

MANILA BULLETIN:

A chief lays out proposed P15-billion RCEF allocation

BY [GABRIELL CHRISTEL GALANG](#)

May 6, 2024 01:31 PM

With recent support having been garnered from President Marcos, the Department of Agriculture (DA) has asked the House of Representatives to further pursue amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), specifically on the extension of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF).

In a hearing at the House of Representatives on Monday, May 6, Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. spoke about the importance of revising the RTL, and how it extends its support to local farmers.

He believes that the revision of the law would be imperative since the country is facing challenges due to the volatilities caused by world conflicts and climate change.

Certain changes proposed to the Republic Act 11203 would pose bigger financial adjustments to the RCEF.

During the hearing, the proposal stated an increase of total annual appropriation of RCEF to P15

-billion distributed to various DA agencies and programs.

Within the said budget, 50 percent or P7.5 billion will be allotted to the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PhilMech) for post-harvest facilities and storage.

About 30 percent, or P4.5 billion, will then be allocated to the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice).

Other allocations, like the expansion of the rice credit assistance and rice extension services program, would be given P900 million each, as both initiatives would get a six-percent share of the proposed P15-billion budget.

The Bureau of Soils and Water Management (BSWM) has been earmarked four percent of the budget, equivalent to P600 million for soil health improvement purposes.

The Pest and Disease Management, as well as the Rice Industry Development, will each receive P300 million. This would allow them to establish the Office for the Integration of RCEF Priority Programs and Projects (PAPs).

If approved, the RCEF would be extended until 2030 to ensure a comprehensive development of the rice industry.

The agriculture chief believes that these amendments would provide preferential attention to rice farmers, cooperatives, and associations.

Moreover, the proposed change would permit the President to reallocate the RCEF, given that there's recommendation made from the DA secretary and the RCEF program steering committee.

Excess tariff revenues can also be dispersed to various programs as determined by the DA chief, while the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) will augment the funding requirement of the enhancement fund in case tariff revenues are below P15 billion.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/6/da-chief-lays-out-proposed-p15-billion-rcef-allocation>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Romualdez optimistic of below P30 per kilo rice after meeting with DA chief

BY [ELLSON QUISMORIO](#)

May 6, 2024 06:44 PM

AT A GLANCE

- House Speaker Martin Romualdez has expressed strong belief that, given the right circumstances, prices of rice could plunge to below P30 per kilo come July.



House Speaker Martin Romualdez (Facebook)

House Speaker Martin Romualdez has expressed strong belief that, given the right circumstances, prices of rice could plunge to below P30 per kilo come July.

Romualdez made this pronouncement after engaging Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. in a meeting at the House of Representatives Monday, May 6.

"Opo, gagawin po natin ang lahat, yun po ang ating goal na aagahan natin 'yung pagbaba ng presyo ng bigas (Yes, we will do everything we can, the goal is to make cheaper rice available earlier)," Romualdez told reporters after the meeting when asked if it was possible to have rice priced at P29 per kilo rice.

"Kasama din natin ang [National Irrigation Administration] Administrator [Eduardo] Guillen, with full support sa irrigation program, we will work together hand-in-hand para mapaaga ang goal natin na ibababa natin ang presyo ng bigas at ibang mga commodities po," he said.

(We are also working NIA Administrator Eduardo Gullen, with full support from the irrigation program, we will work together hand-in-hand so that we can achieve our goal of bringing down the price of rice and other basic commodities.)

Earlier Monday, President Marcos announced that he would certify as urgent the bills seeking to amend Republic Act (RA) No.11203 or the Rice Tarrification Law (RTL). This is seen as a major boost in the effort to reduce rice prices as it would restore the National Food Authority's (NFA) power to directly sell cheaper rice to the market.

Currently, the retail price of well-milled and premium rice is anywhere from P50 to P60.

Tiu explained how these proposed amendments to the RTL would make it feasible for the staple grain to be sold at below P30 at retail.

"Dati sir nakatali iyung kamay ng DA and NFA due to 'yung certain law that we have existing so meron tayong pinababago sa batas at hopefully ma-pass ng Congress ito para mabigyan ng leway na mag-intervene ang DA at NFA sa issue sa bigas," he said.

(Before, the hands of the DA and NFA were tied due to a certain law that we have existing so we're asking for amendments to the law and hopefully Congress will pass it and give the DA and NFA the leeway to intervene on the issue of rice.)

Romualdez said they also want to do the with pork, for the benefit of consumers. He claimed that the price of other products like chicken, eggs, and sugar have already gone down.

"Kailangan lang dito ay proper coordination kaya 'yung sinabi ni Secretary [Tiu] (Like what the Secretary said, what we need is full coordination). We are in full coordination with the department of agriculture and our agri team," said the House leader.

Tiu attended the House Committee on Agriculture and Food's hearing on the proposed RTL amendments Monday morning as one of the resource speakers.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/6/romualdez-optimistic-of-below-p30-per-kilo-rice-after-meeting-with-da-chief-1>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Hope for the Philippine Horticulture Industry

BY [RAYMUNDO W. LO, MD, FPSP](#)

May 7, 2024 03:34 AM

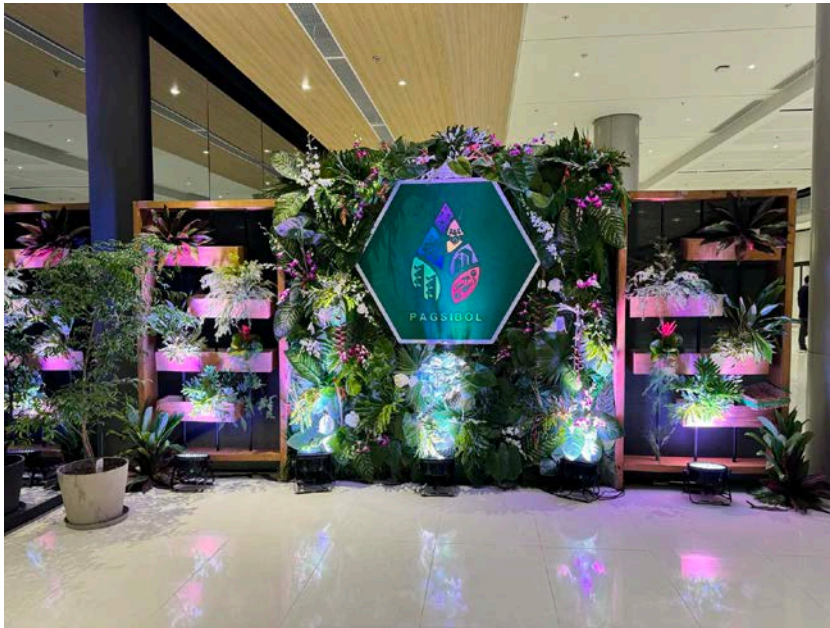
UNDER THE MICROSCOPE



The Philippine Horticulture and Urban Agriculture Summit 2024 was held May 3-6, 2024 at the A Mall, Makati City. As an avid gardener and orchid hybridizer, I eagerly attended what was promised as a meeting of minds among stakeholders in the industry and government officials concerned, namely from the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

There is a glimmer of hope for the industry that I had despaired about in my previous column (What ails the orchid industry? May 7, 2023, Manila Bulletin).

According to Mike Rimland of world-famous Costa Farms, the global retail value of ornamental plants according to one speaker, is worth over US\$200 billion, more than the combined total of tea (around US\$52 billion) and coffee (around US\$75 billion). Shocking as it seems, it underscores the economic value of ornamental plants which the Philippines has barely explored. According to the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) speakers, our local market size is around P1.6 billion while local production is just P350 million with the rest filled up by imports, thus contributing to the balance of payments deficit.



The speakers, both local and international, have shown the way by way of their success stories and future business opportunities.

There are new initiatives like farm and flower tourism, where local and foreign tourists flock to Instagram-worthy scenery of fields in bloom and idealized landscapes. In this day and age of social media like Facebook, Tiktok and others, they are also taking advantage of virtually-free publicity as people post their selfies amid these fabulous backgrounds.



The International Ornamental Industry forum speakers spoke on the cut flower and potted annual business in the ASEAN region and which varieties are ideal for the Philippine setting (Taksa-on Vathesatogkit) and growing cut-flowers under protected greenhouse culture (Jerry Sangatanan). A surprising revelation is that tulips are now being grown locally under strictly-controlled conditions in Nueva Vizcaya.

Tessie Amore of the University of Hawaii and Surawit Wannakrairoj from the Kasetsart University, Thailand, spoke on breeding approaches for orchids and ornamental plants.

Reynold Pimentel, noted Philippine plant breeder, related his experience in developing new cultivars with high ornamental value using Philippine endemic species

A session on the potentials of the landscape industry revealed that there is a shortage of available quality plants and trees that major land developers like Ayala Land and Villar Land require for landscaping. Their emphasis is on the use of Philippine plant and tree species that are environmentally-friendly and sustainable. That is a huge opportunity that can be explored. But our local nurseries and the real estate developers have to get together to come up with standards for growing these ornamental plants and trees for use in public spaces.

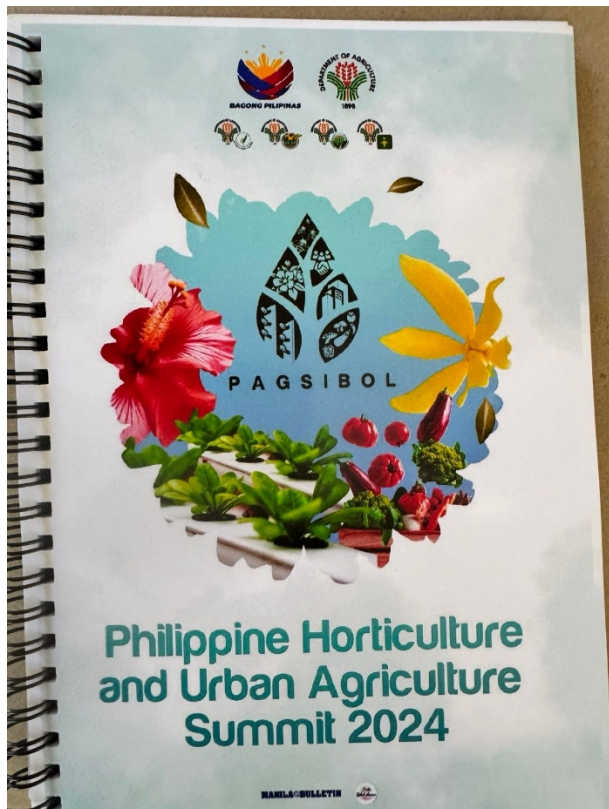


The third day was all about urban agriculture, which we sorely need to grow vegetables and fruits, and stave off the rising costs of food and as a way to get the different elements of the community together. To make urban gardening more attractive, edible landscaping makes these gardens look pretty and Instagram-worthy as well. Other ways of growing plants with limited space are in growth chambers (green pods and greenhouses), vertical farming and protected environments.



There are so many opportunities in the horticultural industry, not only locally but in the export of plants, cut-flowers and foliage which some, like Insular Botanicals of Lucban, Quezon

pioneered. As previously mentioned, the global market for ornamental plants and flowers is humongous, and we are barely scratching the surface, to speak.



But we need to address the challenges, from regulatory restrictions, lack of governmental support and financing to the setting up of mass production facilities for propagating select varieties and even subsidies for importing good stock and setting up growing facilities. Powerhouses in the ornamental plant industry like Taiwan, Thailand and Singapore all provided their growers with financial support that enabled the industry to grow and eventually stand on their own.

A serious re-evaluation of the Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act (RA 9147) and its implementing rules and regulations (IRR) is needed at this point to unlock the full potential of our endemic plant species. As it is, almost all these endemic species are now available abroad and were actually the basis for the rise of the industry in other countries. Thus, these are no longer threatened by extinction other than in their local habitats, which are what needs to be protected. We have to allow our own people to benefit from them by allowing propagation of these endemic species and using them as breeding stock to come up with our own cultivars, hybrids and varieties that can be exported abroad as well as supply the local market.

Let's hope our government officials are listening and responsive to this call.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/7/hope-for-the-philippine-horticulture-industry>

MANILA BULLETIN:

PROVINCIALLUZONNEWS

26,000 Isabela farmers affected by El Niño

BY LIEZLE BASA ÑIGO

May 6, 2024 06:32 PM

CITY OF SANTIAGO, Isabela – The Office of the Provincial Agriculturist has said that around 26,000 farmers in Isabela have been affected by the El Niño phenomenon.

Almost 31,000 hectares of agricultural land were affected and damage to agriculture in the province was placed at P1,487,405,308.23.

The Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (PDRRMC) recommended placing the entire province under a state of calamity due to the widespread impact of El Niño during their quarterly meeting last May 2.

Government meteorologist Ramil Tuppil said that El Niño is expected to continue in the country until this month based on the recent ENSO Alert System Status. He said that El Niño in the tropical Pacific continues to weaken, but hotter and drier conditions continue.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/6/26-000-isabela-farmers-affected-by-el-nino>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Romualdez welcomes PBBM's decision to certify Rice Tariffication Law amendments as urgent

BY [ELLSON QUISMORIO](#)

May 6, 2024 03:41 PM

AT A GLANCE

- House Speaker Martin Romualdez has hailed President Marcos' decision to certify as urgent the bill amending the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), which he has said would lead to a significant drop in the prices of rice.



House Speaker Martin Romualdez (left), President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. (Speaker's office)

House Speaker Martin Romualdez has hailed President Marcos' decision to certify as urgent the bill amending the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), which he has said would lead to a significant drop in the prices of rice.

"The certification of this bill as urgent by President Marcos is a critical step forward in our concerted efforts to improve the livelihood of our local farmers and ensure food security for all Filipinos," Romualdez said in a statement Monday afternoon, May 6.

"This amendment will allow us to address the challenges and limitations of the current law, ensuring that it serves the best interest of the agricultural sector and the consumers," added the leader of the 300-plus strong House of Representatives.

In a media interview at the Philippine International Convention Center in Pasay City Monday morning, President Marcos, Jr. said he would certify as urgent the proposed amendments to Republic Act (RA) No. 11203 or the RTL.

Romualdez and several other House members have proposed amending the RTL to restore the National Food Authority's (NFA) role to sell rice directly to public markets. Under the current law, the NFA's mandate is limited to ensuring buffer stocks for disasters.

"By adjusting the framework for rice importation and enhancing the role of the [NFA] in the market, we can better protect our rice prices from the volatility caused by international markets and the predatory practices of some traders," Romualdez explained.

