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**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# **BPI's Sustainability Awareness Month 2024: Pioneering a 'beyond green' future**

**BY IGNACIO R. BUNYE**

Jun 10, 2024 06:20 AM

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## **SPEAKING OUT**



The Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI) launched this June the third edition of its eagerly awaited annual Sustainability Awareness Month (SAM), aligning perfectly with the bank's robust sustainability agenda. Under the inspiring theme "Beyond Green," this initiative seeks to foster a culture of sustainability among Filipinos through a series of engaging activities and events.

Yesterday, (June 9), the Ayala Triangle Gardens in Makati City became a hub of energy and enthusiasm as over 120 companies came together for the #BestLifeRun Corporate Race 2024. With an estimated 4,000 participants, this event not only promoted employee health and wellness but also strengthened business camaraderie through a fun and healthy activity.

Scheduled for June 13, two insightful webinars aim to provide participants with actionable knowledge:

λ "SustainableME: Power Up your Biz with Renewable Energy" will highlight BPI's Ka-Negosyo Green Financing and Ka-Negosyo SOLARise solutions, focusing on how SMEs can adopt renewable energy for sustainable operations.

λ "Sustainable Investing: Driving Positive Change in the Philippine Stock Market" will explore sustainable investing, emphasizing the role of investors in steering capital towards ESG-compliant companies, in collaboration with BPI Securities and the Philippine Stock Exchange.

On June 18, BPI's Sustainable Development Finance (SDF) will host Business Talks featuring renowned thought leaders. These discussions aim to strengthen the business case for sustainability in manufacturing, covering economic briefings, regulatory updates, and emerging trends in energy and resource efficiency.

June 24 will see the launch of the BizLink event, focusing on digital cash management solutions tailored to the needs of Philippine companies. The event will introduce new features, including the Mobile Check Deposit Facility, under the theme "BizLink: Maximizing Business Growth and Environmental Impact."

The spotlight will shift to agriculture on June 26 with the “Beyond Green: Sustainable Agricultural Technologies and Poultry Practices” event. This session will showcase new innovations in poultry production, waste management, vertical farming, and soil conditioning, all part of BPI’s Sustainable Agriculture program under the SDF umbrella.

On June 27, SAM will feature the “BizKo: Sustainable Financial Solutions through Digital Innovation” event, highlighting digital cash management solutions for micro, small, and medium entrepreneurs. BizKo's payment and collection facilities for small businesses will be introduced, showcasing BPI’s commitment to supporting SMEs.

Throughout SAM, BPI will offer various promotions to encourage sustainable consumption. These include real zero percent special installment plans on energy-efficient appliances and rooftop solar panels, as well as exclusive discounts on eco-friendly transportation options.

Eric Luchangco, BPI’s chief finance officer and chief sustainability officer, underscored the importance of collective action in achieving sustainability goals. “BPI recognizes the power of collaboration in shaping a brighter future for generations to come. Through these initiatives, we aim to inspire meaningful engagement in promoting sustainability across businesses and lifestyles,” he stated.

For over four decades, BPI has championed sustainability through its principles of People, Planet, Profit, and Economic Benefits (E2). Since integrating ESG considerations in 2008, BPI has led the way with numerous “firsts” in Philippine banking. The bank continues to pursue initiatives to reduce its carbon footprint, enhance its digital platforms, and support financial wellness for all.

BPI’s seven digital platforms—Vybe, BPI Online/App, BPI Trade, BanKo Mobile App, BPI BizKo, BPI BizLink, and BPI Wealth App—cater to various segments, from large corporations to individual consumers, driving financial security and sustainable banking practices.

BPI’s dedication to sustainability has been recognized with multiple awards, including being named the Best Sustainable Bank in the Philippines by Finance Asia for four consecutive years and receiving the Biggest ESG Impact award. In 2024, BPI has already garnered 10 ESG-focused awards, on track to match last year's total of 14.

BPI executives in charge of the Sustainability Awareness Month are Jovi Alonso, Chief Credit officer; Eric Luchangco, Chief Finance Officer and Chief Sustainability Officer; Cathy Santamaria, Chief Customer and Marketing Officer; and Dino Gasmen, Treasurer and Head of Global Markets.

For more information on BPI’s “Beyond Green” SAM activities and to register for upcoming events, the interested reader is invited to visit BPI’s official website.

BPI’s Sustainability Awareness Month 2024 is more than just a series of events; it’s a call to action for Filipinos to embrace sustainability in their daily lives, fostering a culture of responsibility, and environmental stewardship. Through this initiative, BPI continues to reinforce its unwavering commitment to creating a better, more sustainable Philippines.

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<https://mb.com.ph/2024/6/10/bpi-s-sustainability-awareness-month-2024-pioneering-a-beyond-green-future>

## ‘Senior citizen’ Phl peso



**COMMONSENSE - Marichu A. Villanueva - The Philippine Star**

June 10, 2024 | 12:00am

Being a senior citizen is no joking matter. Ask that of anyone 60 years old and above. They enjoy being one.

If you ask foreign exchange traders and money market dealers, they are quite disturb on what is being perceived as the “weakening” of the Philippine peso vis-a-vis the mighty \$ greenback. At the close of the market in last Friday’s trading, it improved a bit at P58.52 to \$1 from the previous day’s average of P58.66. It hit P58.81 to \$1 last June 5 trading.

Lately, they likened their worst fears to the Philippine peso becoming a “senior citizen” sooner than expected. Because when one turns 60 years old, this is the age group categorized as “senior citizen.”

Being a senior citizen is no joking matter. Ask that of anyone 60 years old and above. They enjoy being one.

Before the 19th Congress winded down its second regular sessions last month, the House of Representatives approved on third and final reading the proposed expanding of benefits to senior citizens under our existing laws. Among other things, the present Senior Citizens Act and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) granted a 20-percent discount and exemption from paying the 12 percent value added tax (VAT) for limited items of consumer products.

The House-approved measures are House Bill (HB) No. 10312 or the proposed enhancing the discount on purchases of goods and services of senior citizens and PWDs; HB 10313, or the proposed promotion of senior citizens and PWDs by including services in the eGOV super app; and HB 10423, the proposed granting of

a universal social pension to senior citizens, amending Republic Act No. 7432, or the Seniors Citizens Act.

These House bills were shepherded by Albay Rep. Joey Salceda who chairs the House ways and means committee jointly with the House committee on senior citizens with 72-year-old Senior Citizens Party list Rep. Rodolfo Odanes. While waiting for these to become laws of the land, Salceda prevailed upon the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and Department of Agriculture to expand the senior citizen and PWD discount on basic goods from P260 to P500 a month.

I wish this to be true. Because up to now I have yet to be given that P260 discount on my weekly grocery bills. At the most, they just deduct P165 as discount. But this is better than the previous flat rate of P65 less of your total grocery bills.

What are the funding sources to these latest social safety nets? Of course, from us taxpayers again. Our lawmakers are so generous with our hard-earned money. Meanwhile, these House-approved bills need to secure Senate concurrence, if not counterpart measures to get them approved into law by President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. (PBBM).

But the allusion to our country’s peso as fast turning into a “senior citizen” soon is just a “very catchy phrase” as far as Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) Governor Eli Remolona is concerned. In his address before us at the Tuesday Club breakfast group at the Edsa Shangrila, Remolona turned the table at the detractors of our country’s currency.

“The market has a culture of, I would say, ‘Marites.’ There are narratives that circulate around the market. And sometimes, these narratives are false,” Remolona argued. “Marites” is the street lingo for “Mare, what’s the latest?” or gossips or loose talks coming out of thin air. “And so we intervene basically to express our own view about where the peso should go,” Remolona riposted.

Remolona is a veteran banker and finance expert himself before he joined the government, first as Monetary Board (MB) member. He became BSP Governor in July last year, with a full term of office for six years. He succeeded from erstwhile BSP Gov. Benjamin Diokno who switched places with him as now MB member.

As BSP Governor, he chairs the seven-man MB, two members of which recently figured in the controversial “ghost employees” scandal. Last week, the two accused MB members resigned one after the other after being called at Malacañang Palace to explain their side.

As the head of the country’s chief monetary policy-making body, Remolona acted “decisively” to protect the reputational damage to an institution like the BSP. Since MB members are presidential appointees, PBBM needs to name their respective

replacements. So there is now jockeying for the two vacancies that have the highest salary grade in all government posts.

