tariffs paid by importers, in the first quarter averaged at P38.84 per kilogram, almost 45 percent higher than the P26.8 per kilogram average price level last year, based on BOC data.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/05/02/2351863/rice-tariff-collections-soar-60-p11-billion>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Marcos Jr. approves military procurement 'wish list'

[Michael Punongbayan](#) - The Philippine Star

May 2, 2024 | 12:00am



President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. addresses the troops during his visit to the headquarters of the 6th Infantry Division, Camp Brigadier General Gonzalo H. Siongco at the Municipality of Datu Odin Sinsuat in Maguindanao on April 29, 2024.

Pool photos by KJ Rosales / The Philippine STAR

MANILA, Philippines — Amid continuing maritime aggression by China, President Marcos has approved a \$35-billion budget to modernize the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), with the Philippine Navy getting the largest chunk to strengthen capabilities in the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

The budget will be used to finance various acquisitions enumerated in a lengthy "wish list" submitted by the AFP to the President, and will be spread out over 10 years, Philippine Navy spokesman for the WPS Commodore Roy Vincent Trinidad said yesterday at the Kapihan sa Manila Bay news forum.

"As to the proportion, I would say that the larger chunk goes to the Navy, and then the Air Force, and then the Army, and then the General Headquarters. Because the

thrust now is already external. It says there that there are different capabilities that will allow the Philippine Navy to fight across a broad spectrum of warfare,” he said.

Trinidad explained that broad spectrum warfare refers to air, surface, sub-surface and electronic spectrum.

“So our ships or our capabilities, including those on land, should have the capability to fight in the air, on land, on surface, at sea and sub-surface undersea, and of course in the electronic spectrum,” he said.

“The details of this are with the Department of National Defense and they will determine which will be prioritized, where and how will it be acquired and how it will be developed. Will it be bought? Will it be manufactured locally, so that the local labor force can be utilized and the money will be spent here? So we are thankful that the AFP is fully supported,” he added.

Asked if the Philippine Navy is still looking to acquire a submarine, Trinidad did not say if it was included in the wish list but noted that it is still part of the plan.

“The project is still there for undersea warfare capabilities. When you say undersea warfare, there are a lot of components to it, not just a submarine. These include support components that are on the surface like our bases and the training of our personnel,” he said.

Trinidad said the Philippine fleet already has a submarine group, which has sent officers and enlisted personnel locally and abroad for training.

“Modernization will always start in the mind. If our minds are outdated, even if we have new technology we still cannot use those,” he said, adding that they invest in young ensigns, junior officers and lieutenant junior grades.

More aggressive

While there were no reported casualties during China’s latest aggression at Panatag Shoal, Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) spokesman for WPS Commodore Jay Tarriela said that China has become more aggressive.

According to reports, Tarriela said, “The CCG now has elevated the tension and the level of their aggression as well towards the PCG vessel.”

“This is the first time that we can say that a PCG vessel has been subjected to a direct water cannon with that kind of pressure that even resulted in structural damage of the PCG (vessel),” he added.

Tarriela said the PCG's BRP Bagacay's railing and canopy were damaged when hit by a Chinese vessel, while the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR)'s BRP Bankaw's starboard stern was hit by the CCG's water cannon.

He estimated that the pressure from the water cannon went beyond the fatal 200 pounds per square inch of pressure.

BFAR spokesman Nazario Briguera in a radio interview noted that in the past, the CCG only resorted to high-pressure water cannon but now there were multiple instances of ramming of vessels.

He added that among the damage incurred by the ship were on the radio system and electrical navigation.

Tarriela believed that this was China's response to the "David and Goliath" narrative wherein the Philippines is the David in this scenario.

"It just goes to show that Goliath is becoming more Goliath," he said.

But this is part of the Philippines' transparency strategy that prompted China to show its real face and true character as a bully country, which Tarriela said is still a victory of their transparency strategy.

Will not engage

Despite the continued aggression displayed by China, he said they would not be the cause for the escalation of tension in the WPS.

"We would not be the reason to be an excuse for the Chinese government to bring in their warships and elevate the tension, wherein they would claim that we started the war and so they brought in their warships. This is the reason why we have a calibrated approach in maintaining our presence in the WPS," Tarriela said.

For his part, Trinidad said they would continue exercising their mandate to patrol the area, resupply the troops and fisherfolk and rotate personnel.

"This is what we call below the threshold of conflict. This is child's play where they will repeatedly trigger you until you attack first, and then you lose," Trinidad said, pointing out that China behaves the same way with India and Korea in their common borders.

Trinidad said the military is happy that the government has a strong stand on the issue because those who should benefit from Philippine waters are the Filipinos and the fisherfolk.

According to him, last Tuesday's water cannon attack was on a humanitarian mission that still succeeded in providing water, fuel and food supplies to Filipino fishermen in the area.

Asked if statements of support from foreign nations are enough or may just be all talk, Trinidad said international support is very important to the Philippines.

"We are on the right side. That's why we ensure that what our soldiers do at sea, whether navy, coast guard, BFAR, etc., all the players of the maritime domain, all our actions must be within the bounds of international law," he said.

Condemnation

China's water cannon attacks on Philippine vessels and dangerous actions in WPS have sparked international condemnation.

The US slammed yesterday China's repeated harassment of Philippine vessels in the WPS as Washington warned that it is "detrimental" to regional peace and security.

The State Department also called out China's installation of barriers in Philippine waters.

"Our belief is that the CCG installation of these barriers also endangers Philippine fisherfolk's livelihoods and prevents them from exercising their legal rights to fish in those waters," State Department principal deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel said at a press briefing.

Meanwhile, United States Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin III will host a quadrilateral meeting with Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro and their Japanese and Australian counterparts this week to discuss ways to strengthen security among the four nations, the US Department of Defense announced.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he made clear during his visit to China last week that the US will continue to work to de-escalate tensions and the US defense commitments to the Philippines remain ironclad.

The United Kingdom reiterated its call for "respect for the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and adherence to the 2016 Arbitral Award, which is legally binding on the parties."

Canada also expressed concern over China's actions and the use of water cannon through Canadian Ambassador David Hartman's post on X.

Japanese Ambassador Kazuya Endo posted that "Japan is concerned about the recent incident around Scarborough Shoal" which he said undermined safety.

The European Union and France expressed concern, saying CCG's use of water cannon is against international law and a threat to safety of life at sea.

Germany also reiterated its call for the respect of UNCLOS and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, while Australian Ambassador HK Yu said China's dangerous maneuvers and obstruction encountered by Philippine vessels "create risks of miscalculation and endanger peace. Disputes must be resolved peacefully under UNCLOS."

No meddling

Rep. Ramon Rodrigo Gutierrez expressed support for Cagayan Rep. Joseph Lara who initiated a House probe on the surge of Chinese students in Cagayan after the Chinese embassy criticized Lara for "inciting suspicion and hatred of China" and insinuating Sinophobia.

"For the Chinese embassy to issue a statement directly attacking the inquiry and the motives Congressman Lara has, is this the non-interference that China espouses?" Gutierrez said.

"Why does the embassy of China presume to have the authority to tell us, the representatives of the Filipino people, our motives? We take exception to this statement," he added.

