

CLIPPINGS FOR TODAY JUNE 09, 2024

A. MANILA BULLETIN:

Major agri groups opposing tariff cuts seek resignation of NEDA's Balisacan

DOF: P22-billion revenue loss possible from rice tariff cuts

'Ramdam namin ang pagbuhos ng biyaya': Solon lauds PBBM for legacy projects in Bicol

The UN says more aquatic animals were farmed than fished in 2022. That's the first time in history

Zambales solon calls for probe on fishermen's complaints vs BFAR

Villafuerte calls for 'stronger presence' in West Philippine Sea amid China fishing ban

B. THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

'No fish kill in Pangasinan town'

C. PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

BFAR is not giving enough boats to West Philippine Sea fisherfolks – solon

D. BUSINESS WORLD:

Rice imports hit 2 million metric tons by end of May

NFA urges lifting of preventive suspensions

Rice tariff cut to set the stage for bringing down rates — DoF

E. MANILA STANDARD:

PH bans imported domestic, wild birds from Australia due to avian flu

F. THE MANILA TIMES:

Aquaculture overtakes wild fisheries for first time – UN report

NO TO TARIFF CUT

G. BUSINESS MIRROR:

Rice straw to biogas: Transforming residues to revenues—and clean environs

Avocados: Mexico's 'green gold' export harming forests and waters

A war on worms in warm weather

H. REMATE:

Farmers groups aapela sa rice import tariff cut

Ibon mula Australia haharangin ng DA

MANILA BULLETIN:

Major agri groups opposing tariff cuts seek resignation of NEDA's Balisacan

BY JEL SANTOS

Jun 9, 2024 04:44 PM



(JEL SANTOS/MANILA BULLETIN PHOTO)

Seventeen agriculture groups opposing tariff cuts on Sunday, June 9, sought the resignation of National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan due to his “pro importation ideology.”

The groups are SINAG, FFF, KMP, PHILCONGRAINS, ABONO Party-list, UBRA, Phil Egg Board, NFHFI, AGAP Party-list, Phil Palay, PCAFI, PhilMaize, AA, RWAN, IRDF, Bantay Bigas, and P4MP.

Jayson Cainglet, the executive director of farmers’ group SINAG, said all 17 agriculture groups came together because of Balisacan as they are all against his proposed tariff cuts on agricultural products.

“Iyan ang mga pinag buklod ni Balisacan. Kahit differing view sa RTL (Rice Tariffication Law), NFA (National Food Authority); we are all united today (These are the things that Balisacan brought together. Despite differing views on the RTL (Rice Tariffication Law) and the NFA (National Food Authority), we are all united today),” he said during a press conference in Quezon City.

“Susulat kami nang formal kay Presidente (We will formally write to the President). I have confidence that if we have a face-to-face meeting with him, I think we have to tell him that we want Secretary Balisacan to step down,” Leonardo Montemayor, former Department of Agriculture (DA) chief and the chairperson of the FFF (Federation of Free Farmers), he said.

He said that Balisacan should return to the Philippine Competition Commission.

“Maybe he can go back to the Philippine Competition Commission na wala na naman siya nagawa for the rice sector. Kasi po, sobrang-sobrang importasyon noon under RTL. Pina-investigate namin niya kasi sa PCC under the head at that time was Balisacan (Maybe he can go back to the Philippine Competition Commission where he didn't do anything for the rice sector. Because there was excessive importation under the RTL. We had it investigated by the PCC when Balisacan was the head at that time),” he said.

“Until now, there has been no result of that investigation which we requested way back I think in late 2019 or early 2020 until matapos ang term niya (his term ended). So maybe he's better placed there,” Montemayor ended.

For his part, Danny Fausto, the president of PCAFI (Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food), said: “Si Secretary Balicasan po ay galing sa Department of Agriculture—undersecretary for planning. At matagal na siya diyan at sa School of Economics, doon din po ako na tapos. E, siguro po hindi siya nakatutungtong sa lupa, sa katotohanan (Secretary Balisacan came from the Department of Agriculture—undersecretary for planning. He has been there for a long time and at the School of Economics, where I also graduated. Maybe he is not grounded in reality).”

“Pinapakiusap namin kay Secretary Balisacan, magpahinga na muna siya at baka napapagod na siya (We are asking Secretary Balisacan to take a break, as he might be getting tired),” he went on.

Meeting with the President

Fausto said they are asking for a meeting with President Marcos to discuss the NEDA Board's approved tariff cuts on agricultural products.