Unlike these peso critics, Remolona cited the BSP relies on credible market intelligence. “The real story is about a strong dollar,” Remolona asserted. He traced this to the phenomenon of the US dollar as a “safe haven” for all money currencies whenever there are uncertainties and global “tension” like wars.

Vis-a-vis the US dollar, the BSP Governor pointed out, the Philippine peso “weakened” by 5.4 percent. According to him, the Philippine peso is within the middle range along with other currencies against the US dollar.

Thus, the 72-year-old chief banker of the land just sneezes at the market prediction for the peso turning “senior citizen” as not so subtle attempts to pressure the BSP to defend the peso. “We don’t intervene everyday. We intervene only when we have to. When it’s under stress, meaning there is a dysfunction in the market. Maybe liquidity disappears. And then we intervene to provide liquidity,” Remolona explained.

“Sometimes the peso goes to the wrong direction and so we intervene,” Remolona added.

In a period of the “strong” US dollar phenomenon, Remolona agrees that the Philippines benefits from it to a certain extent, especially on the impact of “investment pledges” secured by PBBM. “We’re hopeful they will come, they’re still coming,” he quipped.

DTI Secretary Alfredo Pascual quoted the BSP report about the \$7.6 billion in foreign direct investments (FDIs) that flowed in as of February this year. Pascual credited them as the direct results of PBBM’s presidential trips abroad from day one of his administration.

As of last count, PBBM went into 28 trips abroad, the most recent was in Singapore for a security policy speech last week. Turning 67 years old this year, PBBM certainly would not want to see our currency to turn into a “senior citizen peso.”

<https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2024/06/10/2361604/senior-citizen-phl-peso>



**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Phivolcs: Kanlaon spewing more sulfur dioxide

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

June 10, 2024 | 12:00am



In this handout photo taken on June 3, 2024 by Irish Casag and released on June 4, shows Mount Kanlaon volcano spewing a large plume of ash during an eruption as seen from La Castellana town, Negros occidental province, central Philippines Mount Kanlaon on Negros island exploded for six minutes, sending a plume of ash, rocks and gases five kilometers (three miles) into the sky.

AFP / Irish Casag

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) yesterday reported an elevated volcanic sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) gas emission from the summit crater of Kanlaon Volcano after it averaged 4,397 tons per day.

Last Saturday's emission was the highest this year and the second highest land-based measurement for Kanlaon, according to state volcanologists.

“The volcano has been degassing increased concentrations of volcanic SO<sub>2</sub> this year at an average rate of 1,458 tons per day, but emission since the June 3, 2024 eruption has been particularly elevated at a current average of 3,347 tons per day,” Phivolcs said.

It added that volcanic earthquake has persisted at an average of 33 events per day since the eruption. Phivolcs noted that medium-term inflation of the Kanlaon edifice has been recorded since March 2022 and a shorter-term inflation of the eastern flank since last year, indicating slow pressurization within the volcano.

“The overall monitoring parameters indicate that degassing of magma may be driving current unrest, causing increased volcanic gas emission, swelling of the edifice and occasional volcanic earthquake activity,” the state agency said.

Phivolcs reminded the public that Alert Level 2 prevails over Kanlaon.

“This means that there is current unrest driven by shallow magmatic processes that could eventually lead to explosive eruptions at the summit crater.

The public is strongly advised to be vigilant and avoid the four kilometer-radius permanent danger zone to minimize risks from volcanic hazards such as pyroclastic density currents, ballistic projectiles, rockfall and others,” the agency added.

Phivolcs advised the public that in case of ashfall events that may affect communities downwind of Kanlaon’s crater, people should cover their nose and mouth with a damp, clean cloth or dust mask.

“Civil aviation authorities must also advise pilots to avoid flying close to the volcano’s summit as ash and ballistic fragments from sudden eruption can be hazardous to aircraft. Communities living beside river systems on the southern and western slopes, especially those that have already experienced lahars and muddy streamflows, are advised to take precautionary measures when heavy rainfall over the volcano has been forecast or has begun,” Phivolcs said.

P104.8 M agriculture damage

Meanwhile, damage to the agriculture sector in Negros due to Kanlaon’s eruption has reached P104.8 million, affecting 842 hectares of plantations and with volume of production loss of 3,947 metric tons (MT), according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Based on the latest data from the DA’s Operations Center, at least 1,706 farmers and fisherfolk were affected by Kanlaon’s restiveness amid the ashfall and lahar flows.

The DA added that the bulk of the damage was recorded in high-value crops at P101.2 million covering 817 hectares and with a volume of production loss of 3,891 MT.

Damage to livestock and poultry was P2.17 million affecting 118 animals, including cattle, carabao, goat, horse and swine; palay farms reached P1.37 million, covering 21 hectares and with volume of production loss 57 MT; and corn, P122,250, affecting five hectares.

“Best possible efforts are being undertaken to carry out assistance and appropriate interventions to the affected farmers and fisherfolk. Department offices in Western and Central Visayas will provide agricultural inputs,” the DA said.

The agency also gave assurance of the distribution of seeds, planting materials and bio-control measures to affected farmers and fisherfolk.

Affected farmers and fisherfolk can avail themselves of the P25,000 loan under the Survival and Recovery Loan Program from the Agricultural Credit Policy Council, according to the DA.

The agency noted that the provincial government of Negros Oriental has initially identified two evacuation centers in Barangays Panubigan and Linothangan for displaced animals.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/06/10/2361677/phivolcs-kanlaon-spewing-more-sulfur-dioxide>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Amid high pork prices, consumers shift to chicken

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

June 10, 2024 | 12:00am



Department of Agriculture Undersecretary Deogracias Victor 'DV' Savellano talks to shoppers as he inspects chicken and pork products at a supermarket in Muñoz, Quezon City on May 28, 2024 reassuring the public of a fresh, sufficient, and affordable supply in supermarkets.

Miguel De Guzman / The Philippine STAR

MANILA, Philippines — There has been an increase in the consumption of chicken, due to the spike in the retail price of pork as well as special occasions such as graduations and fiestas, United Broiler Raisers Association (UBRA) president Elias Jose Inciong said yesterday.

“(Consumption of chicken) increased because of graduation, and it’s summer; there are many fiestas,” Inciong said.

He added that the retail price of chicken remains stable between P180 and P200 per kilo, compared to the cost of pork, which has reached as high as P420 per kilo.

“If you go to the supermarkets, normally, it will peak starting Wednesday,” Inciong added.

Based on monitoring of the Department of Agriculture, the retail price of chicken ranged between P160 and P220 per kilo; pork kasim, ranged between P305 and P380 and pork liempo, between P340 and P420.

Inciong added that despite the increase in the consumption of chicken, poultry raisers have yet to recover from losses.

“From October to April or eight-month period, the industry is either losing or break-even,” he noted.

Inciong said that the most difficult period for the production of chickens was half of the second quarter up to first half of the third quarter amid the high humidity.

“The temperature now ranged from 28 to 30 degrees Celsius, but it still feels 34 degrees Celsius because of humidity,” he noted.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/06/10/2361682/amid-high-pork-prices-consumers-shift-chicken>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Rice tariff reduction loss may hit P22 billion – DOF

[Louise Maureen Simeon](#) - The Philippine Star

June 10, 2024 | 12:00am



Workers arrange sacks of National Food Authority (NFA) palay or unmilled rice inside their warehouse in Balagtas, Bulacan on May 22, 2024.

STAR / Miguel De Guzman

MANILA, Philippines — The Department of Finance (DOF) has estimated that revenue losses from rice tariff reduction may reach up to P22 billion this year as the government moves to bring down inflation and eventually cut interest rates to make room for economic growth.

Finance Secretary Ralph Recto said the latest projection showed that losses could range from P20 billion to P22 billion after President Marcos approved the reduction of rice tariff to 15 percent from the current 35 percent.

This was higher than the DOF's initial estimate of P10 billion a few weeks ago. At the time, the exact tariff rate had yet to be determined.

Despite the losses, Recto remains unfazed with the potential hit on one of the government's revenue generating measures.

“Once we are able to reduce inflation, hopefully, we can reduce interest rates. And that will create more growth so we can recover those losses,” Recto said.

Inflation quickened to 3.9 percent in May, hitting a six-month high. While rice inflation posted a slower growth during the month, it remained elevated at 23 percent.

The Philippine Statistics Authority had said the tariff cut could bring down rice prices by P6 to P7 per kilo and significantly impact rice inflation and the overall headline rate.