"It should be noted, that at issue here isn't any law passed by Congressman Lara. It isn't even a proposed bill. There is no government policy or program questioned. It was simply a resolution seeking an inquiry into what the good congressman sees as a cause of concern within his district." – **Evelyn Macairan, Pia Lee-Brago, Bella Carioso, Delon Porcalla**

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/02/2351946/marcos-jr-approves-military-procurement-wish-list>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Agri department reviews African swine fever plan

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 02:12 AM May 02, 2024

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is reviewing a nationwide plan to curb the spread of African swine fever (ASF) by enhancing the guidelines on transporting pork and its by-products nationwide.

The DA issued Special Order No. 615 to form a technical committee to review the national zoning and movement plan that outlines the requirements for the movement of swine and related commodities in different zones.

Among other concerns, the panel will discuss and study the proposed approaches or strategies to strengthen safe and efficient movement of live pigs and pork as well as pork products and by-products.

The panel is tasked to review the current implementation of DA's Administrative Order (AO) No. 2, which prescribes certain measures to transport swine commodities.

Further, the committee will craft guidelines and protocols relative to amendments on the zoning and movement plan, subject to the Agriculture Secretary's approval.

Promulgated in 2022, the AO amended a previous directive that classified each town or city based on risk of disease transmission and its proximity to ASF-affected areas.

“High risk” areas are those with an extreme likelihood for disease introduction, transmission and spread of ASF due to the presence of presumed risk factors.

“Moderate risk” areas refer to those with a potential likelihood for disease introduction and transmission but no risk mitigation measures are in place.

Meanwhile, “low risk” areas pertain to those with less likelihood for disease introduction because of a robust surveillance system in place.

The order has different colored zones —a red (or infected) zone will include towns or cities with confirmed outbreaks or cases. It noted that areas in the red zone may reach or expand across the boundary of the adjacent city or municipality.

A pink (buffer) zone is a town or city where ASF is not detected but demarcated immediately around the red zone when local authorities confirm that this particular area has been infected. The DA considers the National Capital Region as a pink zone.

Places where the animal disease is not detected but close to areas in the pink zone are placed under the yellow (surveillance) zone. They are considered high risk areas.

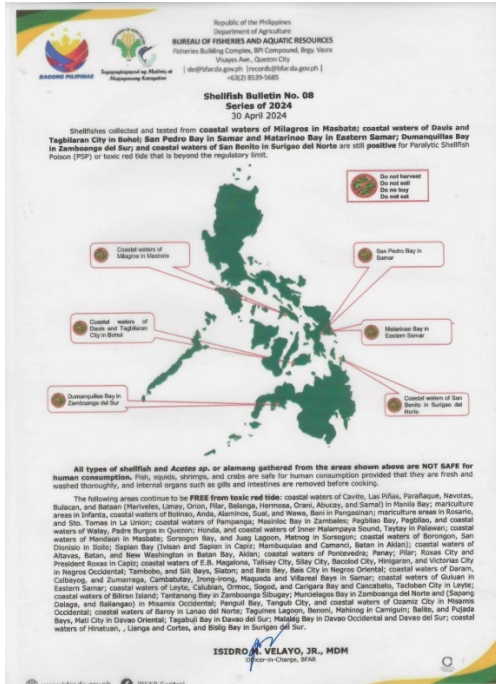
A light green (protected) zone is an area where ASF is not detected. It is considered to be a moderate risk area. —*Jordeene B. Lagare*

<https://business.inquirer.net/457090/agri-department-reviews-african-swine-fever-plan>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

BFAR: Red tide alert still up in parts of Masbate, Visayas, Mindanao

By: Luisa Cabato - Reporter / @luisacabatoINQ - Inquirer.net|May 02,2024 - 06:10 AM



The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources says that six coastal areas in the Visayas and Mindanao are still positive for paralytic shellfish poison or red tide toxin. (Photo courtesy of BFAR Facebook)

MANILA, Philippines — Paralytic shellfish poison or red tide toxin continues to affect six coastal areas in Masbate, the Visayas and Mindanao as they remain positive of this toxin. This was the warning of Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR).

A red tide bulletin was earlier issued by BFAR in these areas particularly on March 16.

<https://cebudailynews.inquirer.net/571145/bfar-red-tide-alert-still-up-in-parts-of-masbate-visayas-mindanao>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Imports necessary to ensure adequate supply during closure of key fishing grounds — DA

May 1, 2024 | 8:18 pm



REUTERS

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

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said fish imports are calibrated to ensure adequate supply when certain fishing grounds are closed to allow fish species to regenerate.

“Preparations are made prior to the start of the closed fishing season, there is transparency immediately as to how big (the import volumes will be),” Agriculture Assistant Secretary and Spokesperson Arnel V. de Mesa told *BusinessWorld*.

Last week, the DA approved the import of 25,000 metric tons (MT) of pelagic fish in anticipation of the three-month closed season in key fisheries.

“*Kumbaga, hindi ’yung kung kailan may problema na at saka ka pa lang mag-announce ng imports* (We don’t wait until the problem is here before announcing imports),” he added.

Under Memorandum Order No. 17, commercial fishing operations are allocated 80% or 20,000 MT, with the remaining 20% or 5,000 MT going to fisheries associations or cooperatives.

“The only good thing about it now is that it can be programmed right away. Because fisheries will close again by Nov. 1 in North East Palawan, and by Nov. 15 in the Visayas,” Mr. De Mesa said.

The fisheries where closed seasons are declared late in the year include northern Palawan, Ilocos, Negros Occidental, Capiz, and Cebu.

Sardine fishing is not allowed in northern Palawan between Nov. 1 and Jan. 31. Herring and mackerel cannot be caught in the Visayan Sea between Nov. 15 and Feb. 15.

Closed seasons are authorized by Republic Act No. 8550 or the Fisheries Code.

Last year, the department approved fish imports of 35,000 MT for sale in wet markets.

David B. Villaluz, chairman of the Philippine Association of Fish Producers, Inc. said that the DA’s importation plan may end up competing with aquaculture products.

“This is disadvantageous to aquaculture during the latter parts of the year. *Duon kami bumabawi, dun magpro-produce ang* aquaculture to offset supply during the closed fishing season, (That’s when we make up for the slower parts of the year. That’s when we hope to produce more when closed fishing season brings down supply),” Mr. Villaluz told *BusinessWorld* by phone.

In 2023, fisheries production dropped 6.5%, accelerating the 5% decline recorded in the prior year, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. has said that fish imports must arrive before Jan. 15.

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/05/01/592309/imports-necessary-to-ensure-adequate-supply-during-closure-of-key-fishing-grounds-da/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Sugar farmers proposing safety nets to go with easing of import process

May 1, 2024 | 8:21 pm



PHILIPPINE STAR/MIGUEL DE GUZMAN

SUGAR producers are calling for “appropriate safety nets” as the government eases entry requirements for agricultural imports.

In a statement, the Sugar Council — composed of three planter federations — urged the government to pursue programs to raise the competitiveness of the sugar industry and the rest of Philippine agriculture.