“Humihingi kami ng meeting sa ating Presidente. Sinabi natin kay Secretary Laurel and Secretary Recto and agreeable naman sila na tulungan tayo na mag-set ng meeting (We are requesting a meeting with our President. We informed Secretary Laurel and Secretary Recto, and they agreed to help us arrange the meeting),” he said.

The PCAFI president said they are optimistic that President Marcos will meet with them once his schedule allows.

Elias Jose Inciong, the president of UBRA (United Broiler Raisers' Association), said they will tell the Chief Executive that high food prices are because of economists like Balisacan.

“Kaya mahal ang pagkain ngayon, kaya lagi tayong may crisis ay gawa ng mga ekonomista na katulad ni Balisacan na puros imported, 30 years na ‘yan (The reason food is expensive and we always have a crisis is because of economists like Balisacan who have relied on imports for the past 30 years),” he said

"If the President keeps on listening to them, he will not be the first President to fall victim to these economists,” he added.

Political pressure

Inciong said the move to cut tariffs has a political dimension, saying the President is being pressured by his party-mates and allies.

“May pressure from his party-mates, from his allies, kasi bagamat popular ang stance ng President tungkol sa China, itong nangyayari sa presyo ng pagkain nakakapekto sa kanilang

surveys (There's pressure from his party mates, from his allies, because although the President's stance on China is popular, the current food price situation affects their surveys),” he said.

He said Balisacan possibly tempted President Marcos during the recent NEDA meeting by suggesting that tariff cuts could boost his approval ratings.

“Tingin ko ang sinamantala nina Balisacan, during the NEDA meeting, na according to the announcement, the President was present. Tingin ko natukso nila si President na this is a shortcut to solving the approval ratings because of food prices (I think Balisacan and others took advantage during the NEDA meeting, where, according to the announcement, the President was present. I believe they tempted the President, suggesting that this is a shortcut to improving approval ratings due to food prices),” Inciong stated.

Earlier, the NEDA Board decided to decrease the tariff on rice from 35 percent to 15 percent in a bid to lower rice prices.

Balisacan disclosed the approval of the new Comprehensive Tariff Program (CTP) for the years 2024 to 2028, which encompassed tariff reductions on other essential items within the energy and manufacturing sectors, while also preserving the prevailing low rates on significant agricultural products.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/6/9/major-agri-groups-opposing-tariff-cuts-see-resignation-of-neda-s-balisacan>

MANILA BULLETIN:

DOF: P22-billion revenue loss possible from rice tariff cuts

In 2024 alone

BY XANDER DAVE CEBALLOS

Jun 9, 2024 08:22 PM

The government could lose around P20 billion to P22 billion in revenues this year due to the 15 percent tariff reduction on rice imports, Finance Secretary Ralph G. Recto said.

Recto, however, said that this could be offset through lowering inflation, which would lead to possible cut on interest rates. “Fifteen percent (tariff cut) for the year, ang tansya ko ay 20 to 22 billion,” He told reporters on the sidelines of a site inspection of the LRT Line 1 Cavite Extension.

“Hindi losses yan, we are reducing inflation and once we’re able to reduce inflation, hopefully we can reduce interest rates and that would create more growth,” he added.

He also affirmed that the approval of the tariff rate cut is just the state’s short-term development plan, as its goal is to ensure that investments are made to increase farmers’ productivity.

“We will continue to make those investments with our farmers, irrigation, mechanization, post-harvest facilities so the time will come we don’t have to import our food requirements particularly rice. We are not abandoning our farmers,” the DOF chief stated.

Meeting with farmers to increase productivity

Recto also said that he had a meeting with farmers on the tariff cut, noting that their discussions are “moving forward” on increasing rice productivity.

“They are one of those that we are consulting how do we increase rice production. So what are their inputs, how should we spend the budget,” he said, noting the year-on-year budget rise of the Agriculture department, which is roughly around P200 billion this year.

The finance chief also said that the farmers group can recommend an amendment to Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) to suggest another P15 billion from the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund.

“They can also suggest another P15 billion, halimbawa, because in the RTL they’re already getting more or less P20 billion in the beginning, and more or less P30 billion last year, so we can provide another 15, possibly,” he added.

The House of Representatives last month approved on second reading an amendment to the RTL to increase the fund from the current P10 billion to P15 billion.

Meanwhile, the state has so far collected P16 billion in rice tariffs this year to assist local farmers.