The DOF likewise said that the reduced tariff can ease inflation by up to 1.8 percentage points.

“Remember that it’s also the consumers who are paying for that,” Recto said.

While the lower revenues will impact farmers, who are the recipients of the imported rice levy through the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), the finance chief maintained that the government is not abandoning rice farmers.

“The budget of the Department of Agriculture (DA) has grown and is growing so we can provide more support to the farmers. Sure, one is through the RTL, through the duties. The other is through the general fund,” Recto said.

Last year, tariff collections from 3.6 million metric tons of rice reached about P30 billion, way above the mandated P10 billion supposed to fund farm mechanization, seed development, propagation and promotion, credit assistance and extension services.

Recto emphasized that the Philippines is not relying on importing rice and that the tariff cut continues to be a short-term solution for the government.

He said increasing productivity through higher investments in irrigation, mechanization and post-harvest facilities, among others, remains a priority.

“We are not abandoning our farmers. In fact, we will be investing more. The DA budget is about P200 billion and I expect another increase in 2025,” Recto said.

The Agriculture department said it wants to double its budget for next year to about P500 billion.

Recto also met with representatives of farmer groups a few days ago. Asked whether they are now amenable with the tariff cut after the dialogue with him, he said “we are moving forward.”

“I think we are already discussing how we can increase productivity,” Recto said.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/06/10/2361578/rice-tariff-reduction-loss-may-hit-p22-billion-dof>





**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Philippine rice imports continue to mount

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

June 10, 2024 | 12:00am



MANILA, Philippines — The country's rice imports expanded by over a quarter to more than two million metric tons (MT) from January to May compared to last year's level, according to the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI).

Data from the BPI showed that rice imports from January to May reached 2.086 million MT, 27 percent higher than the previous year's 1.64 million MT.

Industry sources said the increase was due largely to the country's need to have sufficient stocks of the staple amid threats posed by the dry spell on domestic production.

Almost three-fourths or about 1.522 million MT of rice imports during the period came from Vietnam, which has been the country's top supplier of the grain. It was followed by Thailand at 319,740.74 MT.

Government data indicated that rice imports from non-traditional sources, particularly countries outside Southeast Asia, have increased exponentially during the five-month period.

The Philippines imported 147,169.5 MT of rice from Pakistan from January to May, more than 48 percent higher than the 99,280.71 MT that it bought from the South Asian country for the whole of 2023.

Likewise, India, another South Asian country, has already exported 21,169.5 MT of rice to the Philippines, more than half of the 13,924.63 MT total volume it shipped to the country for the whole of 2023.

BLY Agri Venture Trading led all the 161 rice importers in the five-month period with a total volume arrival of 131,178.99 MT, according to the BPI.

It was followed by Orison Free Enterprise Inc and Macman Rice and Corn Trading with rice import volume of 127,924.35 MT and 114,330.8 MT, respectively.

BPI data showed that the three firms were the only ones that have imported more than 100,000 MT of rice during the reference period.

The 161 rice traders and importers have used 2,882 sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances (SPSICs) in bringing in their shipments from January to May.

An SPSIC is a document that importers must secure before bringing in their agricultural goods in the country. It certifies that an imported farm product is safe for human consumption and does not pose any threats to human, animal and plant health.

From January to May 28, the BPI issued 4,140 SPSICs for the importation of over 4.8 million MT of rice.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) tightened last year its rules on rice importation by mandating traders and importers to ship out their shipments to the Philippines within 30 days from the date of their SPSICs.

The DA is seeking stronger regulatory powers from legislators to be able to penalize rice importers who underutilize their applied and approved SPSICs. The department earlier argued that low or no utilization of SPSICs “create discrepancies” in its forecasting regarding the country’s rice supply situation.

The United States Department of Agriculture projected that the Philippines would remain as the world’s largest rice importer this year with a total import volume of 4.1 million MT.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/06/10/2361590/philippine-rice-imports-continue-mount>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Farmers' groups call for Balisacan's resignation

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

June 10, 2024 | 12:00am



Farmers harvest rice amid the hot weather in Apalit, Pampanga on April 13, 2024.

Michael Varcas / The Philippine STAR

MANILA, Philippines — Various farmers' groups on Sunday demanded the immediate resignation of Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan after the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Board approved the lower tariff on imported rice from 35 percent to 15 percent, in a bid to bring down the retail price of the staple.

At a press conference, former agriculture secretary Leonardo Montemayor said that peasant organizations will personally write to President Marcos to remove Balisacan from his post.

“We will continue various types of protest actions, signature campaigns; and the visit to NEDA will not be very friendly, as we will reiterate our call for the removal of Secretary Bali\_sacan,” Montemayor said.

Montemayor belied the claim of Balisacan that the retail price of rice will go down with the lower tariff on imported rice.

“The real world is very different from the imaginary world of Secretary Balisacan and NEDA. That’s why, NEDA should change its name to ‘national importation and dreamland authority’ or ‘NIDA.’ The P29 (per kilo price) of rice is more imaginary. It’s more aspirational than real. It does not happen in real life,” he added.

According to Montemayor, during the meeting with Finance Secretary Ralph Recto last week, he and Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. vowed to arrange a meeting between Marcos and leaders of various peasant organizations.

“We are working hard to get a face-to-face meeting with the President. We have to tell him that we want Secretary Balisacan to step down. We owe it to the President – and the entire Filipino people – to make these views known to him,” Montemayor said.

He added that a temporary restraining order will be filed in court once an executive order on the reduced tariff is formally issued.

Montemayor noted that the forgone revenues for the Bureau of Customs are at P70 billion, while local palay farmers will lose at least P88 billion annually.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/06/10/2361675/farmers-groups-call-balisacans-resignation>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Aquaculture overtakes wild fisheries for first time — UN report

[Alberto Peña](#) - Agence France-Presse

June 9, 2024 | 5:55pm



A fisherman prepares to fish shrimps with a net at a shrimp farm and restaurant in Isla Venado, Puntarenas, Costa Rica, on June 22, 2022. Aquaculture production exceeded fisheries production for the first time in 2022, accounting for 51% of the world total, according to a report by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Agency (FAO) published on June 7, 2024 in Costa Rica at a conference on ocean conservation.

AFP/Ezequiel Becerra

San José, Costa Rica — Aquaculture is playing an increasingly important role in meeting the world's food needs, surpassing wild fisheries in aquatic animal production for the first time, according to a report published Friday.

With global demand for aquatic foods expected to keep growing, an increase in sustainable production is vital to ensure healthy diets, the United Nations's Food and Agriculture Organization said.

In 2022, aquaculture yielded 94.4 million tonnes of aquatic animal production -- 51 percent of the total, and 57 percent of the production destined for human consumption, it said.

"Aquatic systems are increasingly recognized as vital for food and nutrition security," according to the report, released as experts gathered in Costa Rica for talks on ocean conservation.

"Because of their great diversity and capacity to supply ecosystem services and sustain healthy diets, aquatic food systems represent a viable and effective solution that offers greater opportunities to improve global food security and nutrition," it added.

While wild fisheries production has stayed largely unchanged for decades, aquaculture has increased by 6.6 percent since 2020, the report noted.

The sustainability of wild fishery resources remained a cause for concern, it added.

The proportion of marine stocks fished within biologically sustainable levels decreased to 62.3 percent in 2021, 2.3 percent lower than in 2019, the report said.

"Urgent action is needed to accelerate fishery stock conservation and rebuilding."

## **Call for investment**

With the world's population projected to reach 8.5 billion by 2030, "providing sufficient food, nutrition and livelihoods for this growing population demands significant investments," it added.

"Aquaculture has a major role to play, particularly in Africa where its great potential is not yet realized," the report said, noting that more than 40 percent of the world's population cannot afford a healthy diet.

Aquatic products remain one of the most traded food commodities, generating a record \$195 billion in 2022 -- a 19 percent increase from pre-pandemic levels, it said.

"Despite these significant achievements, the sector still faces major challenges from climate change and disasters, water scarcity, pollution, biodiversity loss" and other man-made impacts, it added.

The report was released to coincide with a meeting in San Jose of country representatives, scientists and international experts to prepare for the third UN Ocean Conference, to be held in France in 2025.

United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Social Affairs Li Junhua said at the start of the talks that protecting the ocean was "not an option but an imperative."

Costa Rica's President Rodrigo Chaves, host of the two-day meeting, said that if the world does not act, "we as a generation would be taking away the future of humanity."