“The removal of the (Sugar Regulatory Administration’s) import rules, including its (power to set) fees and charges, would amount to loss of regulatory authority and SRA revenue,” it said.

Administrative Order No. 20 (AO 20) instructed the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Finance, and Department of Trade and Industry to simplify the administrative procedures for agricultural imports, while removing non-tariff barriers.

Under AO 20, the SRA was instructed to streamline and standardize sugar import rules. It was also ordered to admit more traders into the sugar import program.

In a position paper, the council said the current rules of the SRA cannot be considered barriers to be removed.

“The integrity of SRA and its ability to perform its mandate must be preserved,” it said.

It added that AO 20 can open the floodgates to sugar imports “that will kill the domestic industry.”

The Sugar Council had recommended a sugar import program based on the SRA’s analysis of market conditions prior to the start of the milling season. Industry stakeholders must also be consulted.

It added that imports should be subject to a so-called “trigger point” for bringing supply and demand into balance via imports.

The council is composed of the Confederation of Sugar Producers Associations, Inc., the National Federation of Sugarcane Planters, Inc., and the Panay Federation of Sugarcane Farmers, Inc. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/05/01/592312/sugar-farmers-proposing-safety-nets-to-go-with-easing-of-import-process/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Palay production drops 2% in Q1

May 1, 2024 | 8:20 pm



A farmer threshes newly harvested palay grains at a ricefield in Mogpog, Marinduque in central Philippines, March 22, 2016. — REUTERS

PRODUCTION of palay, or unmilled rice, fell 2% year on year to 4.69 million metric tons (MT) in the first quarter, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

The PSA said first quarter output missed its projection of 4.82 million MT, based on the standing crop as of March 1.

It added that the harvest from irrigated areas was 3.6 million MT, while rainfed palay production was 1.09 million MT.

The region with the top palay production was Central Luzon with 775 thousand MT, followed by the Cagayan Valley with 754 thousand MT.

The Central Luzon and Western Visayas palay harvests during the quarter fell 11% and 3%, respectively. Palay production in the Cagayan Valley rose 15%.

The Department of Agriculture's official view of palay output this year is that it should not fall below 20 million MT. In 2023, palay production was 20.06 million MT.

Corn production was 2.53 million MT in the quarter, up 1% from the same period last year.

Yellow corn production rose 2% to 2.08 million MT.

It added that white corn output slipped 5% to 445 thousand MT for the period. — **Adrian H. Halili**

https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/05/01/592310/palay-production-drops-2-in-q1/#google_vignette

BUSINESS WORLD:

PHL trade talks with UAE expected next week

May 1, 2024 | 8:21 pm



REUTERS

THE PHILIPPINES is expected to start the first round of negotiations for a comprehensive economic partnership agreement with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) next week, with a target to wrap up talks within the year, the Trade department said.

Undersecretary Allan B. Gepty of the Department of Trade and Industry told reporters that the Philippines will start the first round of talks on May 6.

“That is, of course, a very important free trade agreement (FTA) for the Philippines given that we have a lot of professionals and also businesses in the UAE,” Mr. Gepty said.

“Definitely, an FTA will be a big help for them as far as a stable business environment is concerned, and of course, in the same manner, it’s also important for UAE investors here in the Philippines because, as always, a stable business environment would really encourage more investment in this country,” he added.

Mr. Gepty said that the agreement will cover market access, intellectual property, competition, digital trade, and government procurement.

“And given the importance of the FTA, we hope to finish the negotiations within the year in time for, if I’m not mistaken, the 50th anniversary of our diplomatic relations with the UAE,” he said.

“So, if we can conclude that within the year, that would be a good milestone in our diplomatic relations, particularly economic relations,” he added.

He said that the negotiations will take place alternately in the UAE and in the Philippines, with the first round in Dubai.

“In the first round of negotiation, basically, it will focus on... the terms of reference. We’ll have to work within those terms of reference (in later sessions),” he said.

“In the first round, we’ll have to work and negotiate on the text of the FTA. We hope to conclude as many chapters as possible,” he added.

Asked if there are any potential stumbling blocks in the talks, he said: “I see a lot of alignment when it comes to the trade and investment policy direction of the Philippines and the UAE, so that’s why I’m confident that I think we can conclude the negotiation within the year.”

He said that the Philippines will negotiate market access for its agricultural and industrial products as well as services.

“We want to secure a preferential arrangement for all our products of interest, from agricultural products to industrial products,” he said. “What is interesting in the case of the UAE is that the Philippines is very strong in exporting aerospace parts to the UAE.”

“We know that the UAE is also strong in the aerospace industry, as they have big airlines, so more than the parts, we are also eyeing services,” he added.

According to Tradeline Philippines, total trade between the Philippines and UAE grew over 5% to \$1.9 billion in 2023. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/05/01/592313/phl-trade-talks-with-uae-expected-next-week/>

MANILA STANDARD:

DA requests extension of rice enhancement fund

By Rochelle Campos

May 1, 2024, 11:30 pm

The Department of Agriculture (DA) urged the House of Representatives to extend the DA's Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) until 2030, highlighting its significant contributions to boosting rice production and supporting small farmers.

Established under the Rice Tariffication Act (RTL) of 2019, the RCEF collects tariffs on rice imports and allocates funds to modernize and improve the rice industry's productivity.

DA Undersecretary for Rice Industry Development Christopher Morales, speaking before the House Committee on meeting on Monday, detailed the RCEF's achievements since its implementation.

He noted that over 15 million sacks of certified rice seeds have been distributed to about 1.2 million farmers, alongside 27,508 pieces of machinery and post-harvest facilities to enhance efficiency and reduce waste.

Morales added that the RCEF has provided training to 250,000 farmers, granted P4.6 billion in credit assistance, and offered P20.1 billion in financial aid.

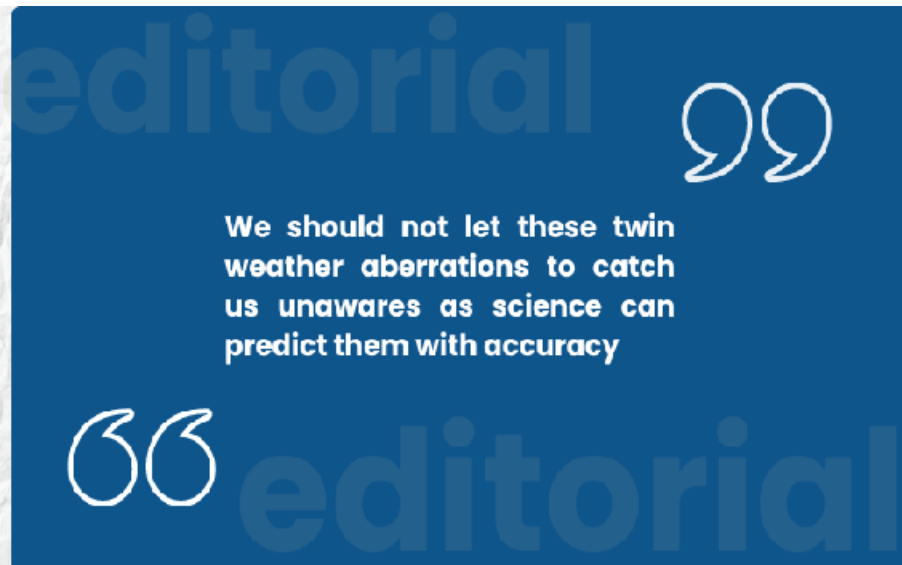
“While we are on the direction toward our desired impacts, we still have a long way to go,” said Morales, underscoring the need to extend the Rice Fund when its six-year life ends this year.