"This will lead to more stable and predictable pricing for consumers while ensuring farmers receive a fair price for their produce," he added.

Romualdez earlier said that their aim was to reduce the prevailing retail price of rice in the market by P10 to P15 per kilo.

The proposed amendments to the 2019 law also aim to enhance the competitive edge of Filipino rice farmers by providing them with more robust support and protection.

Moreover, the changes are designed to stabilize rice prices by reducing the influence of unregulated rice importation and curbing the ability of middlemen to inflate prices excessively.

The House Committee on Agriculture and Food began last week its deliberation on the proposed amendments to the RTL.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/6/romualdez-welcomes-pbbm-s-decision-to-certify-rice-tariffication-law-amendments-as-urgent>

Suarez lauds Marcos' plan to certify Rice Tariffication Law amendments as urgent

BY [DEXTER BARRO II](#)

May 6, 2024 03:12 PM

AT A GLANCE

- Deputy Speaker and Quezon 2nd district Rep. David "Jay-jay" Suarez commended President Marcos for his plan to certify the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) amendments as urgent to bring down rice prices.
- During an interview with reporters on Monday, Marcos announced his support to amending the RTL, particularly in giving the government control over rice prices.



Quezon 2nd district Rep. David "Jay-jay" Suarez (Dexter Barro II/MANILA BULLETIN)

A much welcome development.

Deputy Speaker and Quezon 2nd district Rep. David "Jay-jay" Suarez had this to say as he commended President Marcos for his intention to certify the proposed amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) as urgent in the effort to bring down rice prices.

“Ramdam po natin na isa sa mga pangunahing hamon na hinaharap ng ating mga kababayan, ay yung patuloy na pagtaas ng presyo ng bilihan,” Suarez said in a press briefing on Monday, May 6.

(We sense that one of the main challenges facing our countrymen is the constant increase in the prices of goods.)

“And amending the Rice Tariffication Law is one sure step that we can have more competitive prices for Filipinos,” he added.

During an interview with reporters on Monday, Marcos announced his support for moves to amend the law, particularly in giving the government control retail prices of rice, the country’s staple food.

The House of Representatives has already started to deliberate over the proposed amendments to the RTL.

The Committee on Agriculture and Food, chaired by Quezon 1st district Rep. Wilfrido Mark Enverga, launched its committee hearings last week. The panel stressed the need for amendments to address the RTL’s faults in addressing the challenges that face rice farmers and the agricultural sector.

“This is in line with the directives of Speaker Martin Romualdez, our leader here in Congress na i-amend ang RTL upang siguraduhin na mapababa po nating ang presyo ng bigas para sa mamamayang Pilipino (to amend the RTL to ensure that we lower the price of rice for the Filipino people),” said Suarez.

Amid talks of amending the law, farmers group Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas is instead urging for a complete revocation.

For Suarez, a vice chairperson of the committee, said he respects the group’s position as part of the multilateral evaluation of the law’s effectiveness.

“Ito na po iyong pinakadahilan kung bakit tinatalakay ngayon ng Komite ng Agriculture iyong RTL dahil after so many years of implementation, we need to find out kung naging effective ba ito, kung ano po ba ang naging lapses nito, kung anong naging epekto nito sa sektor at kung ano po ba ang dapat gawin upang siguraduhin na mas makakabuti po ito sa bawat Pilipino,” he said.

(This is the main reason why the Committee on Agriculture is now discussing the RTL because after so many years of implementation, we need to find out if it has been effective, what have been its lapses, what impact has it had on the sector and what should be done to make sure that it will be better for every Filipino.)

The criticisms that the law has faced throughout the years urged the House Speaker to finally call for its amendments, according to Suarez.

“He’s seen that we need more safeguards, more regulation, more intervention from government to make sure that we give more competitive prices, better prices para sa bawat Pilipino (for every Filipino),” he pointed out, referring to Romualdez. Suarez said RTL should ideally decrease rice prices by almost P15.

With this, the Quezon lawmaker expects his colleagues in the Senate to do its part by also amending the RTL ahead of sine die break.

“I’m sure the Senate will take cue and take action on that. So antayin na lang po natin kung ano po ang magiging tugon ng Senado (So let’s just wait to see what the Senate’s response will be). But I’m very positive that the Senate will take action given the urgency of the matter,” noted Suarez.

Congress will have its sine die adjournment starting May 25 and until July 21.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/6/suarez-lauds-marcos-plan-to-certify-rice-tariffication-law-as-urgent>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Marcos to certify as urgent Rice Tariffication Law amendments

BY [ARGYLL CYRUS GEDUCOS](#)

May 6, 2024 10:30 AM

AT A GLANCE

- Marcos said amending the National Food Authority (NFA) charter and the RTL would give the government the ability to intervene when retail prices of rice go up.

President Marcos said he would certify as urgent the bill proposing to amend the five-year-old Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), saying the government should have some form of influence in how rice is being sold in the country.



President Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr. (Malacañang photo)

Marcos said this amid calls to amend Republic Act (RA) No. 11203 which, according to critics, failed to reduce the cost of rice and increased the number of cheaper imported ones in the market.

In an interview in Pasay City on Monday, May 6, the President said amending the National Food Authority (NFA) charter and the RTL would give the government the ability to have a say when retail prices of rice go up.

"Mako-control natin, meron tayong influence doon sa presyuhan sa pagbili ng palay at sa pagbenta ng bigas (We can control and we'll have an influence in the price of the selling of rice). So that's what we are going to do," he said.

"I think it justifies the urgent certification," he added.

According to the President, the price of rice is increasing because the government has no control over it.

"Ang problema kasi kaya tumataas iyong presyo ng bigas, dahil ang mga trader ay nagko-compete (The problem why the price of rice is increasing is because traders are competing)," he said.

"Pataasan sila ng presyuhan sa pagbili ng palay at wala tayong control doon (They want to buy rice at a higher price and we have no control over that)," he added.

Signed by former president Rodrigo Duterte in 2019, the RTL lifted quantitative restrictions on rice and introduced tariffs to protect local rice producers.

It established the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), which enhances rice productivity and supports farmers. It also mandated the NFA to manage a buffer stock sourced solely from local farmers.

On April 30, the House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture and Food started its evaluation of the RTL's effectiveness on the country's agriculture sector.

The panel's chairman, Quezon 1st District Rep. Mark Enverga, highlighted the need to revisit the law before its mandatory review this year.

"The clamor to revisit the law is overwhelming... We are considering the proposals to look into the gaps, the challenges, and the need to further enhance the effectiveness of the law," he said.

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"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," he added.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/6/marcos-to-certify-as-urgent-rice-tariffication-law-amendments>

MANILA BULLETIN:

'New model' deal? China resorting to 'propaganda, lies' to confuse Pinoys, says solons

BY [ELLSON QUISMORIO](#)

May 6, 2024 11:53 PM

AT A GLANCE

- Surigao del Norte 2nd district Rep. Robert Ace Barbers and Lanao del Sur 1st district Rep. Zia Alonto Adiong have called out China for its propaganda, which they believe is an attempt to create confusion among Filipinos on the West Philippine Sea (WPS) issue.



(Unsplash)

Two ranking congressmen from Mindanao have called out China for its propaganda, which they believe is an attempt to create confusion among Filipinos on the West Philippine Sea (WPS) issue.

Criticizing the Chinese over this tactic on top of their continuous bullying of Filipino fishing boats and other assets in the body of water are Surigao del Norte 2nd district Rep. Robert Ace Barbers and Lanao del Sur 1st district Rep. Zia Alonto Adiong.

Barbers says he is in full support of Department of National Defense (DND) Chief Gilbert Teodoro, who likened to a “charade” the Chinese Embassy's claim that Manila and Beijing have a “new model” or gentleman’s agreement meant as “confidence-building measures to avoid conflict in the WPS.”

“The claim made by a Chinese Embassy official, I believe, is an outright and calculated lie and

forms part of their propaganda intended or designed to veer away and/or deviate the Filipinos' attention on their creeping invasion and maybe other evil designs in the Philippines," he said.

Barbers, chairman of the House Committee on Dangerous Drugs, said China first claimed it had a verbal gentleman's agreement with former president Rodrigo Duterte on the Ayungin Shoal in WPS.

"Now, under the present dispensation, the Chinese Embassy claimed the exists a 'new model' of a gentlemen's agreement confirmed by the AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) Wescom, the DND chief and the National Security Adviser. Secretary Teodoro has debunked all those claims," he noted.

"China is banking on those fabricated or non-existent verbal agreements to justify their presence, incursions in the WPS, bullying and water-cannoning of our Coast Guard and BFAR (Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources) ships inside the Philippine territory. China has been lying and the Filipinos should always adopt extreme caution on whatever they say and do on the WPS issue," added Barbers.

Adiong, an assistant majority leader, said China is resorting to propaganda to divide Filipinos on issues involving the WPS.

"I think beyond the legal issues nakikita ko po dito (what I see here is) this is one of the tactics of China, part two ng propaganda ng PR ng China (this is part two of the propaganda of China's public relations). In fact, Secretary [Gibo] Teodoro came out this morning with the statement denouncing that there was no such new arrangement," he said.

"I think China is resorting to different kind of tactics, nandiyan 'yung bullying, pati na rin 'yung kasi (the bullying is there including the propaganda because) they understand the importance of propaganda [because] it puts legitimacy to their illegal claim," Adiong said.

"Sinasabi nila o, nag-agree na kami at saka ang Pilipinas (They're saying, look we have an agreement with the Philippines) so why are you acting this way? Why are you changing our agreement?" he asked.

Adiong has admitted to being angry that there are Filipinos parroting China's wrong assertions on the WPS, and who are serving as Beijing's mouthpiece.

"I think it's very clear ang position ng ating President, ang ating gobyerno, that we have to fight for our claim at hindi lang ito arbitrarily claimed by the Philippines (The President and our government have a very clear position, that we have to fight for our claim and that this isn't an arbitrarily claim by the Philippines), the basis for this is the ruling of the UNCLOS and internationally we have the moral high ground to claim these areas and the [WPS]," Adiong stressed.

UNCLOS stands for United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. It was adopted in 1982.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/6/new-model-deal-china-resorting-to-propaganda-lies-to-confuse-pinoys-says-solons>

Cynthia Villar hits NFA: 'They have not proven to take care for rice farmers, consumers'

BY [DHEL NAZARIO](#)

May 6, 2024 06:18 PM

Sen. Cynthia Villar criticized the National Food Authority (NFA), which according to her, has not proven itself in terms of looking after rice farmers and consumers' welfare.

Villar made the statement after President Marcos said he would certify as urgent the bill proposing to amend the five-year-old Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).

House Speaker Martin Romualdez and several other House members have proposed amending the RTL to restore the NFA's role in selling rice directly to public markets. Under the current law, the NFA's mandate is limited to ensuring buffer stocks for disasters.

However, Villar recalled how she, together with other senators were buying rice from the NFA to give to calamity victims in Mindanao and they were told that NFA has no stock only to find out that they sold the rice stocks to traders.

She said that NFA plays a vital role in ensuring food security and stability in the country by managing the supply and distribution of rice.

"It should focus on the acquisition, maintenance, and distribution of rice for buffer stocking sourced from local farmers and for calamity assistance. NFA has a yearly budget of P9 billion to do their local procurement," Villar said.

The senator also recalled a report on irregular sale of NFA Stocks to Selected Commercial Traders namely G4 Rice Mill Corp., and NBK San Pedro Ricemill.

"They pass this sold palay as deteriorating or aging stocks, and without undergoing a bidding process after purchasing the grains in palay form at P23 per kilo and sold as milled rice for Php 25 per kilo. The government was said to have incurred a P12,500,000.00 loss because of this," she said.

It was on March 4 when a total of 139 NFA officials were suspended pursuant to an order issued by the Office of the Ombudsman.

Meanwhile, the senator also called for the urgent passage of the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Law to control the middlemen and traders. She highlighted how the Senate passed Senate Bill No. 2432 or the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, in December 2023, and has been certified as urgent by the President.

"The Senate version states that there shall be severe sanctions on the nefarious acts of smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, and cartel of agricultural and fishery products as a self-preservation measure against the manipulative scheme of economic saboteurs, protect the livelihood of farmers, and plug leakages in tax and duty collection," she said.

She added that the bill likewise protects the State from tax evaders and non-payors of duties, and ensures the well-being of our agricultural producers and welfare of the consumers, and the economy as a whole.

Meanwhile, she said that the Rice Tariffication Law or RA No. 11203 provides that tariffs collected from imported rice shall go to the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF).

She explained that collections in excess of the P10 billion fund go to the Rice Farmer Financial Assistance or RFFA (RA No. 11598), to rice farmers tilling 2 hectares and below and registered in the RSBSA.

"I have filed Senate Bill No. 2601 or "An Act Liberalizing the Importation, Exportation and Trading of Rice, Lifting for the Purpose the Quantitative Import Restriction on Rice and for other purposes."" she added.

Villar said that a Congressional Oversight Committee on Agricultural and Fisheries Modernization (COCAFAM) Meeting of both houses has been set on May 14 in the Senate.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/5/6/cynthia-villar-hits-nfa-they-have-not-proven-to-take-care-for-rice-farmers-consumers>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

DA: 1 Pinoy died daily of rabies in 2023

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

May 7, 2024 | 12:00am



Pet owners accompany their fur babies as they receive free microchipping and anti-rabies vaccination along Escrivá Drive in Barangay San Antonio, Pasig on February 23, 2023.

STAR / Michael Varcas

MANILA, Philippines — At least one Filipino died daily in 2023 due to rabies, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

As this developed, an additional P100-million budget was endorsed to the DA for the procurement of vaccines against the disease.

Constante Palabrica, DA assistant secretary for poultry and swine, said local government units (LGUs) play an important role in eradicating rabies.

Palabrica made the statement during the turnover of the Philippine Inter-Agency Committee on Zoonoses in Quezon City recently.

He said Agriculture Undersecretary for livestock Deogracias Victor Savellano endorsed the additional budget allocation for the procurement of more anti-rabies vaccines.

Palabrica said the endorsement is pending before the office of Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel.

“Once approved, we are ready to buy the vaccines,” Palabrica said, noting the need for all LGUs to help in the campaign against rabies.

“When it comes to vaccination against rabies, the BAI cannot do it alone. It should have the participation of local government units. The only solution (to rabies) is vaccination,” he said, referring to the Bureau of Animal Industry.