Participants will debate issues including the capacity of the ocean to absorb carbon dioxide, the need for sustainable fishing and tackling marine pollution.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/agriculture/2024/06/09/2361568/aquaculture-overtakes-wild-fisheries-first-time-un-report>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Agri groups demand Balisacan resignation

By: [Russel Loreto](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 05:30 AM June 10, 2024



NO LIFELINE Agricultural groups leaders explain why they feel Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan has failed the country’s farmers and fisherfolk. —Russel Loreto

MANILA, Philippines — Seventeen agriculture groups set aside their differences and “joined forces” on Sunday to demand the resignation of Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan for failing to sufficiently grow the agricultural sector.

“[Balisacan] has never sided with the interests of the farmers and consumers,” Jayson Cainglet, executive director of Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag) told the Inquirer. “He is embarrassing the President.”

The groups took particular issue with Balisacan’s recent announcement of tariff reductions on agricultural products, which had already been battering farmers since the Duterte administration.



The groups claimed that projected revenue losses annually on rice will stand at around P40 billion. If pork, chicken, mechanically deboned meat and corn will be included, they say losses will be at P60 billion to P65 billion.

In a press statement, Sinag chair Rosendo So said the tariff reduction plan was misguided.

“If the solution to lower rice prices is to subsidize, why are we helping importers and Vietnamese farmers instead? There is no need to reduce tariffs if the solution is a subsidy,” he said.

The groups noted that Balisacan already said, upon assuming office, that the agricultural sector was “already in crisis,” but he did nothing.

“[The National Economic and Development Authority] is giving the President false hopes. That’s why we feel that before the President thinks of issuing an executive order, he should listen to us first,” said Leonardo Montemayor, chair of Federation of Free Farmers (FFF).

## **Contrary views**

Providing computations and their own studies, the groups disputed the P29 per kilo rice price claim and outlined major revenue losses, declining farmer incomes, and lack of support for the agriculture sector.

“At retail level, our estimate is that with a 15 percent tariff, rice prices will still be P50 and above given the other factors I mentioned,” Montemayor said. “So where is the claimed price reduction from this 15 percent tariff? It will not happen.”

Aside from that, the groups said that a proposed reduction in rice tariffs from 35 percent to 15 percent could drastically impact the agriculture sector.

Tariff collections are projected to plummet from P48.72 billion to P20.88 billion, which they say will cut the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) support.

They added that lower import costs could reduce palay prices by P4.32 per kilo, slashing annual farmer incomes by P86 billion. If imports are undervalued, only P7.4 billion would be available for support programs aside from the P10-billion RCEF, while farmer losses could reach P72 billion annually.

Moreover, the RCEF has already been under implementation since 2019, but the agricultural sector's share in gross domestic product never surpassed 11 percent during Balisacan's tenure.

The groups are seeking an in-person meeting with President Marcos to directly raise their concerns over problems in the agricultural sector that has been growing since the Duterte administration.

### **No changes**

Although the House of Representatives has proposed amending the Rice Tariffication Law, the RCEF and the many problems in its implementation remained the same while the government geared tariff cuts in a bid to fight inflation.

If President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. will approve Balisacan's policy change the group said that they were planning to file a temporary restraining order because they said it did not follow proper consultation and legal procedures.

Aside from Sinag and FFF, the groups present included Philippine Confederation of Grains Associations, Abono party list, United Broiler Raisers Association, Philippine Egg Board, National Federation of Hog Farmers Associations in the Philippines, AGAP party list, PhilPalay, Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc., PhilMaize, Alyansa Agrikultura, Rice Watch Action Network, Integrated Rural Development Foundation, Bantay Bigas, and Pambansang Mananalon, Mag-Uuma, Magbabaul, and Magsasaka ng Pilipinas.

The Inquirer had sought Balisacan's comment but had yet to receive any at press time.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1949884/agri-groups-demand-balisacan-resignation>

# Temper hope for lower rice prices

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 04:35 AM June 10, 2024

We will do everything within our power ... to make sure the substantial cut in rice tariff will translate to a significant reduction in the retail price of the grain.”

This was the bold promise made by Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. after the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) board, chaired by President Marcos, agreed last week to cut the tariff on imported rice to 15 percent from 35 percent to help bring down the price of the staple food to as low as P29 a kilo for poor Filipinos.

Lawmakers also praised the tariff reduction, with Speaker Martin Romualdez noting that it was aligned with the administration’s commitment to make rice affordable for Filipinos. “The import levy reduction and the direct sale of imported rice by the government through its Kadiwa centers should bring down the retail price of rice substantially, especially for consumers,” he noted.

But not to spoil their optimism, consumers should not expect retail prices to go down sharply. While the claim that the tariff reduction will bring down the price of rice may be good publicity for the government, the actual effect of the tariff reduction will be to prevent the price of the commodity in local markets from rising further and continue fueling inflation, with the coming State of the Nation Address of the President next month.

## **Tariff reduction**

Just how much will the local price of the commodity go down? At best, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), is a decrease of P6 to P7 a kilo due to the tariff reduction, while the DA said the tariff cut would bring it down by P4 to P5 a kilo.

As Neda Secretary Arsenio Balisacan admitted after the announcement of the new Comprehensive Tariff Program from 2024 to 2028, which also included reductions

in tariffs on other essential items in the energy and manufacturing sectors and kept the prevailing low rates on key agricultural products, “if we don’t reduce the tariff, with the increasing world prices compounded by the 35-percent tariff over and above that, prices and inflation will remain to be a very serious problem.”

Data from the PSA showed that inflation rose to 3.8 percent in April, of which nearly half (1.75 percentage points) was due to high rice prices. Indeed, rice inflation was at a high of 23.9 percent in April, although this was slightly lower than the 24.4 percent in March.

### **Reliance on rice imports**

Then there is the persistent problem of unscrupulous traders and middlemen that has kept retail prices of rice elevated. “That the tariff will provide major and lasting relief to consumers is more a shot in the dark than a probable result,” warned national manager Raul Montemayor of the agricultural group Federation of Free Farmers, noting that while the country’s reliance on rice imports has increased, retail prices have also risen.

Jayson Cainglet, executive director of the agricultural advocacy group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura, also expressed disappointment over the tariff cut, arguing that lowering rice tariffs before has not resulted in more affordable rice prices and benefited only a few privileged rice importers and traders for the past years.

What needs to be done to bring down prices not only of rice but also of other essential commodities, is to fast-track the implementation of the President’s directive to the DA last April to simplify its policies and procedures on the importation of farm products and remove other non-tariff barriers that restrict or delay their entry to the country.

### **Bureaucratic regulations**

These include quotas, import licensing schemes, and bureaucratic regulations that have the net effect of increasing the cost of imports. Their removal or easing will therefore boost supply in local markets and ultimately bring down prices of essential farm products. However, this should go hand in hand with a decisive move against

the alleged cartel that has been controlling domestic prices of rice, a group that has been the subject of numerous congressional inquiries that hardly yielded positive results.

There is a chance for rice prices to decline in the latter part of this year when global prices of the commodity are projected to go down. “It’s already past El Niño and the election in India is over, so all those restrictions and exports of major exporting countries are expected to loosen,” Balisacan said. India, Vietnam, and Thailand are the country’s main sources of imported rice. As for the latest tariff cut, consumers need to temper their hopes that rice prices will fall sharply. The government, for its part, should also buckle down to work on long-term measures to increase farm productivity. Decades of dependence on imports have shown the high risks the country faces when the supply of its staple food is hinged on external events.

<https://opinion.inquirer.net/174313/temper-hope-for-lower-rice-prices>

## **BUSINESS WORLD:**

# Rice tariff cuts not seen affecting ‘core’

## RCEF modernization effort

June 10, 2024 | 12:03 am



PHILSTAR

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

THE REDUCED duties on rice imports will shrink the pool of money available to allocate as farmer aid under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), but will not affect the core RCEF programs involving farm modernization, analysts said.

Roehlano M. Briones, a senior research fellow with the Philippine Institute for Development Studies, said that the reduced tariffs will be felt mainly in the funding available for assistance to rice farmers.

“But core programs will not be affected, so no effect on production,” Mr. Briones said in a Viber message.

Last week, the Board of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) approved a plan to lower tariffs on industrial and farm goods. This included the further reduction of rice import tariffs to 15% from 35% until 2028.

“What will be affected will be tariff collections in excess of P10 billion which are supposed to fund supplementary programs for farmers such as financial assistance,” Raul Q. Montemayor, national manager of the Federation of Free Farmers, said in a Viber message.