MANILA BULLETIN:

‘Ramdam namin ang pagbuhos ng biyaya’: Solon lauds PBBM for legacy projects in Bicol

BY DEXTER BARRO II

Jun 9, 2024 03:21 PM

AT A GLANCE

- Ako Bicol Party-List Rep. Zaldy Co has expressed his gratitude to President Marcos for his transformative initiatives in the Bicol region that have benefited local agriculture, fisheries, and community development.



President

Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. during his visit in the Bicol region (PCO)

Ako Bicol Party-List Rep. Zaldy Co has expressed his gratitude to President Marcos for his transformative initiatives in the Bicol region that have benefited local agriculture, fisheries, and community development.

Co, chairman of the House Committee on Appropriations, gave this message during Marcos’ recent visit to Bicol wherein he distributed assistance to farmers, fisherfolk, and their families.

"Today, we’re not just graced by your presence, Mr. President, but also by the profound impact of your legacy projects," Co said in his speech.

"Sa bawat sulok ng Bicol Region, ramdam po namin ang pagbuhos ng biyaya mula sa inyong administrasyon. Ang mga proyekto at programang ito'y nagpapataas ng kalidad ng buhay at nagbibigay din ng bagong pag-asa't inspirasyon sa aming mga Bicolano," he added.

(In every corner of the Bicol region, we feel the outpouring of blessings from your administration. These projects and programs uplift our quality of life and provide hope and inspiration to us Bicolanos.)

Co said the President's legacy projects play a vital role in strengthening food security, healthcare, and housing in the region.

In the area of food security, the Bicolano lawmaker highlighted the distribution of presidential assistance to farmers, fisherfolks, and families.

With this program, P10,000 financial aid was provided to every beneficiary from Albay, Sorsogon, Masbate, and Catanduanes. This was accompanied by the distribution of essential agricultural inputs including farm equipment, machinery, fertilizer, seedlings, piglets, feeds, and animal vaccines.

Fisherfolks also received boats provided by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) with this program.

For healthcare, Co emphasized the ongoing construction of the "legacy building" at the Bicol Regional Hospital and Medical Center (BHRMC),

As part of the Marcos administration's Legacy on Specialty Hospitals initiative, this particular project is set to enhance medical services throughout the Bicol region and nearby provinces.

"Ang proyektong ito'y katuparan ng aming pangakong mapabuti ang kalusugan ng bawat Bicolano (This project is a realization of our promise to improve the health of every Bicolano)," noted Co.

Meanwhile, the congressman also commended the legacy housing projects of President Marcos which aims to provide safe and decent living conditions for Filipino families.

He said this initiative is a true reflection of the administration's commitment to community welfare.

Additionally, Co also shed a spotlight on the ongoing efforts by the government to upgrade the region's power infrastructure, which include the rehabilitation of electric cables and the construction of new sub-stations.

"These improvements are seen to stabilize the region's power supply and reduce the frequency of brownouts," he said.

As chairperson of arguably the most influential committee in the House of Representatives—the Appropriations Committee—Co assured support for Marcos' "unparalleled dedication" to improve the lives of Filipinos.

"Makakaasa po kayo sa matibay at tuluy-tuloy na suporta ng House of Representatives sa inyong mga adhikain para sa bansa," he stressed.

(You can count on the House of Representatives' strong and continued support for all your aspirations for the country.)

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/6/9/ramdam-namin-ang-pagbuhos-ng-biyaya-solon-lauds-pbbm-for-legacy-projects-in-bicol>

MANILA BULLETIN:

The UN says more aquatic animals were farmed than fished in 2022. That's the first time in history

BY ASSOCIATED PRESS

Jun 8, 2024 11:21 PM



FILE - Farm-raised Atlantic salmon move across a conveyor belt as they are brought aboard a harvesting boat on Oct. 12, 2008, near Eastport, Maine. The global total volume of fish, shrimp, clams and other aquatic animals that is harvested from farming has topped the amount fished in the wild from the world's waters for the first time ever. (AP Photo/Robert F. Bukaty, File)

ROME (AP) — The total global volume of fish, shrimp, clams and other aquatic animals that are harvested by farming has topped the amount fished in the wild from the world's waters for the first time ever, the United Nations reported Friday.

The U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization, in its latest report on fisheries and aquaculture — or farming in water — says the global catch and harvest brought in more than 185 million tons of aquatic animals in 2022, the most recent year for which statistics are available.

Experts say the milestone in human history had been expected, as the hauls from fisheries have largely stagnated over the last three decades — largely because of limits in nature.

Manuel Barange, who heads FAO's fisheries and aquaculture division, said aquaculture has benefited from a growing recognition of the nutritional benefits — like Omega 3 and other micronutrients found in food from aquatic animals — and lesser environmental impact than food derived from land animals.