Savellano reiterated Palabrica’s statement, saying as a former governor, he experienced the importance of LGUs in the campaign against rabies.

The DA yesterday assumed the chairmanship of the Philippine Inter-Agency Committee on Zoonoses from the Department of Health.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources is vice chairman of the committee.

Aside from rabies, Palabrica said the inter-agency committee is also focusing on the campaign against avian influenza

<https://www.philstar.com/nation/2024/05/07/2353206/da-1-pinoy-died-daily-rabies-2023>

Intractable



[FIRST PERSON](#) - [Alex Magno](#) - The Philippine Star

May 7, 2024 | 12:00am

Rice continues to be an intractable problem.

Rising prices for the staple commodity continues to fuel the inflation rate. With untamed inflation, monetary authorities will keep interest rates higher for longer. That will be like applying the brakes on our growth rate.

Food prices are rising every month, frustrating all efforts to curb inflation. At the core of food inflation is rice inflation.

We thought we had licked that problem with a law that allowed free trade in rice subject to tariffs. Under this new rice trading regime, private importers are free to import the staple from the international market. The National Food Authority (NFA) will be limited to purchasing from local producers to maintain our buffer stocks.

Things did not work out according to expectation. As our rice imports rose, prices continued to rise as well.

Perhaps the most effective way to curb rice inflation is to dramatically cut the tariff rate imposed on the commodity. But that will deny government the revenue it needs to modernize our domestic rice production. This means the efficiency of our domestic production will remain stagnant.

We have among the highest cost of production for rice. One reason is that we have broken up the land and encouraged small landholdings. This effectively inhibits mechanization of our rice farm systems.

All the countries we import rice from are in the Asian mainland where great rivers irrigate the fields for a water hungry crop. Domestic irrigation costs, although partly subsidized by government using taxpayer money, continue to push up prices.

Our power costs, because of poor planning in the energy sector, continues to keep irrigation costs high. The more severe droughts we expect because of climate change will not help ensure cheap and abundant water supply.

Later this year, as the toll taken by the El Nino phenomenon is accounted for, we will likely see tighter global supply and a continuing spiral in prices. The beast will not be tamed.

President Marcos opened the possibility of certifying as urgent bills amending the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL). What those amendments are will still be subject to legislative debate.

From his other utterances on the subject, it appears one amendment the President is thinking about is allowing the NFA to import rice as well. Before RTL, the NFA had monopoly over rice importation. That monopoly opened wide margins for corruption.

By leaving to the bureaucracy the decision to import rice or not, we made domestic supply unreliable. Several times in the past, the NFA decided to import rice late because of political pressure from our own farmers groups. The delayed importation decisions caused supply uncertainty and actual shortages that required rationing.

We cannot return to a government monopoly over rice trading. The international market for rice is thin. We cannot be assured adequate supply whenever we decide to import. The bulk importation also creates an incentive for rice traders in mainland Asia to jack up prices and rake in huge profits.

Today, the surplus grains available for exportation has thinned dramatically. Some of the countries we import rice from have decided to restrict sales to ensure ample supplies for their own domestic markets. India, for instance, imposed restrictions on the volume and varieties of rice available for exportation. That creates uncertainties for the rice importing countries.

Since the Philippines is the largest importer of rice, we bear the greatest uncertainties. Should severe drought or severe rain destroy crops from our rice sources, we will be left with an empty bag.

We have no choice but to live with this great uncertainty. The last time we had some sort of rice self-sufficiency, our population was only 60 million. Today our population is nearly double that.

There is no way to increase the amount of land we have available for rice farming. Land is a finite resource. Flatland is even more finite. There are competing needs for the land that will bring greater economic output than rice. We need flatland, often the most arable, for commerce, industry and housing.

We will have to wrestle with our rice problem for generations to come.

One approach is to integrate farms, introduce mechanization and higher yielding varieties. One example for this is the FDN Farms in Isabela province that has accomplished a national record of 231 cavans of rice per hectare. With a little more effort, FDN Farms is confident it could break the world record yield achieved by a farmer in India.

In addition, FDN Farms has introduced fish cultivation and cross-cropping in its enterprise. It benefitted from training support for its workforce from the Department of Agriculture and TESDA. The owners of the farm are now offering their methods for replication in other farms elsewhere.

The increased use of higher yielding varieties could face challenges from environmentalist groups however. Recently a court, in a worrying turn against GMOs, ruled against the dissemination of protein fortified rice and enriched eggplants. This could be used as a precedent against other genetically modified crop varieties that are the only solutions to our shortage of arable land.

The agrarian reform orthodoxy that favors breaking up agricultural land into uneconomic little “family-sized” parcels could constrain the growth of properly capitalized, technology absorptive integrated farms such as FDN.

Our struggle to be an efficient food producer runs against many old orthodoxies held sacred by groups that insist they be called “progressives.” The road forward will not be easy.

<https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2024/05/07/2353112/intractable>

DA denies underreporting El Niño damage

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

May 7, 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 — The Department of Agriculture (DA) yesterday denied underreporting El Niño's damage to the agriculture sector after former agriculture secretary Leonardo Montemayor said at least 30 percent of sugarcane plantations in Negros were affected by drought.

The DA was just being careful in issuing damage figures, Agriculture Assistant Secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa said in a chance interview during the Philippine Inter-Agency Committee on Zoonoses ceremonial turnover in Quezon City.

Data validation and verification were being conducted before the information was released to the media, he maintained.

Montemayor earlier said that agriculture damage caused by El Niño is underreported as former Sugar Regulatory Administration chief Rafael Coscolluela had warned that sugar production in Negros is expected to drop by 30 percent amid the impact of El Niño on sugarcane plantations.

“I have to check if the report on sugarcane was incorporated in our official data,” De Mesa said.

The DA has reported a total damage of P5.9 billion to the agriculture sector, including P3.14 billion for rice production; corn, P1.76 billion; high-value crops, P958.06 million; fisheries, P33.83 million; livestock, P7.93 million and cassava, P3.25 million.

It did not mention damage to sugarcane plantations and coconut trees.

Aside from sugarcane plantations, coconut farmers also reported they were affected by El Niño, Montemayor noted.

In some areas, coconut trees produced fewer or smaller nuts and there were reports of the proliferation of coconut scale insects or cocolisap due to hot temperatures in the Zamboanga peninsula, Montemayor said.

While he cannot give a particular figure on the extent of El Niño’s damage, Montemayor maintained the DA’s report was smaller compared to actual losses in the agriculture sector.

Coscolluela said late-milled sugar fields have not been replanted due to dry conditions.

Negros Occidental supplies 60 to 65 percent of the country’s local sugar consumption, he noted.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/07/2353147/da-denies-underreporting-el-nio-damage>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Marcos to certify rice tariffication amendments

[Alexis Romero](#) - The Philippine Star

May 7, 2024 | 12:00am



Workers store sacks of local premium rice at a rice mill warehouse in Bocaue, Bulacan on September 8, 2023.

STAR / Michael Varcas

MANILA, Philippines — President Marcos yesterday expressed readiness to certify as urgent the proposed amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), citing the need for the government to have a say in the pricing and selling of the staple.

The Rice Tariffication Act of 2019 stripped the National Food Authority (NFA) of its regulatory and import licensing issuance functions and limited its role to emergency buffer stocking of rice bought from local farmers.

It also permitted the private sector to freely import rice subject to a tariff.

Due to recent spikes in rice prices, some lawmakers – including Speaker Martin Romualdez – are seeking changes in the policy.

In pushing for changes, Romualdez estimated that the prices of the food staple would drop by P10 to P15 or near the P30 per kilogram mark if the law were amended.

Speaking to reporters in Pasay City, Marcos said amendments to the Rice Tariffication Act and the NFA charter would allow the government to influence the pricing of rice.

“It is something that has come up... The problem is the prices of rice increase because traders are competing. They try to outdo each other in setting high prices when buying palay (unhusked rice) and we do not have control over that,” the President said when asked about the proposed amendments.

“If we have amendments to the NFA charter and the Rice Tariffication Law, we could control, we would have an influence on the pricing of the palay to be purchased and the selling of rice. So, that’s what we are going to do,” he added.

Pressed if he would certify the amendment of the law as urgent, Marcos replied: “Yes, I think it justifies an urgent certification.”

Romualdez previously said the House aimed to lower the price of rice to close to P30 per kilo by June.

Data from the agriculture department showed that the price of local commercial rice ranges from P48 to P66 per kilogram while that of imported commercial rice ranges from P48 to P65 per kilogram as of May 3.

Marcos’ declaration was welcomed by agriculture officials. “We welcome the amendments of the RTL as its effectivity will end this year. It became effective in March 2019 after it was passed into law in the same year,” Agriculture Assistant Secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa said in a chance interview.

“It will depend on Congress on what amendments will be introduced in the existing provisions of the Rice Tariffication Law,” De Mesa added.

At a hearing yesterday by the House committee on agriculture, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. stressed the need for the restoration of the regulatory and commercial functions of the NFA.

Furthermore, Tiu Laurel disclosed that the NFA must be allowed to import rice again but only through the authority of the agriculture secretary to avert unnecessary losses.

“At the moment, no way for anybody in the government to do market intervention which is needed during drastic times in our world history,” Tiu Laurel told the House committee on agriculture yesterday.

Tiu Laurel led the DA contingent during the third hearing of the committee on the proposed amendment to RA 11203.

Administration allies in the House of Representatives were elated by Marcos' statement. Deputy Speaker David Suarez and Rep. Francisco Paolo Ortega V described the Chief Executive's latest pronouncements as a "welcome development."

"This is in line with the directives of Speaker Martin. Amending the Rice Tariffication Law is one sure step that we can have more competitive prices for Filipinos," Suarez told reporters.

Ortega, of La Union's first district, said he was glad to hear from no less than Tiu Laurel of the necessity to modify the law and make it more attuned to the current situation on the ground.

Ortega cited the explanation of the DA chief regarding the effect of more frequent periods of El Niño. "It's an element not contained in the policy, but an element of something that is crucial to the amendment," he said.

"So there is frequency even in the supply, even the demand will be affected, even the production will also be affected. This is crucial and very important," he added.

Former agriculture chief Manny Piñol also lauded Marcos for expressing his readiness to certify proposed amendments to the RTL.

"I am thankful to President Marcos because finally the call of the consumers and farmers were finally heard that there should be amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law because RTL actually was a legislation crafted without consultation with the stakeholders of the rice industry," Piñol said at a press briefing.

"That was why, in 2018, the retail price of rice was only P38 per kilo. The proponents of the RTL promised to bring it down to P7 (per kilo). What happened? The retail price of rice is now P60 and the current administration is being blamed when the truth is that this problem started when the economic managers of the previous administration rammed down our throats this idea of liberalizing the rice industry instead of protecting our local rice industry and protecting the consumers," Piñol said.

He said Marcos was correct in calling for the amendment of the RTL.

For his part, farmers' group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag) executive director Jayson Cainglet proposed to increase from P10 billion to P30 billion annually the fund allotted to farmers.

"Sinag is proposing to increase the fund allotment from P10 billion to P30 billion a year so more public support can be given to our rice farmers and the local rice industry," he said.

But for Gabriela Women's party-list Rep. Arlene Brosas, the RTL should be repealed and not just amended, saying it "falls short of addressing the root cause of the crisis." — Bella Cariaso, Sheila Crisostomo, Delon Porcalla, Jasper Emmanuel Arcalas

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/07/2353150/marcos-certify-rice-tariffication-amendments>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

No ban on US beef, dairy despite bird flu

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

May 7, 2024 | 12:00am



Agriculture Assistant Secretary Constante Palabrica said the transmission of avian influenza (AI) from infected birds to dairy cattle in the US should not be a cause of concern for consumers

[Philstar.com](#) / Jovannie Lambayan

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippines will not ban the importation of cattle products such as beef and milk from the United States as regulators maintain that these products are safe to consume amid bird flu cases in the US dairy herd.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Constante Palabrica said the transmission of avian influenza (AI) from infected birds to dairy cattle in the US should not be a cause of concern for consumers.

Palabrica emphasized that milk products undergo pasteurization that kills the bird flu virus, rendering it ineffective of infecting humans.

“It is not a big issue. If you pasteurize the milk, the AI virus will be ineffective. People will not be infected,” Palabrica, who also heads the Bureau of Animal Industry, told reporters yesterday.

“At this point in time we are not going to ban it,” Palabrica added, referring to cattle products from the US.

In March, the US confirmed its first-ever confirmed outbreak of bird flu in its dairy herd.

Since then, about nine US states have confirmed bird flu cases in 36 dairy herds, based on monitoring by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The US states that have confirmed bird flu cases in some of their dairy herds are Colorado, Idaho, Michigan, New Mexico, Texas, Kansas, South Dakota, North Carolina and Ohio.

The US Food and Drug Administration earlier assured the public that milk products sold in the market were safe to consume.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/07/2353161/no-ban-us-beef-dairy-despite-bird-flu>

Marcos: No water cannons for Philippine ships in WPS

Philstar.com

May 6, 2024 | 3:15pm

MANILA, Philippines — President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. rejected a proposal to equip Philippine ships patrolling the West Philippine Sea with water cannons in response to China's aggressive actions against the country's vessels.

Marcos on Monday ruled out the use of water cannons and other "offensive" equipment to assert the country's sovereignty in the West Philippine Sea.

"The last thing we would like is to raise tensions in the West Philippine Sea," the president said.

"We will not follow the China Coast Guard (CCG) and the Chinese vessels down that road because it's not the mission of the Navy, our Coast Guard to start or to increase tensions. Their mission is precisely the opposite: it's to lower tensions," he added.

Last week, the Philippines said the CCG water cannonned and rammed vessels of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) headed to Bajo de Masinloc, also known as Scarborough Shoal, to assist Filipino fishers in the area.

Marcos said his government will continue to address incidents in the West Philippine Sea through diplomatic channels.

"All we do when our ships are water cannonned, we send a démarche, we send letters to China and the other stakeholders," he said.

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) had summoned a Chinese envoy following the latest incident near Bajo de Masinloc.

Beijing claims nearly the entire South China Sea, dismissing claims from other countries, including the Philippines, and an international court ruling that found its assertions to have no legal basis. — **Gaea Katreena Cabico**

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/06/2353062/marcos-no-water-cannons-philippine-ships-wps>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Villar seeks passage of Agricultural Economic Sabotage Law

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

May 7, 2024 | 12:00am



Senator Cynthia Villar on April 11, 2024.