“The extension of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund until 2030 and reallocation of funds towards farm machinery, seed development, and training and extension services are recommended, with special attention given to soil health improvement initiatives,” he added.

<https://manilastandard.net/news/national/314442220/da-requests-extension-of-rice-enhancement-fund.html>

MANILA STANDARD:

El Niño causes huge crop damage



By Manila Standard

May 2, 2024, 12:15 am

As the entire country reels from the scorching summer heat exacerbated by the El Niño weather phenomenon, it is agriculture that appears to have taken a severe beating.

According to the latest Department of Agriculture data, damage to agriculture from the dry spell has reached P4.39 billion in about 66,065 hectares of farmland.

The El Niño Task Force estimated that of the damaged agricultural land, 78 percent could still be recovered once the drought is over. The agricultural land rendered unrecoverable by the El Niño is more than 14, 500 hectares.

We're told that the crops in the affected areas are totally damaged so these are no longer fit for human consumption.

The land is too dry and no longer viable for planting during the current planting season or until water can be regularly made available, the Task Force reported.

Citing data from the Department of Social Welfare and Development, the Task Force also said that more than 2.1 million individuals have been affected by El Niño.

The World Bank has monitored El Niño occurrence eight times since 1980.

Since then, while the Philippines has put in place mitigation measures to at least minimize the losses from El Niño, especially in the farm sector, the latest weather event has nevertheless cost billions of pesos in losses in the agriculture sector.

This tells us the government should craft a holistic plan to prepare the country for every El Niño weather phenomenon that comes our way.

The enormous farm losses since the dry spell hit the country this year should prod policy makers to come up with a comprehensive approach to tackle the adverse effects of the drought.

Such a holistic program, according to the World Bank, should consist of policy interventions that could include the preparation of detailed El Niño risk and vulnerability maps developed with stakeholders and with recommended actions for farmers or businesses; the inclusion of contingency and preparedness funding for El Niño events in the national budget; and the adoption of drought- and flood-tolerant crop varieties and fishery practices.

Moreover, the national government should set up a trigger mechanism for the release of the funds with early warning systems to avoid undue delays and political issues.

It should also expand grain storage capacity by buying additional storage silos before a predicted El Niño event to avoid shortages and price spikes, and invest in more rural infrastructure such as irrigation and water harvesting systems

All these should mitigate the economic losses from the effects of regular El Niño and La Niña occurrences.

We should not let these twin weather aberrations to catch us unawares as science can predict them with accuracy and give us enough time to prepare for contingencies.

<https://manilastandard.net/opinion/314442041/el-nino-causes-huge-crop-damage.html>

THE MANILA TIMES:

PH aquaculture unlocking potential

By Conrad M. Cariño

May 2, 2024

THE country's aquaculture sector is gradually adopting new technologies to attain better productivity and sustainability, but still needs more investments to unlock its potential.

Wilfredo Cruz, the director of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) Region 3 office, said that the local aquaculture sector in the past 20 years has been adopting technologies like cage culture, resulting in better production.

Rungphech "Rose" Chitanuwat, the country general manager of Informa Markets in the Philippines, said that the local aquaculture sector needs more investments to produce products that the export market demands.

Cruz said the Philippine aquaculture sector has been shifting to modern production methods and systems in the past 20 years, resulting in sustainable operations.

"We have already expanded to cage [aquaculture], and of course, in marine waters and freshwater. This method allows for higher density and better quality management," he said.

"As of now, we are also using the reciprocating aquaculture system, [which] allows for the reuse for water and a more controlled production environment, particularly for species like shrimp and tilapia," Cruz added.

Furthermore, there are aquaculture operators who utilize aerators and sensors to improve their operations, and have shifted to using high density polyethylene instead of bamboo for cage structures.

As for the challenges the local aquaculture sector is facing, Cruz said BFAR has identified four: limited supply of fry; lack of feed supply; disease outbreaks; and climate change.

He said that the limited supply of fry requires importation, citing that 65 percent of the country's bangus (milkfish) fry is shipped from Indonesia. To solve this issue, BFAR and Congress are legislating the establishment of hatcheries nationwide, with 50 already constructed.

On the issue of feeds, Cruz said there is a need to establish small-scale feed mills like the one found in Aurora, and to undertake more research and development (R&D) for the local production of feeds at lower cost.

"We have one [small-scale feed mill] in Aurora. There are still three [others], one in Mindoro, one in Region 6 (Western Visayas) [and] one in Region 10 (Northern Mindanao). We are also doing R&D to produce cost-efficient feeds, we are focusing [on] using local raw materials," the BFAR official said.

For disease outbreaks, BFAR is investing also in R&D, detection methods and training of aquaculture operators and farmers.

The local aquaculture sector is also adapting to climate change by establishing systems that can withstand typhoons and utilizing solar energy.

Cruz added that BFAR has technology demonstration programs in different areas for different marine species, enabling fish farmers and aquaculture operators to cope with challenges the industry is facing and improve their productivity.

He further said that aquaculture is becoming a major job generator, with one cage requiring two employees. Also, citing government data, Cruz said that there are more than 2,000 aquaculture cages nationwide employing around 5,000 people.

BFAR is also promoting value-adding or the production of processed marine products by agribusiness enterprises.

"Baby bangus production is gaining popularity and used in value-adding in sardine-like production," Cruz said.

Need for investments

For her part, Chitanuwat said that the country's aquaculture sector needs more collaboration and investments, so the industry can also export quality processed products.

"It's really collaboration [that is needed], and we need investment to help the farmers," she said.

Chitanuwat said the small aquaculture operators cannot compete with large corporations that have their own laboratories, postharvest facilities and contract growers.

Also, there is a need for the industry to be self-sufficient in the supply of fry and feeds.

"We have to build the opportunity for self-sufficiency. We need to create our local strength, so we can have supply to the farmers," Chitanuwat said.

She explained that the aquaculture industries of Thailand and Vietnam are able to export because operators and farmers have adequate fry and feed supply, postharvest facilities like freezers and processing equipment.

This allows aquaculture operators in Thailand and Vietnam to produce shrimp that have the quality and weight that the export market requires.

Chitanuwat said that to make the country's aquaculture sector more competitive, the government should also give more support.

"This is my observation — farmers are looking for support from the government, and we cannot compare them (small operators) with the big corporations," she added.

Chitanuwat said that Informa Markets is staging this year's Livestock Philippines and Aquaculture Philippines trade show to also further build the country's aquaculture community and link producers with experts and technology providers.

The trade show will be held from May 22-24 at the World Trade Center in Pasay City and will also have seminars and conferences, with topics such as technology applications to be discussed. BFAR Region 3 is supporting the aquaculture component of the trade show.