RCEF is supported by rice import tariffs, as authorized under Republic Act No. 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law of 2019. The law originally allocated P10 billion in tariff money to RCEF for six years, though legislators are working to extend RCEF’s term and expand its allocation.

Under the proposed amendments from the House of Representatives, 53% of RCEF will go to mechanization, 28% to rice seed, and the rest to farm credit and extension services.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has said that any potential gaps in RCEF funding will be made good by the department.

Leonardo A. Lanzona, an economics professor at the Ateneo de Manila, said that the government needs to find alternate sources of funds to support RCEF.

“The impact of reduced tariffs on RCEF goes beyond simply funding,” he added, citing the possibility of rice and other crops becoming less competitive.

“Industry is disproportionately favored by this policy,” he added.

He said that the government must implement a comprehensive plan to employ any workers who may be displaced by the tariff policy.

“Unfortunately, we have not heard of such plans since the government is leaving much of these movements to markets. The problem is that markets do not perform well in achieving structural transformation,” Mr. Lanzona added.

Former Agriculture Undersecretary Fermin D. Adriano said that the government has allocated sufficient funding to rice farming.

“Tariff collection as of end of May is already P16 billion, more than the sum required by RCEF. The DA’s National Rice Program has a budget of P30.8 billion this year. This is on top of the NIA (National Irrigation Administration) budget of P42 billion — 80% of its water goes to supporting rice farmers for free,” Mr. Adriano said in a Viber message.

Where the tariff policy could be felt the most is in terms of farmgate prices, according to Rosendo O. So, chairman of the Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura, who estimated that reduced tariffs could bring down the price farmers receive for their harvest to about P17 per kilo.

“If the solution to lower rice prices is to subsidize, why are importers and Vietnamese farmers still being (prioritized)?... Why not instead, buy from local farmers?,” he said.

The government is estimating a P6 to P7 per kilo decline in the rice process following the reduced tariffs on imported rice.

“*Ang lens ng NEDA ay sa rice prices lang; bahala na mamatay ang mga rice farmers at magsara na sa negosyo ang mga millers* (NEDA is focused on rice prices only and is not too concerned with the livelihood of rice farmers or millers),” Mr. So said.

He added that prior to the NEDA Board’s decision the rice industry and the DA had agreed on a floor price for buying palay (unmilled rice).

Millers and traders were to buy palay at an assured price of P25 per kilo, with the government intended to sell the procured rice at between P35 and 40 per kilo, he said.

<https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2024/06/10/600605/rice-tariff-cuts-not-seen-affecting-core-rcef-modernization-effort/>



## BUSINESS WORLD:

# Kanlaon agri damage estimated at P104.8M

June 10, 2024 | 12:02 am



INTERAKSYON/PNA FILE PHOTO

AGRICULTURAL damage from the Kanlaon Volcano eruption was estimated at P104.8 million, according to initial reports from the Department of Agriculture (DA).

In a bulletin, volume of crops lost was 3,947.3 metric tons (MT) across 842.3 hectares, affecting 1,706 farmers in the area.

The DA said high-value crops sustained the most damage from ashfall and lahar flow following the eruption on Negros Island. The volcano is entirely within Negros Occidental but is near the border with Negros Oriental.

It added that in volume terms, damage inflicted on high-value crops amounted to 3,890.5 MT, valued at P101.2 million. Farmland affected by ash fall was 816.7 hectares.

Last week, Mount Kanlaon started erupting with a 5,000-meter ash plume, according to Phivolcs, the government volcanology service.

Phivolcs had placed Mt. Kanlaon under Alert Level 2, signifying a moderate level of volcanic activity.

Damage to the rice crop was valued at P1.37 million, with the volume of lost crops at 56.8 MT. Damage to the corn crop was P122 thousand, while damage to livestock was P2.17 million.

The DA said its Western and Central Visayas offices will provide seed, planting materials and bio-control measures to affected farmers. A quick response fund will also be tapped to rehabilitate farmland.

The DA said the Agricultural Credit Policy Council will lend farmers up to P25,000, payable in three years at zero interest. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2024/06/10/600604/kanlaon-agri-damage-estimated-at-p104-8m/>

**BUSINESS WORLD:**

# Mass fish deaths in Mexico blamed on severe drought

June 10, 2024 | 12:01 am



REUTERS

ANAHUAC, Mexico — Thousands of dead fish have blanketed the surface of a lagoon in Mexico's northern state of Chihuahua, and officials are blaming an intense drought. The fish deaths at the Bustillos Lagoon, by the town of Anahuac in Chihuahua, came during long dry spells as temperatures have climbed above 40 degrees Celsius. The lagoon's water levels are dangerously low, officials said.

Some form of drought is afflicting nearly 90% of Mexico, the highest rate since 2011, according to government data.

Chihuahua state has been hit particularly hard with most of its territory engulfed by the most extreme levels of dryness.

There was much less water in the lagoon for the fish to live in, and the remaining water was of poor quality, according to Irma de la Pena, head of the Ecology Department in the city of Cuauhtemoc.

“When the amount of water decreases, the pollutants become more concentrated and therefore they also affect the species that live here,” Ms. De la Pena said.

Mass fish deaths in the area have happened in previous years when the lagoon dried up and fish stranded. Livestock, including cows and donkeys, are also perishing as dams run low and farmers struggle to secure water.

Heat and drought have become so severe that many people who rely on agriculture have packed up and left.

“It’s very abandoned because since it doesn’t rain... they no longer dare to continue living here,” said Jesus Maria Palacios, a raiser of livestock in Cuauhtemoc.

At the lagoon, authorities are racing to cover the dead fish with lime, concerned their rapid decomposition under the baking sun could endanger public health by attracting insects and spreading disease. They are asking local organizations to help.

“What we need is support, especially with the potential we have for a health issue,” said Saul Sausamed, president of the Anahuac community. — **Reuters**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2024/06/10/600603/mass-fish-deaths-in-mexico-blamed-on-severe-drought/>

**MANILA STANDARD**

## *New refinery seen to boost palm oil industry*



*Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. and Philippine Coconut Authority administrator Dexter Buted commend privately-held Garcia Refinery Corp. on the inauguration of its P600-million palm oil refinery, the first in Mindanao that could spur further development of the palm oil industry in the country.*

By Manila Standard Business

June 9, 2024, 8:45 pm

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. and Philippine Coconut Authority administrator Dexter Buted lauded Garcia Refinery Corp., a private company, for inaugurating a P600-million palm oil refinery as the first in Mindanao.

The refinery is expected to spur further development of the palm oil industry in the country.

“The establishment of the first palm oil refinery in the SOCCSKSARGEN Region underscores the immense potential for growth and development within the palm oil sector. This embodies the aspiration of the industry stakeholders to become a dynamic, innovative, and self-sufficient industry that provides benefits and stable supply of vegetable oils for the country,” said Tiu Laurel.

SOCCSKSARGEN groups South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and General Santos City.

“The new GARECO refinery brings more than just infrastructure; it brings hope and opportunities. It will create job opportunities for local communities in SOCCSKSARGEN, providing employment to oil palm farmers, laborers, and other stakeholders involved in the palm oil value chain. It is likewise poised to stimulate economic growth in the region, thereby enhancing the quality of life for many,” he said.

The palm oil refinery, funded with a loan from the Land Bank of the Philippines, will produce high-quality palm oil derivatives such as palm olein, palm stearin, margarine, and other products for both the local and international markets.

GARECO formed partnerships with 63 farmers to manage a total 3,065 hectares of farm land planted to palm oil trees. The potential supplier of palm oil nuts is much bigger since Sultan Kudarat alone palm oil trees have been planted on 14,000 hectares of farm land.

Tiu Laurel said the DA, through the Philippine Coconut Authority, “is committed to proactively nurture the growth and development of the palm oil industry.” He said the 5-year Palm Oil Roadmap has recently been updated to support the industry.

“The Department is committed to collaborating closely with stakeholders, including the private sector partners such as GARECO, in addressing challenges, promoting innovation, and ensuring the inclusive growth of the Philippine palm oil industry,” he said.

<https://manilastandard.net/business/314457332/new-refinery-seen-to-boost-palm-oil-industry.html>

**MANILA STANDARD**

## *Safe produce*



By Manila Standard Business

June 9, 2024, 10:19 pm

The Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Plant Industry collects samples from the BPI Kadiwa Center on May 31, 2024 which underwent comprehensive analyses, yielding negative results for harmful substances and contaminants. The first round of food safety testing was conducted using the newly-launched state-of-the art mobile plant food safety laboratory.