STAR / Jesse Bustos
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MANILA, Philippines — Sen. Cynthia Villar has called for the passage of the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Law to prevent middlemen and traders from taking advantage of rice farmers and consumers.

The National Food Authority (NFA) has not proven itself to be taking care of the welfare of farmers and consumers, she said, despite Senate Bill 2432 or the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act having been passed in December 2023 and certified as urgent by President Marcos.

She said the NFA plays a vital role in ensuring food security and stability in the country by managing the supply and distribution of rice. It should focus on the acquisition, maintenance and distribution of rice for buffer stocking sourced from local farmers and for calamity assistance, she said.

The NFA has a yearly budget of P9 billion for local procurement.

“We should urgently pass the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Law to control the middlemen and traders from causing hardship to the farmers and the consumers,” Villar said.

On March 20, 2024, the representatives of both houses of Congress went to a pre-bicam conference for the bill. The Senate version lays out severe sanctions on acts of smuggling, hoarding, profiteering and cartel of agricultural and fishery products as a self-preservation measure against the manipulative scheme of economic saboteurs, protect the livelihood of farmers and plug leakages in tax and duty collection.

Villar said the bill likewise protects the state from tax evaders and non-payors of duties, and ensures the well-being of agricultural producers and welfare of the consumers and the economy as a whole.

“I remember I together with other senators were buying rice from the NFA to give to calamity victims in Mindanao and we were told that they had no stock, only to find out that they sold the rice stocks to traders,” she added.

Recently, there was a report on the irregular sale of NFA stocks to selected commercial traders, namely G4 Rice Mill Corp. and NBK San Pedro Rice Mill. The grains were sold purportedly as deteriorating or aging stocks, and without undergoing a bidding process after being purchased in palay form at P23 per kilo and sold as milled rice for P25 per kilo. The government was said to have incurred a P12,500,000 loss because of this.

On March 4, 139 NFA officials were suspended based on an order issued by the Office of the Ombudsman.

There were several Senate resolutions filed in this regard, including ones by Senators JV Ejercito and Imee Marcos, with the bills languishing in the Blue Ribbon committee.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/05/07/2353177/villar-seeks-passage-agricultural-economic-sabotage-law>

Agricultural output seen flat in Q1 as El Niño bites

May 7, 2024 | 12:33 am



Farmers are seen in a rice field in Bustos, Bulacan, Oct. 17, 2023. -- PHILIPPINE STAR/KJ ROSALES

THE PHILIPPINES' agricultural output may have been flat in the first quarter amid the impact of the El Niño dry spell on the sector, especially on palay production, analysts said.

"First-quarter agricultural output in terms of growth should be around 1.8%. It could have been higher, but El Niño contributed to a lack of water, thereby lowering output," former Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar said in a text message.

If realized, this would be slower than the 2.1% year-on-year growth in the value of farm output in the first quarter of 2023, but faster than the 0.7% expansion in October-to-December 2023.

Agriculture accounts for about a tenth of gross domestic product and about a quarter of all jobs. The Philippine Statistics Authority will release first-quarter agriculture and fishery production data on May 8.

"The overall growth may register a positive figure, but it may remain flat — close to 0.5-1%, mirroring 2023 figures," Roy S. Kempis, director of the Center for Business Innovation at Angeles University said in a Viber message.

Raul Q. Montemayor, national manager of the Federation of Free Farmers, said farm output could have contracted amid dry conditions.

“Climatic disturbances have adversely affected agriculture in the past few months, so I would not be surprised to see a decline in overall agriculture growth in the first quarter,” he said in a Viber message.

He said the impact of the weather event is expected to last until this quarter.

“We will see the total effects only when the situation normalizes, probably in the second semester,” he added.

As of April 30, agricultural damage from El Niño had reached P5.9 billion, according to the latest bulletin from the Department of Agriculture (DA).

The agency said volume losses of farm goods had reached 255,467 metric tons (MT), with rice being the most affected crop, accounting for 53.2% of the total.

The state weather bureau said while the El Niño event is weakening, its effects are expected to last until August.

RICE, CROPS MOST AFFECTED
Mr. Dar said rice production have declined during the dry season harvest.

“This will affect our rice supply during the lean months of the year. The same for corn — it is affected by El Niño, thereby output will be lower,” he said.

“(The) government must invest more in water-harvesting structures including solar-powered irrigation systems, as well as the construction of more efficient irrigation systems,” Mr. Dar added.

Crops account for over half of the value of farm output in the country, with palay or unmilled rice’s share at 30% and corn at 5.5%.

“The lack of rain starting February and the rise of temperature towards March 2024 were detrimental to the crop sector,” Mr. Kempis said.

He added that the dry spell hit crops, mainly rice and corn, during their maturing and reproductive stages.

“El Niño affected production during the reproductive and maturity stages in palay. In corn, one end (the tips) of many corn ears where the silks come out were damaged such that these were considered rejects,” Mr. Kempis said, citing DA reports.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary and Spokesperson Arnel V. de Mesa said the country’s unmilled rice production is unlikely to fall below 20 million MT this year despite the dry weather.

“Our target is similar or a little over what we harvested last year of 20.06 million MT,” he told *BusinessWorld*.

Meanwhile, the fishery sector likely continued to contract in the first quarter, the analyst said.

“With the fishing ban in effect partly covering the first quarter plus the limited access to traditional fishing grounds in the West Philippine Sea, output in the fishery sector will not produce positive results,” Mr. Kempis said.

Fishery production in the first quarter was affected by both El Niño and the closed fishing season, Mr. Dar said.

The government imposes a three-month closed season to repopulate certain fish species. Fishing bans are declared in Northern Palawan, Ilocos, Negros Occidental, Capiz and Cebu in the fourth quarter.

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

The DA approved a fish import quota of 25,000 MT for the fourth quarter to boost supply.

LIVESTOCK,

POULTRY

As for livestock and poultry, Mr. Kempis said higher temperatures might have had a limited impact on these sectors.

“While temperatures could affect backyard production of livestock and poultry, these are more stable (nonfluctuating); with good management of livestock and poultry, production in the backyard sector will be a source of growth,” he said.

However, Mr. Dar said the African Swine Fever (ASF) remains a major problem for hog farmers. “Intensity management and control is needed,” he added.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. said earlier the government would roll out ASF vaccines from Vietnam by June or July.

As of April 15, there were four regions included in the red zone spanning five provinces or 10 municipalities, according to the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI). Red zones are areas with confirmed ASF outbreaks,

Gregorio A. San Diego, Jr., chairman emeritus of the United Broiler Raisers Association, said poultry production declined during the period, resulting in higher imports.

“There is a dip in performance especially for conventional poultry houses, but our bigger problem is the oversupply for broiler and more so with eggs that have resulted in very low farmgate prices,” he said in a Viber message.

Chicken imports totaled 128.51 million kilograms in the first quarter, according to the BAI. Shipments of turkey stood at 307,835 kilos and duck at 33,375 kilos. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/top-stories/2024/05/07/593214/agricultural-output-seen-flat-in-q1-as-el-nino-bites/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Marcos backs bill restoring NFA power to intervene in rice market

May 6, 2024 | 8:57 pm



PHILSTAR FILE PHOTO

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. expressed support for a bill that would amend the Rice Tariffication Act of 2019 to restore the National Food Authority's (NFA) power to stockpile rice and intervene in the market if needed.

Mr. Marcos said he would certify as urgent a proposed amendment to the Rice Tariffication Act, citing the need for government involvement in the market to check rising rice prices.

“The problem is, rice prices are rising because traders are competing with each other. Their bidding for palay (unmilled rice) is pushing up prices, and we have no control over this,” he told reporters on the sidelines of an event in Manila.

By amending the charter of the National Food Authority and the 2019 law, the government can influence the farmgate price of palay, and ultimately retail prices, he added.

Speaker Martin G. Romualdez last week said the House is targeting a reduction in rice prices of as much as P10 to P15 per kilo with an amendment that restores the NFA's power to buy rice and sell it at a lower price — effectively committing the NFA to sell subsidized rice.

Under the Constitution, a President can only certify a bill as urgent if there is a public emergency or calamity that requires the immediate passage of a law.

Inflation accelerated for a second straight month in March — to 3.7% from 3.4% in February — as rice prices continued to surge, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority. Rice inflation hit 24.4% in March, the strongest reading since the 24.6% posted in February 2009.

The government and private economists expect El Niño, which has caused P5.9 billion in agricultural damage as of April 30, to worsen inflation and push food prices even higher.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa on Sunday expressed support for the House proposal, citing the lack of tools at the government's disposal to respond to high rice prices.

The price of regular-milled rice was P50 per kilo, while that of domestically grown well-milled rice was P48 to P55. Imported rice fetched P51 to P54 per kilo.

Mr. De Mesa said that should such a bill be signed into law, the NFA needs to be cautious about selling rice at low prices as it may once again incur losses, which prompted the passage of the Rice Tariffication Law in the first place.

"This view of the President reflects a complete lack of understanding of the competition and the Rice Tariffication Law," said Leonardo A. Lanzona, who teaches economics at the Ateneo de Manila.

It is unlikely for rice traders to raise prices because that will mean losing their consumers, he said via chat. "Collusion in the form of cartels and monopolies is the only way that the traders can unilaterally increase prices."

"In which case, the solution is institutional in nature, not the government regulating prices," he added, noting that the government should instead empower more traders to compete with alleged carters.

"Thus, the answer is really in strengthening the law, not amending it to allow for more government intervention," Mr. Lanzona said. "Whatever the government can do will fail in comparison to what the markets can do."

Reviewing the tariffication law for possible amendment was among the campaign promises of Mr. Marcos.

The 2019 law allowed private traders to bring in rice shipments without restriction, though they had to pay a 35% tariff on Southeast Asian grain, thereby generating revenue for the government instead of obligating the government to pay for rice imports in government-to-government deals with the source countries. The rules have since been modified to apply the 35% tariff to rice privately imported from any source country.

"I don't think it is the role of the government to bring down palay prices just so that the government can buy enough palay for its buffer stocks. That would be unfair to farmers," Raul Montemayor, national director of the Federation of Free Farmers, said in a Viber message.

He said the 2019 law should be amended to instead give the government other options to obtain rice to hold in reserve, including buying from importers, or even directly importing as a last resort.

"With respect to consumers, the cost of selling subsidized rice should be carefully studied, together with the manner of distribution to make sure only intended beneficiaries benefit and there are no leakages to middlemen," he said.

“Overall, government intervention in both the palay and rice markets should be limited to extreme situations,” Mr. Montemayor noted, “and for as long as prices fall within a certain target range, the government must allow the private sector to operate without too much intervention.”

The Philippines imported 3.58 million metric tons (MT) of rice in 2023, according to the Bureau of Plant Industry.

In the same year, farmers produced 20 million MT of palay.

Jayson H. Cainglet, executive director of Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura, said in a Viber message: “We’d rather that (the NFA’s function) be limited to buffer stocking, procuring palay directly from farmers.”

Mr. Cainglet, who was present at a House hearing on the bill on Monday, said his group is lobbying for a P20-billion increase in the annual P10-billion allotment for the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund or Rice Fund. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/05/06/593195/marcos-backs-bill-restoring-nfa-power-to-intervene-in-rice-market/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Trials ongoing for three bird flu vaccines

May 6, 2024 | 8:49 pm



US DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE/CC BY 2.0/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said on Monday that three Avian Influenza vaccines are currently undergoing field testing.

“Three companies have been allowed by the (Food and Drug Administration) to conduct field trials... We are just waiting for the result,” Constance J. Palabrica, assistant secretary for Poultry and Swine, told reporters.

“Everything has to go through the FDA, but we are (helping) companies undertaking the trials and we will present (their results) to the FDA for approval.”

Parts of Pampanga and Nueva Ecija have active bird flu cases as of April 26, according to the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI).

Last year, the DA cleared the commercial use of the avian flu vaccine, with priority given to commercial farms for layer chicken, layer chicken breeders, broiler chicken breeders, free-range breeders, grandparent broiler breeders, as well as smallhold layer/native chicken, duck, game fowl, turkey, and goose farms.

Commercial broiler chicken, smallhold broiler, quail, pigeon, and exotic bird farms were ineligible.

Agriculture Undersecretary Deogracias Victor B. Savellano said that the FDA and the BAI are set to sign a memorandum of agreement regarding the fast-tracking of the approval process for animal vaccines.

“Basically, the two will collaborate on how to hasten everything,” Mr. Savellano said.

He added that the BAI will harmonize its requirements with those of the FDA.

Separately, Mr. Palabrica said there is no need to ban US beef imports following reports of bird flu infecting cattle.

“I don’t think this is a big issue, the jumping of AI into cattle. Even if it jumps, especially with dairy... the avian influenza would be killed if the milk is pasteurized,” he added.

The DA has also taken over the Philippine Inter-agency Committee on Zoonoses from the Department of Health, with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources will serve as vice-chair.

The committee monitors zoonotic diseases, or those with the potential to spread from animals to humans.
— **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/05/06/593188/trials-ongoing-for-three-bird-flu-vaccines/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Wholesale price growth eases in March

May 6, 2024 | 8:47 pm



GROWTH in the wholesale price of general goods in March was at its lowest level in more than two years, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

The general wholesale price index (GWPI) eased to 2.5% in March from the 2.8% reading in February and 4.8% a year earlier.

The recent low was 2.2% posted in June 2021.

The GWPI averaged 3% in the year to date, against the 6.2% posted a year earlier.

Security Bank Corp. Chief Economist Robert Dan J. Roces attributed the slower growth in March to economic slowdowns in key markets.

“Inflation and elevated interest rates are factors. Additionally, shifting investor sentiment in commodity markets might also have led to the observed price adjustments,” Mr. Roces said in a text message.

Inflation was 3.7% in March, making it the fourth straight month that the inflation was contained within the 2-4% target range set by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas.

The PSA said the March reading was mainly driven by sluggish growth in manufactured goods classified chiefly by materials, the sub-index for which eased to 1.3% from 2.2% in February. — **Mariedel Irish U. Catilogo**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/05/06/593185/wholesale-price-growth-eases-in-march/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Sugar output hits 1.86 million MT for crop year, surpassing SRA estimate

May 6, 2024 | 12:04 am



REUTERS

SUGAR production during the 2023-2024 crop year amounted to 1.86 million metric tons (MT), millers said, exceeding estimates issued by the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA).