"We'll focus on opportunities on aquaculture, how to help the aquaculture folks on developing the industry and the technology," Chitanuwat said.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/02/business/agribusiness/ph-aquaculture-unlocking-potential/1944247>

THE MANILA TIMES:

Agriculture policy gone mad

By Ben Kritz

May 2, 2024

APRIL 17 and 18 were incredibly bad days for the Philippines' agricultural sector and the quest for food security and food affordability for all of us who have watched prices at the grocery store or market steadily increase week after week. The damage that was done may not be apparent now, but it will be in the coming months if something is not done to fix it.

On April 17, in a shocking submission to the hysterics of anti-GMO (genetically modified organisms) zealots — who may as well go ahead and own the descriptions "anti-farmer" and "anti-everyone who eats food" while they're at it — the Court of Appeals ordered a halt to the commercial propagation, field testing and research activities of the genetically modified Golden Rice and Bt talong (eggplant), as well as other GMO crops. While the use of engineered crops certainly ought to be carefully managed, the CA ruling defies all logic and will have horrible unintended consequences. It is a big issue, one for which relevant information and analysis are still being gathered, so I'll take up the topic in detail at a later time when everyone is looking for an explanation for why they can't buy meat, fish, eggs or locally produced dairy products for less than a king's ransom, if at all.

For today, I will try to answer a question that was posed to me a couple of days ago, which was, "What do you make of this?" with "this" being a copy of Administrative Order 20, which was signed by President Marcos and took immediate effect on April 18. The title of AO 20 is "Further streamlining administrative procedures and policies, and removing non-tariff barriers on the importation of agricultural products," which is as good as saying, "NEDA (the National Economic Development Authority) wrote this" because it's

a mantra that two-time NEDA Secretary Arsenio Balisacan has repeated so often over the years that he probably mumbles it in his sleep.

That is an educated guess, of course; I have no certain knowledge about whether Secretary Balisacan talks in his sleep or not. And AO 20 doesn't identify the culprit responsible for it, other than bearing the signatures of the President and Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin.

Back to the question: What do I make of this? It's complete garbage, that's what. There is no obvious necessity for it; it certainly does not in any way positively address the country's needs when it comes to food supply, and it seems almost intentionally designed to persecute the Bureau of Customs (BoC) by removing several of the existing guardrails against smuggling and making its already virtually unmanageable job even harder.

Now, at this point, I should offer the disclaimer that these are first impressions, which will have to be updated in detail one way or another when several agricultural and trade policy experts I reached out to get back to me. And, of course, the responsible official or officials of the government must be afforded a fair opportunity to explain why they are apparently working against previously stated policy objectives for food security and affordability or, conversely, why that impression is mistaken.

If we ignore the current context of the Philippines with respect to food importation, AO 20 may not seem so dangerous, though it may still cause some to wonder why someone thought it needed to be issued in the first place since there are pertinent laws and regulations already in place that have only underperformed due to being inconsistently enforced. These measures, which AO 20 acknowledges, are the Price Act (RA 7581), the Agricultural Tariffication Act of 1996 (RA 8178), and AO 13 of 2018 under former president Duterte, which specifically directed the removal of non-tariff barriers and administrative bottlenecks for agricultural

imports, as a complement to the Ease of Doing Business Act enacted at about the same time.

The real-world context of the Philippines, however, is one in which importation has neither improved food supply nor moderated consumer prices; has not made farmgate prices for domestic agricultural products either fair or consistent; and where, despite measures to make legitimate importation both easier and cheaper, seemingly unstoppable large-scale smuggling persists to such a degree that it's considered normal business.

There are three particular points in AO 20 that raise red flags, the first being that much of it is open-ended. For example, the Sugar Regulatory Authority (SRA) is directed to develop upgraded guidelines for sugar importation within 30 days; the Department of Agriculture (DA) is directed to develop new guidelines for the importation of fish and other aquatic products within 30 days; and the DA, SRA, BoC, Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), and Department of Finance (DoF) are directed to formulate the implementation guidelines for AO 20 in its entirety within 30 days. All of that work should have preceded the issuance of an administrative order because otherwise, there is no certainty that the apparent intent of the order will be carried out.

Second, under Section 1 of the order, the DA, DTI and DoF are directed to "[s]treamline procedures and requirements in the licensing of importers, minimize processing time of applications for importation, and exempt licensed traders from submission of registration requirements." That's great, except the agricultural smuggling sector is already made up entirely of licensed traders and importers, a distressing reality that AO 20 doesn't attempt to address at all.

Finally, in line with a directive to streamline procedures and requirements for the issuance of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Import Clearances (SPSIC), AO 20 makes them subject to the Anti-Red Tape Act (RA 9485), meaning that if they are not acted upon within

the prescribed period, they are automatically deemed approved. The SPSIC is not mere procedural paperwork; it is an important public health protection. Obviously, that clearance should be processed as efficiently as possible, but the steps to ensure that an import shipment is safe and properly handled cannot be shortcut in any way, and it is shocking that AO 20 would allow them to be.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/02/opinion/columns/agriculture-policy-gone-mad/1944277>

THE MANILA TIMES:

Negros Occidental livestock damage reaches P10M

By Eugene Adiong

May 2, 2024

BACOLOD CITY: Damage to the livestock industry of Negros Occidental has reached P10,080,100, affecting 870 households in 95 barangay (villages) in the province, according to a report of Irene Bel Ploteña, head of the Provincial Disaster Management Program Division.

The report submitted to Gov. Eugenio Jose Lacson also showed that 11,556 heads of various livestock died due to the ongoing drought.

The hardest hit is the municipality of Isabela where 595 households were affected and 5,152 of various animals died, resulting in losses amounting to P5,956,850.

The report also showed that the drought damaged 183.15 hectares of pastureland.

The biggest damage was incurred in Barangay Gargato, Hinigaran, with P1 million worth of damage inflicted on around 100 hectares of pastureland.

Placeda Lemana, provincial veterinarian, said on Tuesday, April 30, that most of the animals that died were free-range chickens because of the unavailability of water sources where they can drink.

Lemana said that without water, the animals get dehydrated and eventually die.

Of the total number of animals that died due to the intensifying high temperatures, more than 10,000 were chickens, 400 were piglets, 40 heads of carabaos and more than 100 goats, the report said.

Lemana said they have advised farmers to reduce the population of their farm animals to prevent crowding.

Misting of farm animals is also advised to cool them down, she said.

Farmers, she said, have resorted to butchering their animals before they die of extreme heat.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/02/regions/negros-occidental-livestock-damage-reaches-p10m/1944338>

THE MANILA TIMES:

Searca, Newfields offer training on carbon farming

By [Leander C. Domingo](#)

May 2, 2024

TO provide technical support to carbon farm planners and extension workers in Philippine rice-based farming systems, the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca) has been offering a series of training activities.

An endeavor in partnership with Newfields Consulting Ltd. (NFC), Searca Director Glenn Gregorio noted that by offering carbon emission monitoring services, "farmers can gain insight into their carbon footprint."

"Farmers can implement efficient strategies and play an active role in promoting sustainable agricultural practices," he added.

With a plan to organize the fourth workshop in November 2024, he said the first of the series of training workshops was held from November 20-21 last year and followed by the second training workshop from March 10-11.