The total amount of aquatic animals captured in the wild fell from 91.6 million tons in 2021 to 91 million tons the following year, FAO said in its latest State of the World's Fisheries and Aquaculture report.

Global production rose to 94.4 million in 2022, up from 91.1 million a year earlier, it said.

Asia was the source of more than 90% of all aquaculture production of aquatic animals, the FAO added.

Some 90% of aquatic animals that are farmed or fished go to human consumption, with the remainder going to other uses like feed for other animals or fish oils.

The most common fish that are captured in the world's oceans, seas, rivers, lakes and ponds include Peruvian anchovies, skipjack tuna and Alaskan pollock, while freshwater carp, oysters, clams, shrimp, tilapia and prawns are among the most harvested animal life.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/6/8/the-un-says-more-aquatic-animals-were-farmed-than-fished-in-2022-that-s-the-first-time-in-history>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Zambales solon calls for probe on fishermen's complaints vs BFAR

BY ELLSON QUISMORIO

Jun 9, 2024 09:03 PM

AT A GLANCE

- Assistant Majority Leader and Zambales 1st district Rep. Jay Khonghun wants the House of Representatives to investigate the alleged failure of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) to provide adequate boats and other necessary support for fishermen in the West Philippine Sea (WPS).



Zambales 1st district Rep. Jefferson Khonghun (Dexter Barro II/MANILA BULLETIN)

A Zambales congressman wants the House of Representatives to investigate the alleged failure of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) to provide adequate boats and other necessary support for fishermen in the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

House Assistant Majority Leader and Zambales 1st district Rep. Jay Khonghun made the call in response to

numerous complaints from the fishing community about the disparity between the assistance provided by BFAR and their actual needs for sustaining their livelihood.

Khonghun, a member of the House "Young Guns" bloc, also stressed the importance of scrutinizing and potentially realigning the BFAR budget as Congress prepares to deliberate on the upcoming 2025 National Expenditure Program (NEP).

"It is crucial that we address the inadequacies in the support provided to our fishermen," Khonghun said. "The fishermen in the WPS deserve the best resources to sustain their livelihoods and uphold our national interests in these contested waters."

Earlier this year, BFAR announced that it allocated P660 million for the purchase of 66 units of 62-footer fishing vessels to capacitate Filipino fisherfolk with bigger boats.

The agency said that at least 10 of these large fishing boats are to be distributed to fishing cooperatives operating in the WPS.

Khonghun expressed concerns over the effectiveness of BFAR's current initiatives. He emphasized that the House must ensure the allocated funds are being used efficiently to support the fishing community.

"Reevaluating and potentially reallocating BFAR's budget will guarantee that every peso is directed towards genuinely improving the conditions for our fishermen," Khonghun pointed out.

"This is about more than just boats; it's about securing the future of our fishing industry and reinforcing our sovereignty," he added.

Last May 24, the coastal town of Masinloc in Zambales hosted a joint House committee probe on the supposed "gentleman's agreement" between former president Rodrigo Duterte and Chinese President Xi Jinping on the WPS.

It was during the public consultation with the fishermen that the solons learned about BFAR's supposed shortcomings.

Khonghun stressed the importance of a thorough review of BFAR's 2025 budget, suggesting possible internal issues within the agency.

"We need to examine BFAR's budget closely to ensure it matches the fishermen's needs. There seems to be an anomaly within BFAR, as they appear to be misleading our fishermen," he said.

He continued, "Congress has consistently provided funding to BFAR, and the President has repeatedly reminded them to address the real needs of our fishermen. It's essential that BFAR genuinely engages with the fishing community to understand and meet their requirements."

According to BFAR, there are 385,300 fishermen in the WPS. These territorial waters account for 275,520 metric tons of fisheries production, which is equivalent to 6 percent to 7 percent of the whole fisheries sector.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/6/9/zambales-solon-calls-for-probe-on-fishermen-s-complaints-vs-bfar>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Villafuerte calls for ‘stronger presence’ in West Philippine Sea amid China fishing ban

BY DEXTER BARRO II

Jun 9, 2024 03:44 PM

AT A GLANCE

- Camarines Sur 2nd district Rep. LRay Villafuerte says the government should implement a “stronger presence” in the West Philippine Sea (WPS) to protect Filipino fisherfolk from China’s unilateral four-month fishing ban.