In a statement, the Philippine Sugar Millers Association (PSMA) said raw sugar production was also 3.57% higher than the 1.79 million MT reported the previous crop year.

PSMA President Terence S. Uygongco said higher production during the crop year will help reduce uncertainty in the supply of sugar.

“The government’s decision to move the harvest cycle to Sept. 1 from last year’s August to improve yields has proven its worth, and we will continue to push for the original Oct. 1 start of milling, to further improve our cane quality,” SRA Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona said in a Viber message.

The regulator had projected raw sugar production of 1.85 million MT, with a possible 10-15% decline depending on the severity of El Niño.

PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration), the government weather service, said that El Niño is currently at a weakening state, though its effects are projected to last until August.

“We were also lucky that El Niño only hit the tail end of the harvest, and the effect was negated by the increase in planted area,” Mr. Azcona added.

He said that the SRA recorded a 3,000 hectare increase in planted area amid a rise in farmgate prices for sugarcane, encouraging more farmers to plant crops.

The government had earlier allocated P5 billion to directly purchase domestic sugar to arrest the drop in farmgate prices.

However, El Niño has affected the sugarcane planted for the next harvest season.

“This El Niño hit from November 2023 to present has greatly damaged the planted cane for the October 2024 harvest, and so far in Batangas, south Negros, and Mindanao, the October 2024 harvestable cane is suffering,” he said.

“We are hoping for the rains to come soon, so that the 2024 to 2025 season will be as good as well,” Mr. Azcona added.

Meanwhile, the PSMA said that sugar imports should be conducted in times of production deficits.

“All we ask is that the volume to be imported is the deficiency in production including a contingency stock, with the arrival of imports timed not to coincide with sugar milling,” Mr. Uygongco said.

Administrative Order No. 20 (AO 20) instructed the Departments of Agriculture, Finance, and Trade and Industry to simplify the 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.

“As sugar producers, we look forward to the stakeholders’ consultations that have to be undertaken by SRA to accomplish this directive,” he added. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2024/05/06/592804/sugar-output-hits-1-86-million-mt-for-crop-year-surpassing-sra-estimate/>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

DA chief: My team was not consulted in the crafting of AO No. 20

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

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 02:28 PM May 06, 2024

MANILA, Philippines — Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said his team was not consulted when Administrative Order (AO) No. 20 — which removed non-tariff barriers on the importation of farm products — was crafted.

During the hearing of the House of Representatives' committee on agriculture and food on Monday, Laurel said it was the old Department of Agriculture (DA) team that was asked about the AO — and not the team he brought in after his appointment in December 2023.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. issued AO No. 20, signed by Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin, last April 18, to ensure that local supply is sufficient and price remains stable due to higher prices of domestic agricultural products.

“Mr. Chair, again I would like to reiterate that I was never, and my new team was not consulted about this AO, and I think the old team in DA was consulted but not my team, just to clarify,” Laurel told committee chairperson and Quezon 1st District Rep. Mark Enverga.

Laurel said he personally does not think AO No. 20 is a good solution, adding that they have asked the President for a 90-day extension before the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) of said administrative order.

“Sa akin ‘yong AO ho is a band-aid solution to a temporary problem, so hindi ako masyadong kumporme d’yan, there are other ways to skin the cat at marami kasing ibang problema eh,” the DA chief said.

(For me the AO is a band-aid solution to a temporary problem, so I do not fully agree with that as there are other ways to skin the cat and there are other problems.)

“But as of the moment, we have asked the President for a 90-day extension which I think he will be approving, for the IRR of this AO 20. (His specific instruction) from the last time we talked, May 2 or 3, last week, regarding this particular issue is to protect the farmers and the fishermen,” he added.

Repeal of AO No. 20

ACT Teachers party-list Rep. France Castro who was present during the hearing said the non-consultation of the DA should be enough reason to repeal AO No. 20.

“Maganda ‘yong brinought out ni (AGAP party-list) Rep. (Nicanor) Briones ‘no kasi pro-importation ito, to the detriment of our farmers. Kaya talagang dapat na, kung ako Mr. Chair dapat i-repeal na itong AO na ito eh, since hindi rin naman na-konsulta ‘yong DA kaugnay nito Mr. Chair,” she noted.

(What Rep. Briones brought out is good because this is a pro-importation policy, to the detriment of our farmers. That’s why what should happen Mr. Chair, if it were up to me, is to repeal this AO since the DA was not consulted about this.)

This is not the first time that complaints about AO No. 20 have been raised. Last April 29, lawyer Elias Jose Inciong of the United Broiler Raisers’ Association (UBRA) told the House Committee on Trade and Industry that the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) did not consult agricultural stakeholders when AO No. 20 was crafted.

Inciong accused the Neda of having a “god complex” as it allegedly refused to listen to farmers and growers in the country, and instead relied on importation and market liberalization.

Band-aid solution

“The instant solution of Neda is importation. I cannot accept the declaration recently of Neda Director General (Arsenio) Balisacan that they are not pro-importation. They did not have consultations for their recently crafted A.O. No. 20, there’s no due process,” Inciong told lawmakers.

“Neda has a god complex, they did not even bother to talk to us, but they will make importation easier. We’re faring worse than criminals because at least criminals have due process, for us, we’re being sentenced immediately,” he noted.

Inciong also criticized Neda in a press briefing last April 23, saying local growers and producers are being disadvantaged due to Neda allowing more imports as an immediate solution to high prices.

<https://business.inquirer.net/457520/da-chief-my-team-was-not-consulted-in-the-crafting-of-ao-no-20>

Tweaks in rice tariffication law urgent, says Marcos

By: [Jeannette Andrade](#), [Melvin Gascon](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 05:50 AM May 07, 2024



PRICE WATCH Rice prices in this stall at the Marikina City public market on Feb. 15 range from P45 a kilo, the cheapest variety of well-milled rice, to P70 a kilo for the “fancy” red rice. Keeping food, especially rice, affordable to ordinary wage earners is among the major challenges faced by the Marcos administration. **GRIG C. MONTEGRANDE**

MANILA, Philippines — President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Monday said he would certify as urgent the proposed amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), in a bid to lower stubbornly high prices of rice that have stoked inflation and weakened Filipinos’ purchasing power.

“[The proposal to amend Republic Act No. 11203] is something that has come up [because] of the problem that the prices of rice go up because traders compete, bidding for a higher buying price of palay and we do not have control over that,” the President said on the sidelines of the 2024 GOCCs (Government-Owned and -Controlled

Corporations) Day at the Philippine International Convention Center in Pasay City on Monday.

The proposed amendment to the RTL, calling specifically for the National Food Authority (NFA) to get involved in the buying and selling of palay to balance out market forces, “justifies an urgent certification,” he said.

“If we can introduce amendments to the NFA charter in the (RTL), this will allow us [in government] to control and influence the pricing of rice,” he said, “So, that’s what we are going to do.”

Marcos had said during his campaign and early in his term that his administration would bring down rice prices to as low as P20 a kilo.

But as of May 3, local regular milled rice was sold at P50 a kilo from P34 to P42 a kilo during the same period last year. Imported regular milled rice, on the other hand, is going for P48 to P51 a kilo, from P37 to P38 a kilo last year, based on data from the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Importation

Enacted in 2019, the RTL provided for the unlimited entry of imported rice subject to tariffs, which are then plowed back into the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) to help local farmers become more competitive in rice production.

However, the NFA had also been barred from buying and selling rice and its role was limited to managing buffer rice stocks.

Speaker Martin Romualdez has been pushing for the RTL amendment to allow the NFA to sell rice, noting that rice prices could go down by P10 to P15 or close to the P30 per kilo mark if RTL is amended and the NFA is allowed to “influence” the selling and buying prices of rice in the local market.

In a statement, Romualdez said that revisiting the RTL showed the government's commitment to reducing market prices of rice and protecting farmers and consumers from unscrupulous traders and profiteers.

“The certification of this bill as urgent by President Marcos is a critical step forward in our concerted efforts to improve the livelihood of our local farmers and ensure food security for all Filipinos,” he said.

“By adjusting the framework for rice importation and enhancing the role of the NFA in the market, we can better protect our rice prices from the volatility caused by international markets and the predatory practices of some traders,” Romualdez explained, pointing out that, “This will lead to more stable and predictable pricing for consumers while ensuring farmers receive a fair price for their produce.”

‘Flawed’

In a television interview, former Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol lauded the President's pronouncement that he would certify proposed amendments to the RTL as an urgent measure, which he described as “flawed [piece of] legislation.”

“...The RTL actually was a legislation that was crafted without consultation through the stakeholders of the rice industry,” Piñol said over the government television program “Bagong Pilipinas Ngayon.”

He lamented how the RTL supposedly stripped the government of its powers to regulate the rice industry, purportedly allowing full control over the stocks and pricing of rice in the market by the “rice cartel or rice mafia.”

The DA also supported moves to restore the NFA's function as a rice price stabilizer and increase the fund allocation for programs to enhance rice production and farmers' incomes as lawmakers deliberate on measures seeking to extend the RTL.

In his report to the House committee on agriculture chaired by Quezon Rep. Wilfrido Mark Enverga, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. lauded the RTL as a landmark legislation that provided “the platform and infrastructure to increase the

productivity and incomes of farmers even as competition arising from freer importation stands to benefit consumers.”

He said major amendments to the RTL that the DA was proposing include:

- Strengthening the role of NFA as price stabilizer by restoring its ability to import if needed to boost domestic supply and only through the authority of the DA secretary; its warehouse registration and monitoring functions; and its power to regulate rice prices and market supply.
- Extension of the RCEF until 2030, including reallocation of funds toward farm machinery and postharvest facilities, as well as storage and processing; seed development; and training and extension services, with special attention to soil health improvement initiatives and pest and disease management strategies to protect and enhance rice production.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1937635/tweaks-in-rice-tariffication-law-urgent-says-marcos>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Ex-DAR chief wants NFA to return to ‘buy high, sell low’ rice system

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

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 11:34 PM May 06, 2024



INQUIRER PHOTO/GRIG C. MONTEGRANDE

MANILA, Philippines — The National Food Authority (NFA) should return to its old policy of buying palay from farmers at a high price, then selling rice to consumers at a low price, according to a former Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) official.

At the hearing of the House of Representatives’ committee on agriculture and food on Monday, ex-lawmaker and former Agrarian Reform secretary Rafael Mariano said NFA should do this as it is not a profit-generating body — noting that the “buy high, sell low” system would give subsidies to both farmers and consumers.

“Before, when there was no RTL (Rice Tariffication Law) [...] the formula being used was to buy high, sell low. This means the palay of rice farmers will be bought at a high price, and will be ground by NFA and sold at a more affordable price to consumers,” Mariano said in Filipino, when asked by Bulacan Rep. Tina Pancho about his suggestions.

“So this means there is a subsidy for our farmers who plant rice, and a subsidy for our buyers, the Filipino people,” he added.

Pancho then asked Mariano why it seems the NFA has been neglecting the farmers. “What’s confusing now is why the NFA, an agency of the government, seems to neglect you farmers who are now obliged to sell your products to traders, at a low price. Isn’t it that NFA should be helping you?” Pancho asked.

Do front-loading

“That’s how it should be — what should actually happen is even if the palay procurement fund of NFA is low, we should do front-loading. This means, for example, if our main crops would be harvested by October, the NFA funds should have been downloaded already by September 1, prepositioned in strategic NFA warehouses or wherever the NFA’s buying stations are. It should be that way, your Honor,” Mariano replied.

Pancho then asked Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. as to why this system is not being used.

According to Laurel, they have been preparing and shaping NFA to act like a trader so that it could compete during the next harvest season.

“With the NFA Ma’am, Cong. (Pancho), Mr. Chair, NFA is different now, the council approved the NFA’s buying range — from let’s say P23 to P30, and this depends on the area. Basically the mandate, our direction in the NFA now, is we will now fight and act like a trader,” Laurel explained.

“Before, the NFA will have meetings, and then the NFA price will be set at P23 (per kilogram of palay). After the meeting, the trader would just increase the price to P23.50 (per kilogram), then we cannot buy anything. Now, that won’t happen, we have bought lots of palay, but this is unfortunately the last harvest season,” he added.

Laurel said for the next season, they intend to “buy high, sell low” so that farmers would be encouraged to plant again. He also said that the Department of Agriculture is building dryers and rice silos so that the NFA can store more rice.

Encourage farmers

“We are now ready for the next harvest season, we would fight it out now, and definitely I want to pay higher prices to the farmers, the important thing is for them to earn so that they would plant again, plant more, to encourage them and for them to feel that their increased performance was incentivized,” he said.

“The problem is we really need investment in agriculture because during this wet season, our palay buying would be limited because we do not have dryer systems, we do not have a rice silo, but when we finish our P10 billion-worth (facility) this year, and the other few billion (projects) last year that will be worked on this year, we can buy more from farmers because we can have them dried,” he added.

Talks to amend Republic Act No. 11203 or the RTL have been abundant, with the House leadership believing that changing the law would make rice prices go down. Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez and Deputy Majority Leader Erwin Tulfo said the RTL would be amended to allow NFA to sell cheaper rice directly to consumers.

The committee is currently discussing proposed amendments to the RTL, but not all within Congress are in favor of such moves. Makabayan bloc lawmakers, particularly Gabriela party-list Rep. Arlene Brosas, believe that the RTL must be repealed, because it negatively impacted farmers.

In a statement earlier, Brosas acknowledged the administration for giving Congress the chance to discuss the effects of RTL — which they believed disadvantaged local farmers because consumers prefer the cheaper but imported rice grains, compared to the local variety which is priced higher.

Progressive groups believe that even if the tariff for imported rice were used to help farmers, the local industry was severely affected as rice farming was no longer seen as profitable.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1937700/ex-dar-chief-wants-nfa-to-return-to-buy-high-sell-low-rice-system>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

NFA is buying palay intended to be sold to LGUs at low prices – Tiu Laurel

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

INQUIRER.net / 08:01 PM May 06, 2024



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

MANILA, Philippines — Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. told the House of Representatives that the National Food Authority (NFA) is buying huge volumes of palay (unhusked rice) which will be then sold cheaply to local government units (LGUs) and Kadiwa stores.

Laurel said this on Monday, even as Congress has not finished deliberating on the amendments to Republic Act No. 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).

These amendments are meant to lower rice prices by allowing the NFA to sell cheap rice again.