<https://manilastandard.net/gallery/314457279/safe-produce.html>

EDITORIAL

# Alarming spread of avian flu calls for strong global response

By The Editorial Board

June 10, 2024

LAST April, the chief scientist of the World Health Organization (WHO) raised concerns about the ability of the H5N1, the avian influenza virus, to spread from poultry and wildfowl to mammals after it was detected in dairy cows in North America and even otters and foxes in the United Kingdom.

Dr. Jeremy Farrar now sees H5N1 evolving into a virus that can infect humans on a mass scale. Cases of humans contracting H5N1 have been reported but are confined largely in Southeast Asia, where avian flu has been prevalent.

It is the next phase that Dr. Farrar is most worried about — human-to-human transmission.

Last week, WHO confirmed the first human case of avian flu in Australia — a 2-year-old girl who had returned last month from a trip to India, where the virus had infected birds.

In just two months, Dr. Farrar's dreaded scenario may already be playing out.

The child has made a full recovery after being hospitalized, and WHO said "no close family contacts in Australia or India had developed symptoms."

Still, how the patient got infected remains a mystery; she "did not have any known exposure to sick persons or animals while in India," WHO said.

Humans usually contract H5N1 after being exposed to chickens, ducks and similar farm fowl. WHO said H5N1 can cause "severe disease" in humans and has "a high mortality rate."

From 2003 to 2023, there were 246 cases of human infection with H5N1 in four countries in the Western Pacific region. Of these cases, 138 were fatal.

WHO is not recommending travel or trade restrictions for avian flu at this point but advised persons exposed to "potentially infected animals or contaminated environments, and who felt unwell, to seek health care promptly and limit exposure to others."

But H5N1 is not the only virus that WHO is closely monitoring. Last week it reported that a 59-year-old man in Mexico died from another strain of avian flu — H5N2.

It is the first recorded case of H5N2 in humans. The man had long been bedridden before experiencing fever and breathing difficulty brought about by avian flu, WHO said.

Again, authorities could not explain how the man caught the virus, although H5N2 has been detected in some poultry farms in Mexico.

### **Being fully prepared**

Avian flu may not be a global threat now, but WHO feels the urgency to be fully prepared just in case it does.

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the need for the world to effectively respond to an international health emergency. In 2021, an independent review panel formed by WHO concluded that the pandemic was "preventable" and that the combined response of WHO and global governments was a "toxic cocktail."

WHO acknowledged it should have declared a global emergency earlier than it did.



WHO called the outbreak in China an international emergency on January 30. It had the chance to do so during its first meeting on January 22 but passed up the opportunity, the panel said.

Because of the delay, countries failed to take appropriate measures to halt the virus' spread.

The world eventually paid a high price for the "myriad of failures, gaps and delays in preparedness and response." Seven million people died from Covid-19, and close to 705 million were infected.

WHO is determined not to commit the same mistake. Dr. Farrar said there was initial confusion in confronting Covid-19 because medics and scientists lacked the common terms to describe how the virus was transmitted.

To correct this communication flaw, WHO has begun to update language to describe airborne pathogens.

More importantly, it has secured the commitment of the international community to face ever "more complex and more frequent epidemics and pandemics," Dr. Farrar said.

It is heartening to note that the Philippines is taking steps this early to head off a health crisis spawned by avian flu.

The Department of Agriculture has banned the importation of poultry products from Australia following avian flu outbreaks in that country.

We had been blindsided by Covid-19 before. We were too slow to prevent the virus from infiltrating our borders.

We can't afford to be caught unprepared this time.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/06/10/opinion/editorial/alarming-spread-of-avian-flu-calls-for-strong-global-response/1950709>

# *Masbate farmer thanks Marcos for financial aid*

By Rhaydz B. Barcia

June 10, 2024

**LEGAZPI CITY** — Jimson Tagsic, 70, father of 11, thanked President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. for handing over P10,000 cash aid here on Friday.

"Salamat sa yo President Marcos sa ayudang ibinigay mo sa amin mga magsasaka. Makakatulong ang perang ito ngayon planting season (Thank you, President Marcos, for your financial aid given to us (farmers). This will help us in the upcoming planting season," Tagsic said after receiving the financial aid from the President.

Tagsic was one of the thousands of farmers in the Bicol Region who received financial aid after they were affected by drought.

He is tilling 2.5 hectares of agricultural land usually planted with palay and vegetables. But due to El Niño, he could not go on farming.

"The El Niño badly affected our source of livelihood as I could not plant palay and vegetables. Our land was barren because of drought," he told The Manila Times.

The island province of Masbate was the hardest hit by drought based on the record of the Department of Agriculture (DA) regional office.

Lovella Guarin, DA Bicol spokesman, said last March that Masbate lost agricultural products worth P140.6 million. Albay came next with P30.38 million in damages.

Marcos was in the Bicol Region on Friday to personally distribute the cash assistance to the fishermen, farmers and families affected by El Niño.

The President along with Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. distributed P471.8 million assistance to the farmers and fisherfolk.

Interventions received by the farmers included 38,615 bags of hybrid rice seeds worth P193 million; fertilizer discount vouchers for 39,711 hectares worth P135 million; Rice Farmers Financial Assistance of P5,000 totaling P42.96 million; corn and cassava equipment worth P4.4 million; 10 Gulayan sa Barangay Packages worth P649,250; and piglets worth P1.3 million from the Inspire program.

Rodel Tornilla, DA Bicol regional executive director, said that interventions from other DA attached agencies include 82,592 bags of certified rice seeds from Philippine Rice Research Institute; 3 4WD worth P6.8 million from Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization; 2 Rapid Nursery Propagation Project worth P170,000 from Sugar Regulatory Administration; Agricultural Credit Policy Council AgriNegosyo loan worth P10 million; bottom set gill nets and 10 units 18 footer boats, bangus fingerlings worth P1.38 million from Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources; and Philippine Crops Insurance Corp. pledge of P6.8 million worth insurance for farmers affected by El Niño.

Laurel also said that other big-ticket projects of the department in Camarines Sur are the P1.2 billion Food Terminal Inc. and farm-to-market roads.

At least 5,000 farmers and fisherfolk and other vulnerable sectors in Albay and Camarines Sur were given financial aid by the President through the DA and the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/06/10/regions/masbate-farmer-thanks-marcos-for-financial-aid/1950745>

# *Tariff cuts to only benefit importers, agri groups say*

By Janine Alexis Miguel

June 10, 2024

AGRICULTURAL groups on Sunday kept up their criticism of the government's move to lower rice import tariffs, claiming that it would only benefit importers and lower farmers' incomes.

"Ultimately, tariff reduction will put pressure to lower the farmgate price of palay to P17 per kilo in order to achieve the low price of rice," Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag) Chairman Rosendo So said in a briefing.

The group added its voice to critics of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Board's decision to slash duties on imported rice to 15 percent, from an already previously lowered 35 percent, to "drive down" rice retail prices.

So said the NEDA's claim that the move would lead to rice being sold at P29 per kilo — from current market prices of up to P60 — was "wishful thinking."

With the current price of imported rice at \$635 per metric ton, this would mean a retail price of P52 per kilo after adding traders' share of P4.00 to P6.00, he added.

"Tariff reduction will harm local producers and everyone in the rice industry, including lost revenues from government, but on the other hand ensures the steady profit of the pampered importers" So continued.

It claimed that progress had already been made to lower rice prices after Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. and local millers and traders agreed to buy palay at a floor price of P25 per kilo, to be sold by the government between P35 to P40 per kilo.

Dealings with the Department of Agriculture were already productive and positive, So said, so there was no reason for the NEDA's policy move.

The group also reiterated a demand that NEDA chief Arsenio Balisacan resign, claiming that he had failed to advocate for farmers and consumers. They also said that the tariff cuts were made without proper consultation and adherence to legal procedures.

The Federation of Free Farmers (FFF), for its part, said the tariff cut could reduce farmers' by up to P86 billion annually.

It added that the new tariffs would reduce tariff collections by more than half to P20.88 billion.

Import costs, meanwhile, were estimated to drop by about P7 per kilo and could lead to palay prices dropping to P4.32 per kilo.