Camarines Sur 2nd district Rep. LRay Villafuerte (PPAB)

Camarines Sur 2nd district Rep. LRay Villafuerte says the government should implement a “stronger presence” in the West Philippine Sea (WPS) to protect Filipino fisherfolk from China’s unilateral four-month fishing ban.

In a statement on Sunday, June 9, Villafuerte reckoned that the Philippine Navy (PN), Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), and Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) should ensure the protection of the country’s fisherfolk as China had threatened to detain for 60 days without trial foreigners who trespass into waters Beijing insists as their own starting June 15.

The Bicol lawmaker said the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) should also make good on its assurance to safeguard Filipinos fishing in the country’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the WPS.

“We are taking the military as its word that our fishers have nothing to worry about because the AFP has their back and will provide protection to them against possible harassment from the Chinese in the WPS,” he said.

Earlier, the AFP said it has prepared contingency measures in case China starts to detain supposed trespassers in the disputed waters.

Likewise, the PN vowed that it would not carry out the “provocative” fishing ban.

Villafuerte stressed that China has no right to claim any islands or rock features in the WPS after these were declared legally part of the maritime territory of the Philippines in July 2016, as affirmed in the ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA).

“This unilaterally-imposed fishing ban of Beijing in the WPS has neither legal nor scientific basis,” he stressed.

The National Unity Party (NUP) president noted that there must be a scientific study proving the necessity of a temporary moratorium on fishing in those waters. None was offered with China’s imposed ban, there is none.

According to the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), the fishing moratorium imposed by China already started on May 1 and is expected to last until Sept. 16, 2024.

The DFA recently lodged a diplomatic protest over China’s fishing ban in the South China Sea (SCS), which contains the WPS.

At the same time, Villafuerte says he is also backing the planned formal complaint against Beijing for its island-building activities that have damaged coral reefs in the cays near Pag-Asa Island and Sabina Shoal in the WPS.

The Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG) are currently planning the case.

“The opening of another legal front to protest China’s incursions into Philippine waters is certainly most welcome as part of the Marcos administration’s commitment to exhaust all means to bring to global attention—and generate broad international condemnation of—the nonstop bullying tactics of China in waters that are legally part of our maritime territory,” noted Villafuerte.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/6/9/villafuerte-calls-for-stronger-presence-in-west-philippine-sea-amid-china-fishing-ban>

‘No fish kill in Pangasinan town’

Cesar Ramirez - The Philippine Star

June 9, 2024 | 12:00am

MANILA, Philippines — The municipal agriculture office of Anda, Pangasinan has denied reports of a fish kill in the town.

A statement posted on the Facebook page of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources-Ilocos on Friday quoted Anda municipal agriculturist Elizabeth Tomas as saying that there were “isolated fish mortalities” due to water stratification caused by sudden and heavy downpour.

“The operators observed their stocks gasping for air showing signs of stress from the sudden temperature change on June 4,” the post read.

As a precautionary measure, fish pen operators were advised to harvest their stocks, which they were able to sell for P70 to P80 per kilo depending on the size.

Tomas said the harvested milkfish are safe for human consumption contrary to claims by some netizens.

“These isolated fish mortalities were due to the effects of climate change, prevailing hot weather and sudden heavy rainfall, affecting thermal stratification and influencing supply of dissolved oxygen available for fish stocks in an affected area,” she said.

Tomas said a fish kill, on the other hand, is caused by “unfavorable water quality parameters caused by unsustainable culture practices.”

<https://www.philstar.com/nation/2024/06/09/2361408/no-fish-kill-pangasinan-town>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

BFAR is not giving enough boats to West Philippine Sea fisherfolks – solon

By: [Faith Argosino](#) - Reporter / [@FArgosinoINQ](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 03:42 PM June 09, 2024



In this photo taken on May 16, 2024, Philippine fishermen aboard their wooden boat catch fish in South China Sea. (File photo by Ted ALJIBE / AFP)

MANILA, Philippines — A lawmaker is calling for a congressional probe into the alleged “shortcomings” of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) in providing adequate number of boats for fisherfolks in the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

House Assistant Majority Leader and Zambales 1st District Rep. Jay Khonghun made the call.

He revealed that there were “numerous complaints from the fishing community about the disparity between the assistance provided by BFAR and their actual needs for sustaining their livelihood.”

“It is crucial that we address the inadequacies in the support provided to our fishermen,” Khonghun said.

“The fishermen in the WPS deserve the best resources to sustain their livelihoods and uphold our national interests in these contested waters,” he noted.

He added there is also a need to scrutinize and potentially realign the BFAR budget as Congress prepares to deliberate on the upcoming 2025 National Expenditure Program.