“NFA is buying a lot of palay now. Although it’s the last part of the harvest season now, we’ll plan to sell this through LGUs, to Kadiwa (stores) and maybe through DSWD (Department of Social Welfare and Development) and other government agencies that can help,” Laurel said during a meeting with Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez.

“We need all the help we can get so that we can implement this properly,” he added.

Laurel also hopes Congress can pass the bill that would amend the RTL as it would enable the NFA to sell rice to the public again.

“Well, before, Sir, the hands of the DA (Department of Agriculture) and the NFA are tied due to certain laws that we have, existing. So, we are asking that some things be changed and hopefully this is passed by Congress so that DA and NFA would be given leeway in this rice issue,” he said.

Romualdez and several members of the House have been pushing for the RTL’s amendment, as the law barred the NFA from selling rice directly to the consumers.

Under the current setup, NFA is tasked with building up a buffer stock which will be used by the government in times of calamities, and as social aid.

Romualdez and House members believe that allowing NFA to sell rice to consumers would make the market more competitive and eventually decrease rice prices by P10 to P15 per kilogram — which means rice at P35 to P40 per kilogram may be available in June.

It is unclear whether Congress can approve the amendments, given that the second regular session would just run until May 24.

After then, Congress would go on a sine die adjournment and open session on July 22 — which will coincide with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.’s third State of the Nation Address.

However, Romualdez said earlier that the House will do everything to pass the proposed amendments, especially as [President Marcos Jr.](#) had vowed to certify the bill as urgent.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1937562/nfa-is-buying-palay-intended-to-be-sold-to-lgus-at-low-prices-tiu-laurel>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

House to pass Rice Tariffication Law amendments before May 25 – Speaker

By: [Gabriel Pabico Lala](#) - Reporter / [@GabrielLaluINQ](#)
INQUIRER.net / 05:42 PM May 06, 2024



House session on March 21, 2023 (INQUIRER file photo / GRIG C. MONTEGRANDE)

MANILA, Philippines — The House of Representatives will do everything to pass the proposed amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) before it goes on a sine die adjournment, Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez said on Monday.

Romualdez hopes the Senate will also prioritize the passage of the bill to amend the RTL — especially since President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has vowed to certify the bill as urgent.

The speaker made the statement in a video clip sent by his office after he met with Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

“What is needed here is proper coordination. That’s why the Secretary said we are in full coordination with the Department of Agriculture (DA) and our agri team,” he said.

“That’s why for proposed bills like the RTL, which contains the critical amendments [...], we would do everything to finish this before the sine die, especially once our beloved President certifies this bill as urgent,” he noted.

“We also urge our friends in the Senate to take the lead in the Senate to pass the similar amendments so that we can finalize this initiative, this good program early, and we are lucky to be fully-coordinated, in-sync with the President’s program, with his agri team,” he added.

The House is in session until May 24, 2024 and will go into a sine die adjournment from May 25 to July 21.

The third regular session of the 19th Congress will open on July 22, coinciding with President Marcos’ third State of the Nation Address.

Previously, Romualdez said the bill may be certified by Marcos as urgent as the changes are meant to be able to address the high price of rice.

Earlier, the President promised to make the certification.

According to Romualdez, rice prices can drop by P10 to P15 if the Rice Tariffication Law is amended by June, and the staple will be around the P35 to P40 per kilogram mark.

He also thinks rice prices can even go below P30 per kilogram by July 2024, with the DA trying to identify which areas would receive cheaper rice.

As of now, the House Committee on Agriculture and Food is conducting hearings to discuss the amendments to the law.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1937531/house-to-pass-rice-tariffication-law-amendments-before-may-25-speaker>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Quimbo defends rice tariff law: It did its job until import prices soared

By: [Gabriel Pabico Lala](#) - Reporter / [@GabrielLalaINQ](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 11:06 PM May 06, 2024



Rep. Stella Luz Quimbo **HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES FB PAGE**

MANILA, Philippines — Marikina Rep. Stella Quimbo has defended Republic Act No. 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) from critics, saying that the law was able to keep rice prices low save for recent times — when import prices spiked.

Quimbo at the hearing of the House of Representatives' committee on agriculture and food on Monday presented a graph which showed that rice inflation — or the rate of rice price increases — actually went down as much as negative 8.3 percent after RTL was signed into law in 2019.

However, the recent upward spike in the price of imported rice meant that the government was now bringing in more expensive rice than what was procured after RTL was enacted.

“Okay, sir, the red dot is the point of the passage of the law, you can see that as soon as it was passed, the price of rice plummeted — not even a month passed but rice inflation was in the negative. Almost immediately, and note that rice inflation was

very much sustained at the very low levels, less than three percent, we can see that for many months it was negative,” Quimbo told fellow lawmakers and guests.

“This is proof that RTL was effective, and it was only in 2023 that rice prices skyrocketed. We did not change anything in the law, that’s why I hope we look at the data, and refrain from suddenly attacking the Rice Tariffication Law and refrain from claiming that it was not effective,” she added.

One of the authors

Quimbo was one of the authors who filed measures seeking to amend the RTL. According to her, she filed House Bill (HB) No. 9030 to give the National Food Authority (NFA) an ability to mount an emergency response and reduce tariff costs when imported rice is expensive.

With this way, Quimbo said importation can still be used as a tool to reduce rice prices.

“What happened recently? Rice inflation rose to 24.4 percent — and in fact the reason why I filed my bill was because there was an abnormality in the world market, many months ago, world prices increase due to the increase in fuel costs because of the war in Russia, fertilizer cost issues, higher world prices, and at the export ban (in India),” she explained.

“That’s why it (the effects) was reversed. Import prices are higher that’s why I said the law’s purpose is being reversed, let us give NFA emergency powers, and in fact in my bill there is a call to suspend tariffs so that we can still use importation as a tool to reduce prices but without the tariff,” she added.

The committee is currently discussing proposed amendments to the RTL. According to Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez and other members of the House, they seek to amend the RTL so that NFA can sell cheaper rice directly to the public again.

However, not all within Congress are in favor of amending the RTL. Makabayan bloc lawmakers, particularly Gabriela party-list Rep. Arlene Brosas, have maintained that the RTL must be repealed, because it negatively impacted farmers.

In a statement earlier, Brosas acknowledged the administration for giving Congress the chance to discuss the effects of RTL — which they believed disadvantaged local farmers because consumers prefer the cheaper but imported rice grains, compared to the local variety which costs a bit higher.

Progressive groups believe that even if the tariff for imported rice were used to help farmers, the local industry was severely affected as rice farming was no longer seen as profitable.

Senator Cynthia Villar, author of the RTL, meanwhile warned that amending the law to allow NFA to sell rice again might expose the agency to corruption. But Nueva Ecija Rep. Mikaela Suansing last May 2 assured the Senator that amendments to the RTL would include safeguards — adding that there will be ways to task NFA with selling cheaper rice while monitoring its activities.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1937678/quimbo-defends-rice-tariff-law-it-did-its-job-until-import-prices-soared>

REMATE:

‘Zoonotic disease’ sa mga hayop minomonitor ng DA

May 6, 2024 19:17



MANILA, Philippines – Sinabi ng Department of Agriculture (DA), na pinuno rin ng Philippine Inter-Agency Committee on Zoonoses (PhilCZ), na patuloy nitong minomonitor ang zoonotic diseases o impeksyon na maaaring maipasa mula sa mga hayop patungo sa tao.

Sa turnover ceremony ng chairmanship ng PhilCZ mula sa Department of Health (DOH) patungo sa DA, sinabi ni Agriculture Assistant Secretary Constante Palabrica na kabilang sa mga sakit na ito ay ang rabies at highly pathogenic avian influenza.

Aniya, kailangan ng DA ng P20 milyon hanggang P30 milyon na badyet sa pagbili ng karagdagang anti-rabies vaccine.

Inendorso na umano niya ito para sa pirma ni Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

Sa datos ng DOH, kabuuang 89 human rabies cases ang naitala mula Enero 1 hanggang Marso 16, 2024. Karamihan sa mga biktima ay nasawi.

Naitala naman sa Soccsksargen ang pinakamataas na kaso sa 12, sinundan ng Calabarzon at Bicol na may tig-11 kaso.

Samantala, sinabi rin ni Palabrica na mayroong tatlong kompanya na ang naaprubahan ng Food and Drug Administration (FDA) para magsagawa ng trial sa bakuna laban sa avian influenza.

“It’s still in process, ‘yung AI na bakuna. We’re just waiting for the results of the trial and from that, we can get an approval from the FDA,” dagdag pa niya.

Bukod dito, tinututukan din ng DA ang foot-and-mouth disease at anthrax.

“As of now, merong emerging diseases...and that is the foot-and-mouth disease. The foot-and-mouth disease, as of now, the Philippines is free. Wala tayong bakuna. Hindi naman ito naita-transfer sa tao,” ani Palabrica.

“We have the capability to produce the vaccine for anthrax and we can do immediate action against anthrax,” dagdag ni Palabrica. *RNT/JGC*

<https://remate.ph/zoonotic-disease-sa-mga-hayop-minomonitor-ng-da/>

REMATE:

Rice tariffication law isertipikahang urgent ni PBBM

May 6, 2024 13:39



MANILA, Philippines – SINABI ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., araw ng Lunes, Mayo 6 na sesertipikahan niya bilang ‘urgent’ ang panukalang amyendahan ang Republic Act No. 11203 o ang rice tariffication law (RTL) para mas maibaba ang presyo ng bigas sa bansa.

“Yes, I think it justifies the urgent certification,” ang pahayag ng Pangulo sa isang media interview kasunod ng kanyang pagdalo sa 2024 GOOCs’ Day at the Philippine International Convention Center sa Pasay City.

“Ang problema kasi kaya tumataas ang presyo ng bigas dahil ang mga trader ay nagko-compete. Pataasan sila ng presyuhan sa pagbili ng [bigas] at wala tayong control doon,” ayon sa Pangulo.

Aniya pa, maaaring impluwensiyahan o kontrolin ng gobyerno ang presyo ng bigas kung masisimulan ang pag-amiyenda sa rice tariffication law partikular na sa pagbili ng palay at pagbebenta ng bigas sa publiko.

Samantala, itinutulak ni House Speaker Martin Romualdez ang pag-amiyenda sa RTL para payagan ang National Food Authority (NFA) na magbenta ng bigas sa merkado.

Ang presyo aniya ay maaaring bumaba ng P10 hanggang P15 o P30 kada kilo kapag na amiyendahan na ang RTL, sabay sabing prayoridad ng Pangulo na gawing matatag ang presyo ng bigas.

Isinaisip na ibaba ang presyo ng bigas, pinahihintulutan ng RTL ang unlimited entry ng imported rice sa bansa. Pinagbabawalan nito ang NFA na bumili at magbenta ng bigas at ilimita ang mandato ng ahensiya na pangasiwaan ang buffer rice stocks. *Kris Jose*

<https://remate.ph/rice-tarrification-law-sisertipikahang-urgent-ni-pbbm/>

REMATE:

Panukalang pag-amyenda sa Rice Tariffication Law isesertipikang urgent ni Marcos

May 6, 2024 11:48

MANILA, Philippines- Bukas si Pangulong Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. sa pagsertipikang urgent sa panukalang mga pagbabago sa Rice Tariffication Law.

Sa panayam, sinabi ni Marcos na tumaas ang presyo ng bigas dahil sa kompetisyon ng traders.

“It is something that has come up, so that... ang problema kasi, kaya tumataas ang presyo ng bigas dahil ang mga trader ay nagcocompete, pataasan sila ng presyuhan sa pagbili ng palay at wala tayong kontrol doon,” ani Marcos.

“Kung magkaroon ng amendments sa... NFA charter at Rice Tarrification Law, magagawan natin, makontrol natin, may influence tayo sa presyuhan sa pagbili ng palay at pagbenta ng bigas,” dagdag niya.

Nang tanungin kung isesertipika niya ito bilang urgent, sinabi ni Marcos, “Yes, I think it justifies the urgent certification.” RNT/SA

<https://remate.ph/panukalang-pag-amyenda-sa-rice-tariffication-law-isesertipikang-urgent-ni-marcos/>

REMATE:

Pagbibigay-awtoridad sa NFA na bumili, magbenta ng bigas oks sa DA

May 6, 2024 09:34

MANILA, Philippines- Inihayag ng Department of Agriculture (DA) nitong Linggo na sinusupportahan nito ang panukala na ibalik ang awtoridad ng National Food Authority (NFA) na bumili ng bigas at ipagbenta ito sa mas murang halaga.

Sinabi ito ni DA Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa matapos ilahad ni Speaker Martin Romualdez nitong Martes na magpapasa ng panukala ang Kamara na mag-aamyenda sa Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) at papayagan ang NFA na bumili at magbenta ng bigas.

“Kami sa DA, susupportahan namin ‘yan dahil nakita namin ang kakulangan talaga na ang ating pamahalaan ay makaresponde sa mga pagkakataon na masyadong

nagmamahal [ang presyo ng bigas],” pahayag ni de Mesa sa isang panayam.

Batay sa pinakabagong datos ng DA, ang presyo ng local regular milled rice ay P50 kada kilo, at P48 hanggang P55 kada kilo para sa local well-milled rice.

Sa imported commercial rice, ang regular milled rice ay P48 hanggang P51 kada kilo, habang ang well-milled rice ay P51 hanggang P54.

Sakaling matuloy ang plano ni Romualdez, umapela naman si de Mesa sa NFA na huwag ibenta ang bigas nang sobrang mura. Kung ang umiiral na presyo ay P50 kada kilo, iminungkahi ng DA official sa NFA na ibenta ito sa presyong nasa P40 kada kilo.

“Wag masyadong mababa ang presyo ng ibebenta kagaya ng P25 [per kilo] kasi masyadong malulugi nang malaki ang NFA. ‘Yan din kasi ang isa sa reasons kung bakit naipasa ang RTL na ini-alis ang kapangyarihan, dahil ang laki ng lugi ng NFA,” dagdag niya.

Samantala, nang tanungin kung posibleng maranasan ng mga Pilipino ang P25 kada kilong bigas, sinabi ni de Mesa na depende pa ito kung bababa ang halaga ng pag-produce ng bigas.

“Yan lang naman talaga ang nagiging isyu kung bakit mahal ang bigas. Kumpara sa ibang bansa, mahal pa rin ang ating cost to produce ng palay at ang post-harvest losses natin ay mataas pa rin,” paliwanag ng opisyal. RNT/SA

<https://remate.ph/pagbibigay-awtoridad-sa-nfa-na-bumili-magbenta-ng-bigas-oks-sa-da/>

House, DA eye P30 rice price



MEETING OF THE MINDS. Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez, accompanied by other House leaders, met with officials of the Department of Agriculture led by Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. yesterday afternoon to discuss joint efforts aimed at bringing down the price of rice and other basic commodities.