Gregorio said the third training workshop on April 11 and 12 was attended by 19 participants from the provincial and municipal agricultural offices of Laguna, faculty and researchers of the University of the Philippines Los Baños and representatives from the private sector.

"The training workshops aim to provide a more in-depth discussion of the Carbon Wise Rice Information System (CWRIMS) and its applicability on the ground," he said.

Gregorio noted the importance and significance of interinstitutional collaboration being introduced by Eric Reynoso, Searca head of Emerging Innovation for Growth Department.

In the recently held training workshop, Reynoso highlighted the critical role played by monitoring, reporting and verification or MRV systems "to ensure the accuracy of carbon measurement, facilitating precise assessments of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions."

He also emphasized the importance of cultivating proficiency in generating comprehensive reports using the carbon-wise rice-based farming tool developed by NFC.

Gregorio said NFC Executive Director Eero Nissila discussed the general incentive system, carbon offsetting projects in agriculture and incentive systems for more sustainable agriculture.

Nissila presented different ways to reduce GHG emissions from rice farming such as alternate wetting and drying for irrigation, intermittent drainage, soil and nutrient management, cover crops, biomass incorporation and rice straw management.

Emphasizing the focus on digital MRV, Nissila also reiterated the commencement of carbon offset initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable agricultural practices, urging different organizations and institutions to engage in collaborative efforts.

Moreover, Nissila also highlighted the effects on farmers through various income generation opportunities from carbon credit.

On the other hand, Nikki Carumba, NFC senior software engineer, talked about the latest CWRIMS version and provided a more detailed walkthrough of the system by introducing the stakeholders to the system enhancements and requirements.

Carumba manages the system design and deployment, and showed the diverse features and enhanced functions of CWRIMS, offering a thorough presentation of its operational capabilities and introducing

the system's mobile application designed for offline functionality and efficient data collection in the field. Gregorio said that during training workshops, hands-on exercises are demonstrated, during which the participants use realistic data and conditions from the field.

"This affords the participants an extensive opportunity for interactive engagement with the web and mobile applications," the Searca director said.

He said participants can actively contribute their individual experiences, feedback and recommendations on the uses and functions of both the web and mobile applications.

"This can help refine and optimize features and user experience of the web and mobile applications," Gregorio said.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/02/business/agribusiness/searca-newfields-offer-training-on-carbon-farming/1944248>

THE MANILA TIMES:

CLSU program transfers farm tech to villages

By [Leander C. Domingo](#)

May 2, 2024

THE Central Luzon State University (CLSU) in Nueva Ecija is making farmers more adept and knowledgeable in the application of technologies through its Techno Village Development Program (TVDP), a unified university extension program to accelerate countryside development.

Edgar Orden, CLSU vice president for research and extension, and director of the University Extension Program Office (UEPO), said the university's techno village program was inspired by the Adopt-a-Barangay concept wherein an institution selects a community to serve and deploys its human and material resources to help the locality.

"The program takes the journey further by accentuating the role of innovations and proactive community engagement in the process of helping people and communities develop themselves," Orden said.

He added that the techno village program also aims "to harness and mobilize expertise not only from university's core research and development offices and specialized centers but also the academic program, making it a unified effort to facilitate development." Orden also explained that the program is an extension modality conceptualized by CLSU to create a hub for the application of matured technologies from the university, where local farmers can adopt options such as producing ducks, tilapia, special rice, soybean, goats with upgraded breeds, pellet feeds and mushrooms. Also, CLSU has matured technologies for forage and pasture development.

He said the program is in collaboration with other research and extension centers, colleges and college-based research and development centers, local government units, city and municipal

agriculturists, community-based organizations and farmer associations.

"We want these techno villages in different communities to become a hub of applicable CLSU technologies and be a model to other villages," he added.

Itik Pinas production

One of the project components of TVDP of UEPO is the Itik Pinas (IP) egg production. One of these is set up in the backyard of a farmer-partner in Barangay Cabisuculan in Muñoz, Nueva Ecija.

An improved Philippine mallard duck developed through strategic breeding and selection, the IP is a genetically superior breeder duck characterized by uniform physical appearance, predictable egg production performance and consistent product quality.

Compared to traditional mongrel ducks, IP produces more eggs up to 55 pieces per duck per year.

Tilapia production for 'tilading'

"Tilading" is a salted dried product whose name came from the combination of the words "tilapia" and "daing." It is a processed tilapia product made from 20 to 30 grams of split tilapia that is mildly salted and dried.

The UEPO Team said the product is healthy and cleanly processed, with brine solution used. The processing system was also introduced to the community of Cabisuculan with the university's team ready to assist the technology adopters.

Special rice production

Also developed by CLSU, the Special Purpose Rice CLS2 is one of several specialized rice varieties, including CLS1 and CLS3, being introduced this year through the TVDP.

According to UEPO, these varieties are intended to thrive in lowland irrigated areas during both wet and dry production seasons. Also, the rice variety is the result of extensive research and development in specialized rice breeding to provide high-quality rice options to consumers.

Soybean production

Citing a report from the Bureau of Agricultural Statistics in 2014, UEPO said soybean market in the Philippines is worth billions of pesos annually but only 5 percent of the total supply requirement is produced locally. Also, most soybean-producing areas in the country are in Mindanao.

CLSU has been promoting soybean planting for more than three decades and its extensive research yielded the SJ2 or CLSoy-1 variety with a concomitant package of technology. CLSoy-1 has been registered and recognized as a regional variety because it is adaptable to the local climatic conditions.

The UEPO Team said production and postproduction technologies have also been developed by CLSU, the Bureau of Agricultural Research (BAR), and the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech), among others, to make soybean farming more productive and profitable. BAR and PHilMech are agencies under the Department of Agriculture.

The team said these technologies must reach more local farmers so that they can be motivated to go into soybean production as a livelihood enterprise.

"With the steady demand for soybean by-products that lead processors to develop newer products, demand for soybean seeds shall no doubt persist, hence the big potential for soybean seed production," the team said.

Goat production

Another TVDP project component is goat production. CLSU has granted milking goats to TVDP farmer-partners in Barangay Calabalabaan in Muñoz. Five milking goats — three Anglo-Nubian and two Saanen — and a milking stand were awarded to Mauro Reyes, farmer-partner of TVDP dairy goat production.

Ryan Enriquez, also a farmer-beneficiary from Barangay Villa Isla in Muñoz, reported that his dairy goats produced 36.5 liters of milk in seven days and sold at P150 per liter.

Mushroom production

According to the UELO Team, CLSU also actively promotes mushroom production using rice straw-based technology.

CLSU also conceptualized the establishment of a Science and Technology Village in the community "to alleviate poverty and unemployment through training and demonstration of the university's proven and matured technology to the rural community."

UELO said the project will showcase the mushroom technology developed by CLSU and will provide capability-building activities and extension work on establishing a mushroom production industry in the countryside.

A TVDP farmer-partner, Raymundo Cayapan, is an ambulant driver who now has a mushroom production facility in Talavera, Nueva Ecija. At first, Cayapan grew mushrooms as a hobby and for family consumption, but eventually shifted to doing it as a business and now has almost 300 fruiting bags.