According to the lawmaker, P660 million was allocated by the agency for the purchase of 66 units of 62-footer fishing vessels, which would supposedly help the fishermen.

Citing BFAR, he said 10 of these large fishing boats are to be distributed to fishing cooperatives operating in the WPS.

“We need to examine BFAR’s budget closely to ensure it matches the fishermen’s needs. There seems to be an anomaly within BFAR, as they appear to be misleading our fishermen,” he suspected.

The lawmaker claimed that Congress “has consistently provided funding to the agency,” and it also received repeated reminders from the chief executive to address the needs of the fishermen.

Last May 24, a fisherfolk in Masinloc, Zambales, said they had not received such assistance from the BFAR.

He was responding to the question of Khonghun during a public consultation and a joint hearing held by the House committees on national defense and security and WPS in Zambales.

Based on BFAR's data, a total of 385,300 fishermen are in the West Philippine Sea.

Their produce "account for 275,520 metric tons of fisheries production, equivalent to 6 percent to 7 percent of the whole fisheries sector."

For comprehensive coverage, in-depth analysis, and the latest updates on the West Philippine Sea issue, [visit our special site here](#). Stay informed with articles, videos, and expert opinions.

[https://www.inquirer.net/406079/bfar-is-not-giving-enough-boats-to-west-philippine-sea-fisherfolks-solon/?utm_medium=gallery&utm_source=\(direct\)](https://www.inquirer.net/406079/bfar-is-not-giving-enough-boats-to-west-philippine-sea-fisherfolks-solon/?utm_medium=gallery&utm_source=(direct))

BUSINESS WORLD:

Rice imports hit 2 million metric tons by end of May

June 9, 2024 | 8:22 pm



PHILSTAR FILE PHOTO

THE PHILIPPINES imported 2.09 million metric tons (MMT) of rice at the end of May, up 30.6%, according to the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI).

The BPI reported that rice shipments in May rose 28% to 411,689 MT.

The BPI said Vietnam remained the top supplier of rice as of the end of May, accounting for 72.7% of all imports in the year to date, or 1.52 MMT.

In January, the Philippines and Vietnam signed an agreement giving the Philippines a quota of 1.5 million to 2 million MT of rice annually for five years.

Thailand supplied 319,740.74 MT during the period, or 15.3% of the total, followed by Pakistan with 147,169.MT, or 7%.

Rounding out the top five were Myanmar and India which shipped 65,600 MT and 21,169 MT of rice, respectively.

Imports service about 20% of Philippine rice demand.

The Department of Agriculture is projecting production of palay, or unmilled rice, at 20.44 MMT this year, against 20.06 MMT last year.

The US Department of Agriculture projects Philippine rice imports of 3.9 MMT this year, downgrading its initial 4.1 MMT estimate. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/06/09/600687/rice-imports-hit-2-million-metric-tons-by-end-of-may/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

NFA urges lifting of preventive suspensions

June 9, 2024 | 8:21 pm



PHILSTAR FILE PHOTO

THE National Food Authority (NFA) called for the lifting of the preventive suspensions on NFA staff over the alleged irregular sale of rice reserves.

NFA Administrator Larry R. Lacson said that the Office of the Ombudsman said these personnel are needed to implement the agency's programs.

"Especially those who have nothing to do with that particular transaction so that they can help. We still have many programs that must be implemented, all our manpower must be there," he added.

In March, the Ombudsman placed 139 NFA supervisors under a six-month preventive suspension for alleged involvement in the irregular sale of rice stocks to specific traders. The order has been lifted to about 95 officials.

The unauthorized sales were executed at P25 per kilogram without proper bidding. The NFA had purchased the rice in palay (unmilled rice) form at P23 per kilo.

The suspended NFA officials and employees included 12 regional managers, 26 branch managers, and 99 warehouse supervisors, as well as former top officials.

“We made it a point that our operations are running smoothly, and we even implemented a new price even with the limited manpower we were able to swing that and hit the 100% target,” Mr. Lacson said.

The NFA Council has approved the increased buying price for palay at P23 to P30 per kilogram (kg) for dry and clean palay and P17 to P23 per kg for fresh palay.

The current NFA inventory is 136 thousand metric tons, with a target of 495 thousand MT by the end of the year.

“Less than half (has been purchased) this first half; roughly 60% of our target will be procured in the wet season harvest,” he said.

He added that the NFA is increasing its inventory target next year to 545 thousand MT.

It is proposing a budget of P16 billion next year for rice procurement.