"It remains to be seen whether the reduction in rice import costs due to the lower tariff will be passed on in part or in full to consumers," FFF Chairman Leonardo Montemayor said.

"However, the impact on palay prices will be more direct and immediate because imports and domestic rice compete with each other in the wholesale, and not retail, markets," he added.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/06/10/business/top-business/tariff-cuts-to-only-benefit-importers-agri-groups-say/1950773>

# *World food prices up anew*

June 10, 2024

*By Maytaal Angel*

LONDON- The United Nations world food price index rose for a third consecutive month in May, as higher cereals and dairy product prices outweighed drops in prices for sugar and vegetable oils.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization's price index, which tracks the most globally traded food commodities, averaged 120.4 points in May, up 0.9 percent from its revised April level, the FAO said on Friday.

The May reading was nonetheless 3.4 percent below the level seen a year earlier.

The FAO index hit a three-year low in February as food prices continued to ease off from a record peak set in March 2022, following Russia's invasion of fellow crop export major Ukraine.

The uptick in May was supported by cereal prices rising 6.3 percent month-on-month amid growing concerns about unfavorable crop conditions curbing 2024 harvests in key producing areas like northern America, Europe and the Black Sea region.

Dairy prices increased 1.8 percent in May from April, the FAO said, underpinned by increased product demand ahead of the summer holidays amid worries that milk production in western Europe may fall.

The FAO's May sugar index fell sharply, decreasing 7.5 percent on a monthly basis, as a good start to the new harvest in top producer Brazil got underway. Vegetable oil prices declined 2.4 percent for the month, as palm oil quotations fell amid rising seasonal output.

In a separate report on cereals supply and demand, the FAO forecast 2024/25 world cereal production at 2.846 billion metric tons, roughly on a par with 2023/24's record output, as barley, rice and sorghum output is seen increasing, offsetting declines in maize and wheat.

The FAO warned, however, that the "recent adverse weather conditions in the Black Sea region will likely result in a downgrade in world wheat production, a possibility not yet reflected in the forecast".

World cereal utilization in 2024/25 was seen increasing 0.5 percent year-on-year to a new record high of 2.851 billion tons, the FAO said. World cereal stocks will likely increase 1.5 percent from their opening levels to a record 897 million tons, it added.

[https://malaya.com.ph/news\\_business/world-food-prices-up-anew/](https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/world-food-prices-up-anew/)



# ***NFA to continue buying palay till end of June***

By Jed Macapagal

June 10, 2024

The National Food Authority (NFA) has procured a total 3.32 million 50-kilo bags of palay as of June 5, with over 3.17 million bags purchased from rice farmers over the last six weeks.

The NFA said it only needs to buy 47,000 bags of palay to reach the upgraded procurement target of 3.36 million bags.

This, together with previous rice stocks is equivalent to 136,000 metric tons (MT), enough to cover four days of the country's consumption.

"Farmers are asking us to continue with our procurement until the end of this month so they could still benefit from the higher NFA buying price... They are now enjoying the fruit of the NFA Council's decision to raise the palay buying price to as much as P30 a kilo," said Larry Lacson, NFA acting administrator, at an inspection of the agency's warehouses in Bulacan last Friday.

The NFA Council in mid-April raised the buying price to allow the NFA to effectively compete with private traders who have raised buying prices to corner supply.

The NFA Council raised the buying price to a range of P23 to P30 per kg of clean and dry rice and P17 to P23 per kg of fresh and wet palay from the previous range of P16 to P19 per kg for fresh and wet, and P19 to P23 per kg for clean and dry.

Lacson assured the NFA will continue to buy palay beyond the target as long as farmers continue to harvest this dry season and there is room in warehouses.

"We want our rice farmers to be inspired to produce more," Lacson said.

Lacson added the first half procurement target usually accounts for 30 percent of FA's buffer stock, with the balance of 70 percent coming during the wet season.

As of May 31, as much as 197,049 MT of palay have been procured by NFA from local producers.

For this year, the target procurement from local farmers is 495,000 MT of palay and 545,000 MT for 2025.

Lacson said to achieve next year's target, NFA will seek from Congress a procurement budget of P16 billion, up substantially from this year's budget of P9 billion.

He said an unspent budget of P8 billion from 2023 is also now helping NFA buy rice at higher prices.

Lacson said around P5 billion of the total P17 billion available funds to buy buffer stock has been spent, leaving the NFA with a still substantial P12 billion war chest for the wet season.

The NFA also emphasized its local palay procurement budget is independent from the rice tariff collection which is recently lowered to 15 percent.

"We will buy palay at prices that we think are profitable to farmers to ensure that they will continue to plant rice and even produce more," Lacson said.

[https://malaya.com.ph/news\\_business/nfa-to-continue-buying-palay-till-end-of-june/](https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/nfa-to-continue-buying-palay-till-end-of-june/)

# *DA to improve production of garlic, ginger*

By Jed Macapagal

June 10, 2024

THE Department of Agriculture (DA), through its high-value crops program, is looking to duplicate the recent success of onion farmers on local garlic, ginger and shallots.

“These spices are very basic to us. Our value proposition is that, for example, a clove of native garlic is equal in potency to that provided by the bigger-sized import,” said DA Undersecretary Cheryl Marie Natividad-Caballero, in a statement.

Caballero said other countries are now learning to appreciate the potency of Ilocos garlic that efforts by DA are underway to ensure planting materials do not end up overseas.

“The DA is supporting efforts to preserve the garlic heritage through genomics. So, we are looking at a strategic investment in resilient agriculture...to again position our garlic as Ilocos’ white gold in the 1990s,” Caballero said.

Citing data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), the DA said local garlic production account for only 2.6 percent of annual demand of 146,879 metric tons (MT) with Ilocos Norte, Batanes and Nueva Ecija the top three producers of garlic.

Caballero said DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. in March ordered DA offices in Cagayan Valley to buy as much garlic from Ilocos Norte and Batanes to be redistributed to farmers as planting materials when planting season starts in September.

She said the goal is to increase domestic garlic production and account for at least 20 percent of domestic requirement by next year.

Caballero said the DA is looking closely at consumption and supply sources as well as logistics concerns of ginger and shallots to ensure the country only imports what is needed.

In 2023, the country produced 29,153.73 MT of ginger, of which Calabarzon and Mimaropa provided 4,048.3 MT equivalent to 13.9 percent.

[https://malaya.com.ph/news\\_business/da-to-improve-production-of-garlic-ginger/](https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/da-to-improve-production-of-garlic-ginger/)

# ***GOCC subsidies up 56%***

By Angela Celis

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June 10, 2024

The national government's subsidies to government-owned and -controlled corporations as of end-April surged by 56.31 percent year-on-year, data released by the Bureau of the Treasury (BTr) showed.

According to the latest cash operations report, subsidies in the first four months of the year totaled to P47.31 billion, up from the P30.27 billion recorded in the same period a year ago.

The lion's share of the subsidies released to state-run firms, amounting to P21.74 billion, went to the National Irrigation Administration (NIA), which is responsible for irrigation development and management.

Aside from NIA, other billionaire recipients are the Power Sector Assets and Liabilities Management (PSALM) Corp. with P8 billion, National Housing Authority (NHA) with P3.75 billion, National Food Authority with P2.25 billion and National Electrification Administration with P2.09 billion.

In April alone, government subsidies to state firms jumped to P27.72 billion from P8.96 billion a year ago.

NIA, PSALM and NHA were also the top recipients for the month, with P11.43 billion, P8 billion and P3.75 billion, respectively.

The BTr previously reported that the national government posted a lower budget surplus in April compared to a year ago amid the acceleration in public expenditures.

According to the BTr, the government achieved a P42.7 billion budget surplus for April, 36.03 percent lower than last year's P66.8 billion.

The BTr attributed the smaller surplus for the month to the significant growth in expenditures, which outpaced the rise in revenue collection.

As a result, the year-to-date budget deficit stood at P229.9 billion, up 12.66 percent than last year's level.

[https://malaya.com.ph/news\\_business/gocc-subsidies-up-56/](https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/gocc-subsidies-up-56/)

## ***Rice import arrivals hit 2.08 MMT–report***

Ada Pelonia

June 10, 2024

The country's imported rice arrivals have reached more than 2.08 million metric tons (MMT) as of May 30, according to the latest data from the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI).

Figures from the attached agency of the Department of Agriculture (DA) showed that Vietnam remained as the country's top source of imported rice, accounting for 1.52 MMT of imports. It was followed by Thailand with 319,740.74 metric tons (MT) and Pakistan with 147,169.50 MT.