By Maricel Cruz, Charles Dantes & Macon Ramos-Araneta

May 7, 2024, 12:55 am

Marcos backs amending rice tariffication law to bring down prices

The government is eyeing to bring down rice prices to below P30 per kilogram starting July as President Marcos said he will certify as urgent proposed amendments to the rice tariffication law to address soaring prices of the staple grain.

“Yes, I think it justifies the urgent certification,” Mr. Marcos said in a media interview in Pasay City.

“The problem is that rice prices are increasing because traders are competing. They are bidding higher prices for [rice], and we have no control over that,” he added.

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority released last week showed at the national level, a kilogram of regular milled rice had an average retail price of P51.41 during the second phase of April (15 to 17 April 2024). This was higher than its average retail price in the first phase of April (01 to 05 April 2024) at P51.38 per kilogram and from the second phase of March (15 to 17 March 2024) at P51.21 per kilogram.

The rice tariffication law, which is set to expire next year, has to be renewed. It also created the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund with an annual appropriation of P10 billion.

Speaker Martin Romualdez on Monday said the House of Representatives and the Department of Agriculture are working together to reduce the price of rice to below P30 per kilo in certain parts of the country by the second semester.

“We are confident that it is possible to offer rice below P30 per kilo as early as July this year. The DA is currently identifying the areas where affordable, well-milled rice will be made available to the public,” Romualdez said.

“Although we cannot yet achieve this throughout the entire country, we can start in selected areas identified by the DA. We hope that this initiative will soon reach all parts of the country, especially after the amendment of the Rice Tariffication Law,” he added.

President Marcos said amending the rice tariffication law could enable the government to influence or regulate rice prices, especially in the procurement of palay (unhusked rice) and the distribution of rice to the public.

Romualdez earlier estimated that rice prices could potentially decrease by P10 to P15, nearing the P30 per kilogram mark, with the amendment of the law which permits the unrestricted importation of rice into the country.

The measure, however, restricts the NFA from both purchasing and selling rice, limiting the agency’s role in the management of buffer rice stocks.

“The certification of this bill as urgent by President Marcos is a critical step forward in our concerted efforts to improve the livelihood of our local farmers and ensure food security for all Filipinos. This amendment will allow us to address the challenges and limitations of the current law, ensuring that it serves the best interest of the agricultural sector and the consumers,” Romualdez said.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said pending the amended rice tariffication law, the NFA may be authorized to sell affordable rice through KADIWA centers, which can be established nationwide with the support of local government units.

“Starting in July, some of these KADIWA centers will be operational in specific regions and will offer affordable, well-milled rice five days a week. The operation of these centers will depend on the rice supply available to the NFA,” Tiu Laurel said.

“Gradually, we aim to increase the number of KADIWA centers across the country with assistance from local government officials. Many have volunteered to provide public spaces for these centers,” he added.

Senator Cynthia Villar, for her part, also called for the immediate passage of Anti Agricultural Economic Sabotage Law to control the middlemen and traders.

The measure, which has been certified as urgent by the President, states that there shall be severe sanctions on the nefarious acts of smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, and cartel of agricultural and fishery products as a measure against the manipulative scheme of economic saboteurs.

Villar earlier said she has not heard of any clamor to scrap the rice tariffication law, noting that only importers and middlemen are veering themselves away from the measure.

At the House, Deputy Speaker and Quezon District Rep. David Suarez underscored the urgent need to address the rising costs of goods, especially rice.

“We feel that one of the main challenges facing our countrymen is the constant increase in commodity prices, and amending the rice tariffication law is one sure step that we can do to have more competitive prices for Filipinos,” he said.

Editor’s Note: This is an updated article. Originally posted with the headline Romualdez: Rice below P30 per kilo possible by July

<https://manilastandard.net/news/314443778/romualdez-rice-below-p30-per-kilo-possible-by-july.html>

UN officials urge swift action to fight El Niño phenomenon

By UN News May 6, 2024, 8:20 pm

Top UN officials called last week for swift action to combat the El Niño extreme weather events that are currently devastating southern Africa and other regions with flooding and drought.

The current El Niño event began in mid- to late 2023, causing the ocean's temperature to rise, and its impact has already decimated farming in southern Africa, triggering crop shortfalls and rising commodity prices. At the same time, flooding in Kenya has affected 200,000 people and killed more than 100 people.

Around 40 to 50 million people are currently affected in 16 countries, said Reena Ghelani, the new Climate Crisis Coordinator for the El Niño/La Niña Response.

"These are the countries that are facing the climate crisis," Ghelani told journalists at UN Headquarters, adding that adaptation efforts are key at a time when the UN Secretary-General released \$54 million to "get ahead" of the situation and will soon announce more funding.

But she warned, much more is needed, noting that a similar response plan had in the past cost \$3 billion. UN News

In addition, meteorologists have indicated a 60 percent to 80 percent chance that a La Niña phenomenon will unfold later this year, bringing more rain to some regions and drought to others.

However, the changes would be extreme, and countries may not be able to recover and absorb this, Ghelani said, adding that there are projections that the situation may get worse and affect communities around the world into next year.

"If we act now and act fast, the world will have not another major crisis on its hands," she told journalists at UN Headquarters. "We can prevent this. We know what needs to be done, and we can do it now with timely action."

In southern Africa, severe drought has led to many countries declaring a state of emergency. Recalling a recent trip to the region, Ghelani said February was the hottest in a century.

“Action needs to happen now to support them,” she said.

For the longer-term, basic support that is required should centre on climate adaptation.

Extreme weather is among the main drivers of food insecurity for 72 million people in 18 countries, said Beth Bechdol, Deputy Director-General of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO).

“These El Niño impacts are deepening around the world,” she said, pointing to findings in the recently released 2024 Global Report on Food Crises.

“It’s time to step up our collective efforts to make sure that anticipatory actions that support people at the most critical stage of when a crisis like this begins to take its toll is the most important approach that we can prioritise.”

That means helping farmers so they can protect their crops, fields and livestock as their sources of food supplies and nutrition are needed, especially in times of crisis.

For its part, FAO is providing assistance, from cash transfers for helping farmers and fishers protect their holdings ahead of a massive storm to backyard garden kits for families to produce food at home.

Gains have been made in tackling El Niño-induced consequences around the world, including by developing drought-resistant crops, she said.

In Central America’s “dry corridor,” she said FAO efforts included the timely distribution of drought-tolerant and short-cycle crop seeds, which helped families produce vegetables and made “a significant impact”.

Bechdol said FAO has also been studying the longer-term costs to agriculture following major disasters.

<https://manilastandard.net/spotlight/environmental-and-sustainability/314443928/un-officials-urge-swift-action-to-fight-el-nino-phenomenon.html>

Passage of bill vs agri sabotage pushed

By Bernadette E. Tamayo

May 7, 2024

SEN. Cynthia Villar pressed for the passage of the proposed Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Law to stop the middlemen and traders from manipulating the supply and prices of basic food items such as rice.

"We should urgently pass the Anti Agricultural Economic Sabotage Law to control the middlemen and traders from causing hardship to the farmers and the consumers," the chairman of the Committee on Agriculture said in a statement.

She said the National Food Authority (NFA) plays a vital role in ensuring food security and stability by managing the supply and distribution of rice.

Senate Bill (SB) 2432 or the proposed Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act was passed in December 2023. The House of Representatives (HoR) has also passed its version.

The Senate and HoR on March 20 conducted a preliminary bicameral conference for the bill.

SB 2432 imposes "severe sanctions" against any one involved in smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, and cartel of agricultural and fishery products.

The bill serves as "a self-preservation measure against the manipulative scheme of economic saboteurs, protect the livelihood of farmers, and plug leakages in tax and duty collection," Villar said.

"It also protects the State from tax evaders and non-payers of duties, and ensures the well-being of our agricultural producers and welfare of the consumers, and the economy as a whole," she said.

The senator said the NFA should focus on the acquisition, maintenance, and distribution of rice for buffer stocking sourced from local farmers and for calamity assistance. The agency has a yearly budget of P9 billion for local procurement.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/07/news/national/passage-of-bill-vs-agri-sabotage-pushed/1944994>

House gets go-ahead to pass bill allowing NFA to sell rice again

By **Jocelyn Montemayor**

May 7, 2024

PRESIDENT Marcos Jr. yesterday gave the House of Representatives the green light to fast-track discussions on proposals to amend RA 11203, or the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), and allow the National Food Authority (NFA) to again start selling cheap rice in local markets.

The Rice Tariffication Law allows unlimited entry of imported rice in the country but prohibits the NFA from selling rice and limits its mandate to managing buffer rice stocks.

In a chance interview on the sidelines of the 2024 GOCCs Day, the President said he would certify as urgent proposed measures that have been filed at the House.

“Yes, I think it justifies the urgent certification,” the President said, adding that the prices of rice are again going up because traders are competing and trying to outbid each other when buying palay and rice.

“Pataasan sila ng presyuhan sa pagbili ng [bigas] at wala tayong control doon (they offer higher prices when they buy rice and we have no control over that),” he said.

The President believes that the government can influence or control rice prices if amendments to the RTL are introduced, particularly in buying palay and selling rice to the public.

The House Committee on Agriculture is discussing proposed amendments to the law as contained in House Bill Nos. 212, 405, 1562, 9030, 9547 and House Resolution 1614 seeking to amend RA 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law.

The measures were filed by Reps. Mikaela Angela Suansing, Arlene Brosas, Luis Raymund Villafuerte, Stella Quimbo, Rosanna Vergara and Lordan Suan.

At the Senate, Sen. Cynthia Villar has filed Senate Bill No. 2601 seeking to liberalize the importation, exportation, and trading of rice, and lifting the quantitative import restriction on rice.

The House panel, which is chaired by Quezon Rep. Wilfrido Mark Enverga, is working to amend the RTL to bring down the price of the staple to P30 per kilo by June or July this year from the current prices of P40 to P50 per kilo.

Speaker Martin Romualdez lauded the President's announcement, saying the legislative action "underscores the government's commitment to reducing market prices and protecting farmers and consumers from unscrupulous traders and profiteers."

"The certification of this bill as urgent by President Marcos is a critical step forward in our concerted efforts to improve the livelihood of our local farmers and ensure food security for all Filipinos. This amendment will allow us to address the challenges and limitations of the current law, ensuring that it serves the best interest of the agricultural sector and the consumers," he said.

He said the proposed amendments to the RTL are meant to "enhance the competitive edge of Filipino rice farmers by providing them with more robust support and protection."

The changes are also aimed at stabilizing rice prices by reducing the influence of unregulated rice importation and curbing the ability of middlemen to inflate prices excessively.

Sen. Francis Escudero urged lawmakers to exhaustively study the proposed revisions to the RTL.

In a Viber message to the media, Escudero said he has a lot of questions about allowing NFA to buy and sell rice.

"How much of domestic output will NFA buy? At how much? How much budget will they allocate NFA for this purpose? What is the source given that it's not in the 2024 budget which already has billions in unprogrammed funds?" he asked.

He added: "How will corruption associated with NFA before be prevented? Can NFA import rice too? Have we paid (its) debts, which in 2018 stood at over P140 billion? In other words, I will await their proposal and will study it if feasible."

Villar, chairperson of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Food and Agrarian Reform, said the NFA plays a vital role in the country's food security and stability but has not been able to live up to its mandate.

"I remember, I, together with other senators, were buying rice from the NFA to give to calamity victims in Mindanao and we were told that they have no stock only to find out that they sold the rice stocks to traders," Villar said.

She also noted recent reports that the NFA sold has been selling its rice stocks to select commercial traders which they passed as "deteriorating or aging stocks" and without undergoing a bidding process.

She said the shenanigan caused the P12 billion in losses because NFA sold the rice stocks at a much lower price than their purchase cost.

“The NFA has not proven itself to be taking care of the welfare of the rice farmers and the consumers,” Villar said.

As a complementary bill to prevent scheming traders and corrupt government officials from continuing their illegal practices, Villar called for the immediate enactment of the proposed Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, which was passed by the Senate on December 2023 and certified as urgent by Marcos on March 2024.

The proposed bill, she said, would prevent middlemen and traders from further causing hardship to farmers and consumers.

P30 KILO RICE

Also yesterday, Romualdez and officials of the Department of Agriculture (DA) led by Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel agreed to work together to reduce the price of rice to P30 per kilo in certain parts of the country starting in July.

“We are confident that it is possible to offer rice below P30 per kilo as early as July this year. The Department of Agriculture is currently identifying the areas where affordable, well-milled rice will be made available to the public,” he said.

“Although we cannot yet achieve this throughout the entire country, we can start in selected areas identified by the Department of Agriculture. We hope that this initiative will soon reach all parts of the country, especially after the amendment of the Rice Tariffication Law,” he also said.

The Speaker made the announcement following a productive, hour-long meeting with the agriculture officials and representatives of the National Irrigation Administration (NIA), and other agencies affiliated with the DA.

The discussion took place right after these officials attended a hearing on the proposed amendments to the RTL.

Laurel clarified that despite the restrictions imposed by the law, the NFA may be authorized to sell affordable rice through Kadiwa centers, which can be established nationwide with the support of local government units.

“Starting in July, some of these Kadiwa centers will be operational in specific regions and will offer affordable, well-milled rice five days a week. The operation of these centers will depend on the rice supply available to the National Food Authority,” he said.

“Gradually, we aim to increase the number of Kadiwa centers across the country with assistance from local government officials. Many have volunteered to provide public spaces for these centers,” he added.

Romualdez said House leaders would encourage city and municipal mayors to identify public spaces for Kadiwa centers to help make the plan a reality. – **With Wendell Vigilia and Raymond Africa**

https://malaya.com.ph/news_news/house-gets-go-ahead-to-pass-bill-allowing-nfa-to-sell-rice-again/

Marcos Jr.: RTL amendment vital to taming rice prices

Samuel Medenilla

May 7, 2024



Las Piñas Public Market showcases a variety of rice prices against the backdrop of a significant 31.2-percent surge in wholesale rice prices in March 2024, according to BusinessMirror’s report citing Philippine Statistics Authority data.

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. said he will certify as urgent the proposed legislation amending Republic Act (RA) 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) to allow the government to tame high rice prices.