Additionally, Mr. Lacson said that he is proposing the regular rotation of warehouse supervisors to avoid further complacency within its ranks. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/06/09/600686/nfa-urges-lifting-of-preventive-suspensions/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Rice tariff cut to set the stage for bringing down rates — DoF

June 9, 2024 | 8:21 pm



FINANCE SECRETARY RALPH G. RECTO — DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE FACEBOOK PAGE
By **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**, *Reporter*

THE recently approved tariff cut on rice imports will reduce government revenue by up to P22 billion, but will pave the way for inflation to fall sufficiently to justify bringing down policy rates, the Department of Finance (DoF) said.

Finance Secretary Ralph G. Recto said: “We are reducing inflation. Once we’re able to reduce inflation, hopefully we can reduce interest rates and that will create more growth so we can recover those what you claim to be losses,” he told reporters on Friday.

The National Economic and Development Authority Board last week approved a reduction in rice import tariffs to 15% from 35% previously. This was part of a medium-term plan to lower tariffs on agricultural and industrial products until 2028.

The Agriculture department earlier said that the tariff cut could bring down the retail price of rice by P6 to P7 per kilogram as early as July.

However, Mr. Recto clarified that easing tariffs is just a short-term measure.

“We are not relying on importing rice. That is (for) the short term. We continue to, as part of our Philippine Development Plan, increase rice productivity,” he said.

“We will continue to make those investments with our farmers, irrigation, mechanization, and so on ...so the time will come that we will not have to import our food requirements, particularly rice. We are not abandoning our farmers.”

In its meetings with farmers the DoF discussed ways to increase productivity and spend the budget effectively to achieve this goal.

He also noted that proposed amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law could end up providing further support to farmers.

He said the DoF is studying ways to effectively spend the proposed P15 billion allocation for rice industry modernization, up from the original P10 billion a year.

The House of Representatives last month approved on third and final reading the amendments to the Rice Tariffication Law of 2019, which include extending the validity of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) and increasing its funding to P15 billion.

The RCEF receives its funding from tariffs generated from imports after the tariffication law liberalized rice imports. After largely taking away the government’s rice importing function, the law also freed up private traders to import rice on their own, in the process having to pay an import tariff on their grain. The tariff was originally set at 35% on Southeast Asian grain, though the geographical restrictions have since been removed and the tariff reduced to 15% as an anti-inflation measure.

Mr. Recto noted that rice prices have an outsized impact on inflation.

“If you are able to reduce the price of rice, then its contribution to inflation would dramatically go down,” he said.

Rice inflation rose to 23% in May, easing from the 23.9% posted a month earlier.

Food typically accounts for a large share of the consumer price index market basket in poor countries, with rice the most important element of the food sub-index in the Philippines.

The Department of Agriculture reported that domestically grown well-milled rice averaged P48-P55 as of June 6, from P38-P46 in the same period a year earlier. Regular-milled rice fetched between P45-P52 from P34-P42 a year earlier.

Falling inflation will strengthen the argument for reducing policy rates, he said.

“Possibly, we can reduce the policy rate...depends on what the inflation data will show later on. But by not doing anything, we won’t be able to reduce the price of rice. We won’t be able to do a policy cut,” he said.

Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) Governor Eli M. Remolona, Jr. said that the central bank can begin its policy easing cycle by August.

Mr. Recto has said that the BSP can reduce rates by 150 basis points (bps) in the next two years.

“(Given) all the data today, I still think that 150 bps in the next two years is feasible. More so that we already did the reduction in rice tariffs. So, let’s take a look at how that will affect rice prices and inflation moving forward.”

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/06/09/600644/rice-tariff-cut-to-set-the-stage-for-bringing-down-rates-dof/>

MANILA STANDARD

PH bans imported domestic, wild birds from Australia due to avian flu

By Othel V. Campos

June 9, 2024, 12:20 am

The Department of Agriculture (DA) temporarily banned the importation of domestic and wild birds from Australia following outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) strains H7N3 and H7N9 in Victoria.

The outbreaks were reported to the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) on May 23, 2024, in Meredith and on May 25 in Terang—both in the state of Victoria in Australia. The Australian Center for Disease Preparedness confirmed the outbreak.

According to DA Memorandum Order No. 21, the ban applies to all live birds, poultry meat, day-old chicks, eggs, and semen.

The Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) will also suspend issuing sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances (SPSIC) for these products from Australia.

Shipments already in transit, loaded, or accepted at port before the official communication to Australia are exempt, provided those products were slaughtered or produced on or before May 9, 2024.