The Philippines's other top rice suppliers were Myanmar (65,600 MT), India (21,169.50 MT), China (5,720 MT), and Japan (2,166.59 MT).

LVM Grains Enterprises led the 148 rice importers with a total volume of 501,850 MT, followed by Purericemilling And Processing Corp. with 405,600 MT.

Purefeeds Corp. and Sta. Rosa Farm Product Corp. each recorded a volume of 375,000 MT.

Other top importers during the period were Orison Free Enterprise Inc. and Bly Agri Venture Trading which brought in 176,219 MT and 150,618 MT, respectively.

The data also showed that BPI approved and issued 4,140 sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances (SPSICs) which covered the importation of 4.8 MMT of rice.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) raised its rice import forecast for the Philippines to 4.2 MMT in 2025, noting the country's need to sustain its growing population and the increasing number of tourists set to visit it.

“The Philippines imports are forecast up to a record 4.2 million tons on continued growth in consumption. The Philippines is expected to again be the largest global rice importer,” the latest monthly report on global grains trade read.

The country imported about 3.6 MMT of rice last year, lower than the USDA’s forecast of 3.9 MMT.

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed that unmilled rice in the first quarter fell by 2 percent to 4.685 MMT, from the previous year’s 4.77 percent due to the adverse impact of El Niño.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/06/10/rice-import-arrivals-hit-2-08-mmt-report/>

# *PHL is among world's top aquaculture producers–FAO*

BusinessMirror

June 10, 2024

The Philippines is one of the 10 countries in the world that accounted for a chunk of the global aquaculture production in 2022, according to a new report from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

In the 2024 edition of *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture* (Sofia), FAO said global fisheries and aquaculture production surged to 223.2 million metric tons (MMT) in 2022, a 4.4-percent increase from the level recorded in 2020.

FAO said production comprised 185.4 MMT of aquatic animals and 37.8 MMT of algae.

“FAO welcomes the significant achievements thus far, but further transformative and adaptive actions are needed to strengthen the efficiency, inclusiveness, resilience and sustainability of aquatic food systems and consolidate their role in addressing food insecurity, poverty alleviation and sustainable governance,” FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu said in a statement.

“That’s why FAO advocates Blue Transformation, to meet the overall requirements of better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life, leaving no one behind.”

The report noted that in 2022 and for the first time in history, aquaculture surpassed capture fisheries as the main producer of aquatic animals.

Global aquaculture production reached an unprecedented 130.9 MMT, of which 94.4 MMT are aquatic animals, 51 percent of the total aquatic animal production.

“At present, a small number of countries dominate aquaculture. Ten of them—China, Indonesia, India, Vietnam, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Norway, Egypt, and Chile—produced over 89.8 percent of the total,” FAO said.

However, the UN agency said many low-income countries in Africa and Asia are not using their full potential.

“Targeted policies, technology transfer, capacity building and responsible investment are crucial to boost sustainable aquaculture where it is most needed, especially in Africa.”

FAO also said global capture fisheries production has remained stable since the late 1980s. In 2022, the sector produced 92.3 MMT, comprising 11.3 MMT from inland and 81 MMT from marine capture.

“Despite the growth in aquaculture, capture fisheries remain an essential source of aquatic animal production.”

Of total aquatic animal production, 89 percent was used for direct human consumption, underscoring the critical role of fisheries and aquaculture in maintaining global food security. The rest was destined for indirect or non-food uses, mainly fishmeal and fish oil production.

“Global apparent consumption of aquatic animal foods reached 162.5 MMT in 2021. This figure has increased at nearly twice the rate of the world population since 1961, with global per capita annual consumption rising from 9.1 kilograms in 1961 to 20.7 kg in 2022.”

FAO noted that aquatic foods provide high-quality proteins—15 percent of animal proteins and 6 percent of total proteins worldwide—and key nutrients including omega-3 fatty acids, minerals, and vitamins. In 2021, they contributed at least 20 percent of the per capita protein supply from all animal sources to 3.2 billion people.

The report projected that aquatic animal production will increase by 10 percent by 2032 to reach 205 MMT. Aquaculture expansion and capture fisheries recovery will account for this rise.

It also noted that apparent consumption will increase by 12 percent to supply on average 21.3 kg per capita in 2032.



“Rising incomes and urbanization, improvements in post-harvest practices and distribution and dietary trends are expected to drive most of this increase.”

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/06/10/phl-is-among-worlds-top-aquaculture-producers-fao/>

**ABANTE TONITE**

## ***NEDA Secretary Arsenio Balisacan pinalalayas sa tapyas-taripa ng bigas***

June 9, 2024

Pinagbibitiw ng iba't ibang mga organisasyon sa sektor ng agrikultura si National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Secretary Arsenio Balisacan dahil sa rekomendasyon nito na ibaba sa 15% ang taripa ng bigas at panatilihin ito kasama ang pinababang taripa sa baboy at mais hanggang 2028.

Kabilang sa mga nanawagan para magbitiw na si Balisacan ay sina Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) chairman at dating Agriculture Secretary Leonardo Montemayor, Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) Chairman Rosendo So, United Broiler Raisers Association (UBRA) president Jose Elias Inciong, National Federation of Hog Farmers chair Chester Warren Tan, Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas chairman emeritus Rafael Mariano, at Cathy Estavillo ng Bantay Bigas.

Sa ngayon, wala umanong magawa ang sektor ng agrikultura dahil hindi pa pinirmahan ni Pangulong Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. ang executive order para sa tapyas-taripa.

Nabatid din na hindi pa umano nagtatakda ng araw ng pagdinig ang ang Tariff Commission para makuha man lamang ang saloobin ng iba't ibang sektor ng agrikultura sa isyu.

Sa oras na ilabas ang kautusan para sa tapyas-taripa, plano ng mga naturang grupo na humingi ng temporary restraining order (TRO) sa hukuman.

Sabi nila, sa ilang beses nang ibinaba ng pamahalaan ang taripa sa bigas noon pang panahon ni dating Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte pero hindi naman bumaba ang presyo nito dahil tinataas naman ng ibang mga bansa ang presyo nila sa bigas.

Babala pa ni Montemayor, mawawala ang mapagkukunan ng pondo para sa suporta sa magsasaka sa ilalim ng Rice Tariffication Law, partikular na ang Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund, dahil doon kinukuha ang pera para sa mga programang sumusuporta sa sektor.

“He should resign. He should be ashamed,” sabi naman ni Inciong tungkol kay Balisacan.

Sa kuwenta ng grupo, sasadsad sa P17-P20 per kilo ang presyo ng palay sa susunod na anihan na ikalulugi ng mga magsasaka samantalang umabot na sa P29 per kilo ang naging bentahan nito kamakailan. (Eileen Mencias)

<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2024/06/09/neda-secretary-arsenio-balisacan-pinalalayas-sa-tapyas-taripa-ng-bigas/>

**ABANTE TONITE**

## ***Kamara pipigain BFAR sa ayuda ng mga mangingisda***

June 9, 2024

Nais ni House Assistant Majority Leader at Zambales Rep. Jay Khonghun na imbestigahan ng Kamara de Representantes ang kakulangan umano ng Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) sa pagbibigay ng tulong sa mga mangingisda sa West Philippine Sea (WPS).

Ginawa ni Khonghun ang panawagan matapos ang isinagawang konsultasyon ng House committee on national defense at Special Committee on the WPS sa Masinloc, Zambales, kung saan mayroong mga mangingisda na nagsabi na ang bangka na ibinigay sa kanila ng BFAR ay hindi angkop sa paglalayag sa WPS.

Iginiit rin ni Khonghun ang kahalagahan ng pagsusuri sa badyet ng BFAR habang naghahanda ang Kongreso para sa pagtalakay sa 2025 National Expenditure Program.

Nauna rito ay inanunsyo ng BFAR ang paglaan nito ng P660 milyon para sa pagbili ng 66 units ng 62-footer fishing vessels para sa mga mangingisda.

Sinabi ni Khonghun na maging si Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ay paulit-ulit na nagpapa-alala na tugunan ang pangangailangan ng mga mangingisda.

Ayon sa BFAR, nasa 385,300 Pilipino ang nangingisda sa WPS, na bahagi ng exclusive economic zone ng Pilipinas. (Billy Begas)

<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2024/06/09/kamara-pipigain-bfar-sa-ayuda-ng-mga-mangingisda/>