He also learned to sell mushrooms online and is known as the "online mushroom seller" in his municipality.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/02/business/agribusiness/clsu-program-transfers-farm-tech-to-villages/1944249>

Citing gains from RCEF, agri dept vies for fund extension to 2030

By **Jed Macapagal**

May 2, 2024

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is calling on the House of Representatives to extend the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) created under the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) until 2030.

The DA cited RTL's significant gains for the rice industry, particularly in increasing the country's rice output and providing more resources to help farmers.

RCEF represents tariffs collected from rice imported by the private sector since the law took effect in 2019. The fund is allocated for the modernization of the rice industry.

A total of P10 billion of the rice fund is used every year to mechanize rice farming, provide better seeds and other inputs to boost yield and increase farmers' income, as well extend credit and extension services to farmers.

Rice farmers tilling less than 2 hectares also get financial assistance from the fund. Collection of the fund stops after June 2024.

Christopher Morales, DA undersecretary for rice industry development, said in a recent hearing the government has distributed 15 million sacks of certified rice seeds to 1.2 million farmers since the passage of the RTL. The government has given out 27,508 machineries, equipment and post-harvest facilities to improve efficiency and reduce wastage.

Morales said the rice fund also provided 250,000 farmers training in better farming technologies, P4.6 billion in credit and P20.1 billion in financial assistance.

“While we are on the direction toward our desired impacts, we still have a long way to go...

The extension of the RCEF until 2030 and reallocation of funds towards farm machinery, seed development and training and extension services are recommended, with special attention given to soil health improvement initiatives,” added Morales.

Meanwhile, Flordeliza Bordey, Philippine Rice Research Institute deputy executive director for special concerns on the implementation of RCEF, said between 2019 and 2023, rice yield per hectare has risen by 21 percent during the dry season from 3.63 metric tons (MT) to 4.36 MT.

During the wet season, yield was also up 9 percent to 4.03 MT, Bordey added.

Bordey said production cost has gone down to P13.64 a kilogram in 2023 from P15.24 a kg in 2019 during the dry season and to P14.92 per kg from P15.34 a kg in the wet season over the same period.

Apart from extending the RCEF, the DA also suggested that lawmakers consider enhancements to the RTL to maximize its impact on the rice industry and the lives of farmers.

Among adjustments the DA has identified are greater allocation of funds for farm inputs and post-harvest facilities to boost productivity and rice yield as well as lessen wastage; imposition of timing restrictions on import permits to control arrivals during harvest season; strengthening the regulatory functions of the Bureau of Plant Industry; and allowing the National Food Authority to secure buffer stock through alternative schemes.

https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/citing-gains-from-rcef-agri-dept-vies-for-fund-extension-to-2030/

Govt aid for workers in areas hit by El Niño coming ‘soon’ – BBM

By **Jocelyn Montemayor**

May 2, 2024

PRESIDENT Marcos Jr. yesterday assured workers in the agricultural sector and other industries in areas heavily affected by the El Niño phenomenon that government assistance would “soon” be provided to them.

In his Labor Day speech, the President said the assistance is part of the ongoing program of the Department of Agriculture (DA), the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE).

“Sa susunod na araw ay magpapaabot tayo ng tulong pinansyal sa mga lubhang naapektuhan ng El Niño sa buong bansa – yaong mga nasiraan ng pananim at kabuhayan dahil sa tagtuyot (In the next few days, we will provide financial aid to areas that were heavily affected by the El Niño in the country – for those whose crops were destroyed to those whose livelihood were affected by the dry season),” he said.

He added that priority will be given to those affected in Mindanao.

The DSWD said that as of May 1, there are 2.97 million persons or 695,149 persons from 3,905 barangays in 13 regions affected by El Niño.

The DSWD data likewise showed that P97.275 million worth of family food packs and non-food relief items have been distributed to affected areas in regions I (Ilocos), II (Cagayan Valley), III (Central Luzon), IV-B (Mimaropa), V (Bicol), VI (Western Visayas), VII (Central Visayas), VIII (Eastern Visayas), IX (Zamboanga Peninsula), XI (Davao), XII (Soccsksargen), Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

SWELTERING HEAT

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) yesterday said 38 areas, mostly in Luzon, will experience a danger heat index of 42 to 47 degrees today.

The forecast hottest place in the country is Dagupan City in Pangasinan, which is expected to feel a 47 degree heat index.

The coastal towns of Aparri in Cagayan and Pili in Camarines Sur will have a heat index of 46 degrees, while Laoag City in Ilocos Norte and Tuguegarao City in Cagayan are projected to have a 45 degree heat index.

Thirty-three areas will have a heat index of 42 to 44 degrees, including Quezon City and Pasay City.

The others are Sinit town in Ilocos Sur, Batac in Ilocos Norte, Bacnotan town La Union, Bayombong town in Nueva Vizcaya, Echague town in Isabela, Iba town in Zambales, Muñoz in Nueva Ecija, Baler and Casiguran towns in Aurora, Olongapo City in Zambales, Tayabas City and Alabat town in Quezon, Sangley Point in Cavite, Calapan town in Oriental Mindoro, Puerto Princesa City and Coron and Aborlan towns in Palawan, San Jose town in Occidental Mindoro, Daet town in Camarines Norte, Legazpi City in Albay, Virac town in Catanduanes, Masbate City in Masbate, Roxas City and Mabusao town in Capiz, Iloilo City and Dumangas town in Iloilo, La Carlota City in Negros Occidental, Catarman town in Northern Samar, Catbalogan town in Samar, Tacloban City in Leyte and Guiuan town in Eastern Samar.

PAGASA has classified a heat index ranging from 42 to 51 degrees as dangerous, where residents are likely to experience heat cramps and heat exhaustion and heat stroke is possible.

Due to the predicted extreme heat, the city government of San Juan in Metro Manila yesterday said it would adjust its work hours to 7 am. to 4 p.m. starting today.

Mayor Francis Zamora issued Executive Order (EO) No. FMZ-168 adjusting the work hours in all offices of the city government.

Zamora said that the earlier work hours is in compliance with MMDA Resolution No. 24-08, Series of 2024 which moved the working hours in all local government offices in the metropolis to help alleviate traffic congestion and to mitigate possible health issues due to the high heat index.

TROPICAL CYCLONES

Amid the high temperatures across the country, PAGASA said one to two tropical cyclones might develop or enter the Philippine Area of Responsibility this month.

“It’s possible there will be one or two tropical cycles that will enter our Philippine Area of Responsibility towards the second half of May,” said PAGASA weather specialist Benison Estareja in a weather forecast on Wednesday afternoon.

Estareja nevertheless said the country will still experience hot temperatures until the end of May.

PAGASA weather specialist Rhea Torres, in a weather forecast yesterday morning, said that based on the climatological tracks, there are two scenarios if a tropical cyclone enters the PAR – it will make an approach on land before recurving and exiting PAR, and the tropical cyclone will pass areas in Eastern Visayas, Bicol, Mimaropa and Calabarzon, before heading to the West Philippine Sea.

Torres said they are not expecting any tropical cyclone during the remaining days of the week and next week.