“Yes, I think it justifies the urgent certification,” the chief executive said in an interview with reporters after the commemoration of the 2024 Government-Owned or -Controlled Corporations (GOCC) Day in Pasay City, when asked about his position on the RTL amendment.

He said the reform is necessary to provide government the tool to lower the market price of rice.

“The problem, which is causing the price of rice to rise, are the competing traders. They raise the price in the procurement of palay [unmilled rice] and we have no control on that,” Marcos said in Filipino.

“If there will be amendments in the NFA [National Food Authority] charter and the Rice Tariffication Law, we will be able to control or influence the pricing in the procurement of unmilled rice and the selling of rice,” he added.

Congress is considering restoring NFA’s power to buy and sell rice at a price cheaper than commercial retailers, but with certain conditions such as prioritizing the procurement of locally-produced rice over imports.

The RTL removed such power from NFA together with the quantitative import restriction on rice, when it was passed into law in 2019. This allowed private rice traders to import any volume of rice.

Lawmakers made the proposed amendment to the RTL as rice inflation accelerated to 24.4 percent in March from 23.7 percent in February.

Based on the latest price monitoring of the Department of Agriculture (DA), the weekly average price of well-milled rice from April 22 to 27 was P51.81 per kilogram (kg); while for regular milled, it was P49.44 per kg.

House Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez said the price of rice can be reduced by P10 to P15 if the RTL amendment is enacted.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/05/07/marcos-jr-rtl-amendment-vital-to-taming-rice-prices/>

ECCP calls for agricultural value chain development to address food insecurity, poverty, rural underdevelopment in PHL

Andrea E. San Juan

May 6, 2024

The European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines (ECCP) has released its advocacy papers for 2024 which includes recommendations related to achieving stable food supply, good nutrition, implementing effective health financing methods, among others.

Under the chamber's agriculture advocacy paper, ECCP underscored the need to pursue agricultural value chain development; digitalise the agriculture sector; facilitate easier access to finance for agriculture stakeholders; boost efforts to encourage youth participation in the agricultural sector, among others.

Agriculture

“The pursuit of agricultural value chain development is paramount for the Philippines to address the challenges of food insecurity, poverty, and rural underdevelopment,” the advocacy paper of ECCP noted.

The chamber said that by investing in technologies, infrastructure, and institutions that strengthen the entire agricultural value chain, the Philippines can unlock the sector's full potential, increase food production and achieve food security.

ECCP explained that agricultural value chain development encompasses the entire process from farm to fork, involving various stages such as production, processing, distribution, and marketing.

By focusing on optimising each stage of the value chain, from improving agricultural practices and technologies at the production level to enhancing infrastructure and

logistics for distribution and marketing, the European chamber said the Philippines can “significantly” boost its agricultural productivity and competitiveness.

ECCP also underscored the need to boost efforts to encourage youth participation in the agricultural sector as many experts have highlighted the “adverse effects” of an ageing population of farmers on the country’s food security.

“Attracting youth to participate in the sector remains a challenge, as many farmers prefer their children to pursue higher-paying occupations rather than farming,” ECCP said.

This trend, it noted, is reflected in the “declining enrollment rates” in agriculture programs and related courses, which saw an annual average decline rate of 1.5 percent before the pandemic.

“In order for the country to achieve its goals for the agriculture sector, we must first address the problem of ageing farmers,” ECCP noted.

Nutrition

ECCP underscored the importance of good nutrition. The chamber said it is “crucial” for establishing a stable foundation for socio-economic development.

While the chamber expressed appreciation towards “well-meaning” intent behind proposed and implemented fiscal measures targeting food and beverage products with ingredients that may have a negative impact on health, it said that emphasis should be shifted towards promoting a healthy lifestyle.

“This should be accomplished through a comprehensive, society-wide approach that includes consumer education and awareness regarding physical exercise and health, increased availability of healthier options in the market, and fostering a shift in consumer attitudes towards diet. Such measures are essential for effectively addressing obesity and other lifestyle-related non-communicable diseases,” the chamber’s advocacy paper noted.

Other initiatives, ECCP said, would be to improve access to affordable healthy food options in “underserved” communities, designing neighbourhoods that encourage physical activity through accessible parks and bike lanes.

“The government may also consider expanding to more children and extending the duration of the school feeding program, to include milk as a component,” the ECCP advocacy paper said.

Health financing methods

In terms of health, ECCP said there is a need to expand the PhilHealth coverage and strengthen its capacity to support the provision of health services and products.

“An essential component facilitating the enhancement and inclusivity of healthcare is the implementation of effective health financing methods regardless of disease area involved. Under which, insurance serves as a critical aspect, as it offers individuals a safety net, especially during hospitalisations and unforeseen health crises,” ECCP noted.

ECCP said the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth), serving as the country’s primary health insurance provider, “holds significant responsibility in bridging the accessibility gap to groundbreaking health treatments and vital products.”

The 2024 edition of the ECCP Advocacy Papers presents issues and recommendations formulated from “productive” exchanges among ECCP sector committees, consultations with representatives from the Philippine government, and engagement with stakeholders, said the chamber.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/05/06/eccp-calls-for-agricultural-value-chain-development-to-address-food-insecurity-poverty-rural-underdevelopment-in-phl/>

DA sees delay in rice planting this year

Ada Pelonia

May 6, 2024

Rice planting could be delayed in areas hit by El Niño, an agriculture official said on Monday.

This, following reports from the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) of a delayed rainy season owing to the weather phenomenon.

“Doon sa mga areas na apektado ng El Niño posible talaga na magkaroon ng delays sa land preparations, sa land soaking [There may be possible delay in land preparations in areas affected by El Niño],” Agriculture Assistant Secretary and Spokesman Arnel de Mesa told reporters.

However, de Mesa stressed that planting in irrigated farmlands will be done as usual.

“Doon naman sa mga lugar na merong tamang patubig at hindi pa naman nagbabawas ng irrigation water doon sa ating mga major dams so tuloy-tuloy ang kanilang pag-prepare para sa susunod na taniman nitong darating na wet season [In areas with sufficient irrigation, there is continuous land preparation this incoming wet season for the next harvest],” he said.

De Mesa mentioned that among the areas that were less affected by the weather phenomenon are Central and Northern Luzon, parts of Eastern Visayas, and Mindanao.

Amid calls to extend Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), the DA official said amending the RTL will help planters cope with the ill effects of La Niña.

“Kapag La Niña kasi mas frequent ang bagyo, mas malalakas, at mas malaki ang damage sa agricultural sector kapag matindi ang pagbaha...so mas maganda kung merong ganitong provisions lalo na kung may emergency cases mas maganda

kung makaka-intervene. [La Niña can cause extensive damage to the agriculture sector so it's good to have such provisions that can intervene during emergency cases],” de Mesa said.

Part of the DA's proposed amendments to the RCEF is the construction and enhancement of postharvest and processing facilities, such as warehouses, grain storage facilities, and drying facilities.

De Mesa also said rice prices remain stable following the end of the harvest season.

“Very stable naman ang presyo ng bigas at P48 to P53 for regular at well-milled rice. This has been going on for the last three months or simula January...hindi masyadong magalaw ang presyo ng bigas. [We have a very stable rice prices P48 to P53 pesos for regular and well-milled. This is occurring pa for the last three months. Rice prices

According to the DA's latest price watch report, the average weekly price of local commercial rice in the capital region is P49.44 per kilogram for regular and P51.81 per kg for well-milled while the imported commercial rice is P49.65/kg for regular and P52.60/kg for well-milled.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/05/06/da-sees-delay-in-rice-planting-this-year/>

PBBM binasbasan balik ng NFA rice

May 6, 2024



Sesertipikahan ni Pangulong Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. bilang urgent bill ang pag-amiyenda sa Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), partikular ang probisyon na nagpapalawig sa Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF).

Sinabi ng Pangulo nitong Lunes, Mayo 6, na sa ngayon ay walang kontrol ang National Food Authority (NFA) sa presyuhan ng bigas kaya tumataas ang presyo nito sa mga pamilihan.

Nagpapaligsahan aniya ang mga trader sa pagbili ng mataas na presyo ng palay at walang kontrol ang gobyerno kaya dapat na gawan ito ng paraan.

“Kung magkakaroon ng amendments sa NFA charter at Rice Tariffication Law, magagawan natin, makontrol natin, may influence tayo sa presyuhan sa pagbili ng palay at pagbenta ng bigas. Yes, it justifies the urgent certification,” pahayag ng Pangulo.

Sa ilalim ng RTL, inalisan ng kapangyarihan ang NFA bumili ng palay at mag-imbak ng reserba kaya ang mga rice trader ang bumibili ng palay sa mga magsasaka at sila rin ang nagtatakda ng presyo dahilang para tumaas ang presyo ng bigas. (Aileen Taliping/Prince Golez)

<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2024/05/06/pbbm-binasbasan-balik-ng-nfa-rice/>

DA, Kamara target P30 per kilong bigas sa July

May 6, 2024

Pagtutulungan ng Kamara de Representantes at Department of Agriculture (DA) upang makapagbenta ng bigas na mas mababa sa P30 kada kilo ang presyo sa Hulyo.

Ito ang sinabi ni Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez matapos ang kanyang pakikipagpulong sa mga opisyal ng DA sa pangunguna ni Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

We are confident that it is possible to offer rice below P30 per kilo as early as July this year. The Department of Agriculture is currently identifying the areas where affordable, well-milled rice will be made available to the public,” sabi ni Romualdez.

Nilinaw naman ni Romualdez na hindi pa ito maipatutupad sa buong bansa kundi sa ilang mga lugar pa lamang na tutukuyin ng DA.

Ayon kay Romualdez, tinukoy ng mga lider ng Kamara at DA ang mga butas sa implementasyon ng Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) na matutugunan ng pagtutulungan ng legislative at executive branch.

Sinabi ni Laurel na sa kabila ng limitasyong itinakda sa RTL, ang National Food Authority (NFA) ay maaaring magbenta ng murang bigas sa mga Kadiwa center.

“Starting in July, some of these Kadiwa centers will be operational in specific regions and will offer affordable, well-milled rice five days a week. The operation of these centers will depend on the rice supply available to the National Food Authority,” sabi ni Laurel. (Billy Begas/Eralyn Prado)

<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2024/05/06/da-kamara-target-p30-per-kilong-bigas-sa-july/>

Bigas na mas mababa sa P30/kilo posible sa Hulyo - Romualdez

[Joy Cantos](#) May 7, 2024 | 12:00am

Sinabi ni Romualdez na ang presyo ng bigas na mas mababa sa P30 per kilo ay napagkasunduan sa naturang pulong matapos makitaan ng butas ang implementasyon ng Rice Tarrification law.

MANILA, Philippines — Inanunsiyo nitong Lunes ni Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez na ang House of Representatives at Department of Agriculture ay seryoso at patuloy na tinatrabaho para gawing mas mababa sa P30 kada kilo ng bigas sa ilang bahagi ng bansa simula ngayong Hulyo.

“We are confident that it is possible to offer rice below P30 per kilo as early as July this year. The Department of Agriculture is currently identifying the areas where affordable, well-milled rice will be made available to the public,” ayon kay Speaker Romualdez.

“Although we cannot yet achieve this throughout the entire country, we can start in selected areas identified by the Department of Agriculture. We hope that this initiative will soon reach all parts of the country, especially after the amendment of the Rice Tariffication Law,” dagdag pa ng pinuno ng Kongreso.

Inanunsiyo ito ni Speaker Romualdez matapos ang halos isang oras na pakikipagpulong sa kanyang tanggapan kay DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, mga opisyal ng National Irrigation Administration (NIA), at iba pang ahensya na konektado sa DA.

Naganap ang pulong matapos dumalo ang mga naturang opisyal sa congressional hearing para sa planong amyendahan ang Rice Rice Tariffication Law.

Sinabi ni Romualdez na ang presyo ng bigas na mas mababa sa P30 per kilo ay napagkasunduan sa naturang pulong matapos makitaan ng butas ang implementasyon ng Rice Tarrification law.

Sa kanyang panig, Sinabi ni Sec. Tiu Laurel na bagama’t may mga pagbabawal sa naturang batas na magbenta ng murang bigas ang NFA sa publiko, maari naman itong padaanin sa pamamagitan ng mga KADIWA centers sa bansa.

Iginiit naman ni Romualdez na hihikayatin ng liderato ng Kongreso ang mga city at municipal mayors sa bansa na mag-identify ng pwedeng pagtayaran ng mga KADIWA centers sa kanilang lugar para maisakatuparan ang plano na gawing nationwide ang murang bigas.

<https://www.philstar.com/pilipino-star-ngayon/bansa/2024/05/07/2353165/bigas-na-mas-mababa-sa-p30kilo-possible-sa-hulyo-romualdez>

Amyenda sa Rice Tarrification Law sesertipikahang urgent ni Pangulong Marcos

[Gemma Garcia](#) May 7, 2024 | 12:00am

MANILA, Philippines — Posibleng sertipikahan bilang urgent bill ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ang pag-amyenda sa Rice Tarrification Law (RTL) para bumaba ang presyo ng bigas sa bansa.

“Yes, I think it justifies the urgent certification,” sabi ng Pangulo.

Ayon pa kay Marcos, ang problema ay tumataas ang presyo ng bigas dahil ang mga trader ay nagkokompetensya, pataasan sila ng presyuhan sa pagbili ng bigas at wala rin silang kontrol doon.

Maaari naman anyang impluwensyahan o kontrolin ng gobyerno ang presyo ng bigas kapag naamyendahan ang rice tariffication law partikular na sa pagbili ng palay at pagbebenta ng bigas sa publiko.

Si House Speaker Martin Romualdez ang nagtutulak para sa pag-amyenda sa RTL para payagan ang National Food Authority (NFA) na magbenta ng bigas sa merkado.

Sinabi ni Speaker na maaaring mapababa ang presyo ng bigas sa P10-P15 o mas malapit sa P30 kada kilo kapag naamyendahan ang RTL.

“Kung magkaroon ng amendments sa... NFA charter at Rice Tariffication Law, magagawan natin, makontrol natin, may influence tayo sa presyuhan sa pagbili ng palay at pagbenta ng bigas,” sinabi pa ni Pangulong Marcos.

<https://www.philstar.com/pilipino-star-ngayon/bansa/2024/05/07/2353159/amyenda-sa-rice-tarrification-law-sesertipikahang-urgent-ni-pangulong-marcos>