SCHOOL CALENDAR

In a related development, Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri yesterday backed the plan of the Department of Education (DepEd) to finish the school calendar for the incoming 2024-2025 academic year to March 2025, instead of May next year.

The DepEd on Tuesday said they are planning to end classes by March 2025 for the incoming academic year to partially meet growing calls to revert to the old June-March school calendar. The end-March school calendar finish will be short by at least 120 days if the original class schedule is pursued, which is August to June.

Zubiri said he will convince the President to approve the DepEd's recommendation.

“I fully support the proposal of the DepEd and would seek the President's approval on this very crucial and important decision which could save lives and enhance the learning situation of our students in the country,” Zubiri said in a Viber message to the media.

Zubiri has withdrawn Senate Bill No. 788 which he filed at the start of the 19th Congress, which synchronizes the school year to start in August.

“In an ideal world, we do want to be in synch with international school calendars, to give our students a better chance at getting into programs abroad ... But the reality is that the August calendar has proven to be disruptive to our education system, and even dangerous to the health of our children and school staff,” Zubiri earlier said.

During the Committee on Basic Education hearing last Tuesday, Education assistant secretary Francis Bringas said the agency has submitted to President Marcos the recommendation “presenting other options, including a more aggressive alternative ending school year 2024-2025 in March 2025.”

More than 7,000 schools nationwide have suspended face-to-face classes and shifted to asynchronous learning due to the extreme heat. – *With Victor Reyes, Christian Oineza and Raymond Africa*

https://malaya.com.ph/news_news/govt-aid-for-workers-in-areas-hit-by-el-nino-coming-soon-bbm/

Wheat edges higher

By **Reuters**

May 2, 2024

CANBERRA/LONDON- Chicago wheat futures rose slightly on Wednesday as traders assessed the likely impact on supply of dry weather conditions in key growing regions of Russia and the United States.

Soybean futures fell for a second day, dragged lower by a sharp decline in soyoil prices and a strengthening dollar, which pressured US farm goods by making them more expensive for importers. Corn edged lower.

The most-active wheat contract on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) was up 0.1 percent at \$6.04 a bushel, while CBOT soybeans were down 0.5 percent at \$11.57-1/4 a bushel and corn slipped 0.2 percent to \$4.45-3/4 a bushel.

All three contracts fell to four-year lows earlier this year due to plentiful supply and the accumulation of large bearish bets by speculative investors anticipating lower prices.

Concerns that dryness would hit crops in the southern US Plains wheat belt and in southern Russia pushed CBOT wheat to a four-month high of \$6.33-1/4 on Friday, with speculators forced to cover short positions.

But forecasts this week have predicted some rainfall in Russia, pushing prices off their highs.

“The market is trying to figure out whether there’s any issue with Russian production,” said Commonwealth Bank analyst Dennis Voznesenski.

https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/wheat-edges-higher-2/

BUSINESS MIRROR:

More Filipinos consuming cage-free eggs, survey reveals

Rory Visco / May 2, 2024

FOR the longest time, the idea of eating healthy is not really lost in the minds of people around the world. In fact, the pandemic even fueled the desire of families and people around the world to choose to eat vitamin- and nutrient-rich foods that will boost the immune system so that they can stay healthy and combat any virus or disease that will come along.

Even in the consumption of livestock like cows, chickens, or pigs, there's been a constant interest in consuming livestock that are raised naturally, meaning those that are not confined in suffocating spaces and can freely roam around, and are nourished with natural and chemical-free feeds.

One of those that took people's fancy are eggs since they are easily accessible and affordable but offers a lot of nutritious value as well. Even with eggs, a lot of terms have been coined to make it a top choice of healthy food that consumers can consider as part of their diet.

Cage-free or free-range?

THERE'S been a lot of debate as to which is better. According to Eater.com, a website focused on food and dining, "free-range," a term coined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) are those eggs that "come from hens that have some sort of access to the outdoors...but doesn't mean that the hens actually go outdoors, or that the outdoor space is more than a small, fenced-in area; it simply implies that a door exists that a farmer could at some point open."

There is another term called "cage-free," again courtesy of the USDA, wherein, Eater.com said, "the eggs come from hens that, put simply, aren't caged. They can freely roam a building, room, or enclosed area with unlimited access to food and fresh water during their production cycle, but has no access to the outdoors."

An article that appeared in AVINews.com cited several reasons to consume cage-free eggs, which apparently has "a fresher taste, an enhanced nutritional profile, that

they are products of hens that enjoy a wide habitat with access to open air, that's why they are also called 'happy hen eggs,' that there is respect for the animal and general improvement of its welfare, and is of high quality where consumers and animals benefit equally."

Only cage-free eggs in the PHL

PERHAPS the cage-free eggs fever has already caught on in the country if the results of a recent national consumer survey were to be believed.

Titled "The Philippines Consumer Survey For Cage-Free Eggs," it revealed that a large majority of Filipino consumers prefer that food companies, those in the food industry such as restaurants, retailers and packaged food brands, should source their eggs from farms that use cage-free production methods.

About 83 percent of Filipinos said that restaurants, supermarkets, packaged food companies, and other similar establishments should purchase the eggs from suppliers where the hens live in cage-free surroundings, while 80 percent said they'd lean more on patronizing a food brand that uses cage-free eggs.

And apparently, of the hundreds that were polled, many wouldn't mind paying premium price just to be able to transition to cage-free eggs from the traditional ones. "89 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that 'the advantages of cage-free eggs in terms of food safety and quality are worth spending a little extra money on, while 76 percent of consumers were willing to pay 10 to 25 percent more for cage-free eggs in supermarkets, and 74 percent were willing to spend 5 to 10 percent more for a restaurant meal or packaged food product that used cage-free eggs.'"

Aside from this, interest in animal welfare was also a major element with regard to consumer attitudes. When presented with the statement that "hens that produce eggs should not be kept in cages, that they should have the freedom to walk and move around," 95 percent of them agreed, while 99 percent said food companies should buy their eggs and meat supply only "from a supply chain that adheres to humane standards of animal treatment," and 31 percent cited the safety of cage-free eggs as a valuable advantage.

Consumer attitude

WITH these results from the survey that was conducted by leading APAC consumer research agency GMO Research, consumer attitude is already evolving toward

“seeking higher animal welfare and sustainability standards from the food brands they patronize.”

Given this evolution in customers’ attitude, several major food brands operating in the Philippines like Jollibee, The Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf, Red Ribbon, Mang Inasal, Ascott, MetroMart, including the SM Hotels and Conventions Corp. (SMHCC) and Robinsons Hotels and Resorts have already committed to using only cage-free eggs in the coming years.

“These new survey findings underscore how important it is for food companies to prioritize animal welfare and other ethical sourcing practices in their operations,” according to Robyn Del Rosario, Sustainability Program Manager at Lever Foundation, a non-government organization that supports companies in the Philippines and across Asia regarding sustainable sourcing. “As consumer awareness and demand for improvements like cage-free eggs continue to rise, businesses can seize the opportunity to enhance their brand reputation by aligning their sourcing standards with consumers’ expectations.”

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/05/02/more-filipinos-consuming-cage-free-eggs-survey-reveals/>