Australia is a significant source of poultry for the Philippines, ranking fourth for chicken meat with aggregated imports of 5,365 metric tons (MT) and third for mechanically deboned meat (MDM) at 4,162 MT as of April 2024.

The Philippines previously imported 46,987 day-old chicks and 30,780 hatching eggs from Australia.

Editor's Note: This is an updated article. Originally posted with the headline: "Philippines temporarily halts entry of poultry products from Australia due to avian flu"

<https://manilastandard.net/news/314456819/philippines-temporarily-halts-entry-of-poultry-products-from-australia-due-to-avian-flu.html>

THE MANILA TIMES

NO TO TARIFF CUT

June 9, 2024



Members of Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura express their opposition to the reduction of rice tariff at a press briefing on June 9,2024. The group said cutting tariffs will harm local producers and everyone in the rice industry. PHOTOS BY ISMAEL DE JUAN

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/06/09/photos/no-to-tariff-cut/1950697>

THE MANILA TIMES

Aquaculture overtakes wild fisheries for first time – UN report

By Agence France-Presse

June 9, 2024

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 on 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.



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. Ezequiel BECERRA / AFP

"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.manilatimes.net/2024/06/09/news/national/aquaculture-overtakes-wild-fisheries-for-first-time-un-report/1950590>

A war on worms in warm weather

Erwin M. Mascariñas

June 9, 2024

BUTUAN CITY—While still recovering after the massive damage to their agriculture area from the flood waters that submerged their farmland in February this year, Mario Cabahug, 66, fears that the worst is yet to come as the intense heat combined with the emergence of an invasive worm species sinks further their hopes of recovery.

Cabahug, a farmer since he was a boy, expressed his helplessness as he faced the rising crisis on his small farm in Purok 8, Barangay Nato, in the town of Esperanza, Agusan del Sur province.

“I’ve never experienced anything like this in my entire life, I’ve hoped that after the massive flood that swept this land, I could recover from whatever I’ve lost; but just as the flood waters receded from the constant heavy rains, almost immediately the intense heat killed what little portion of vegetables I’ve planted, and the only hope I had was on the corn, but now they are also dying,” said Cabahug.



A FARMER displays Fall armyworms that were removed from hundreds of infested corn plants.

Based on the May 27 damage assessment report from the Agusan del Sur Provincial Agriculture and Veterinary Office, the towns of Bunawan, Esperanza, Loreto, Trento, Lapaz, Santa Josefa, Talacogon, San Luis and Bayugan City reported that planted corn mostly in the vegetative stage had been infested by the Fall armyworm (*Spodoptera frugiperda*), a voracious invasive species from eastern and central North and South America that first appeared in the province of Cagayan in 2019.

With a voracious appetite, the Fall armyworm, better known as FAW, is the larval stage of a Grey-brown moth, an adult moth that is usually 1-1/4 to 1-1/2 inches from wing tip to wing tip, with a brown or gray forewing, and a white hindwing.

“The reports from the field started coming in March. We then dispatched our teams to verify the situation as...initially only the towns of Esperanza and Loreto were affected. By April the FAW had already spread to more towns affecting several barangays. Most of the affected corn are in their vegetative stage,” said Armando G. Valiente, provincial agriculturist of Agusan del Sur.

Valiente said this is the first time the province experienced such kind of pest infestation of corn crops, affecting around 2,427 farmers with a total land area of 3,963 hectares—with a total value of the damage at P56,451,692, a sum that is feared to rise as the area affected is still growing.

The town of La Paz reported the largest area damaged among all the municipalities with 1,435.10 hectares affecting 12 barangays with a value of 24,330,350.70.



A FALL armyworm curls up after the husk of a corn was opened, revealing damaged kernels.

Climate-linked infestation

Cabahug said he had experienced the drought that affected their farm in 1983 for several months, but even if this year's heat from the El Niño phenomenon had only been two months, the battle is so much different.

“Unlike the dry hot months in the drought of 1983, this year we have to worry about the worms that have infested our corn crops before it might be hot, and it might hinder productivity, but at least there are still crops that will survive. Now you have two problems, the intense heat and then the worms that will eat away the money we have borrowed to plant this season,” said Cabahug.

“We are fighting two fronts, two enemies, it's a losing battle,” Cabahug added. “The damage is massive: usually in a hectare we will harvest 120 sacks of corn but now I doubt that...even 50 percent can be harvested. Our corn is still growing, yet amid all our efforts like spraying pesticides, and even using different brands just to find something that will be effective, the worms continue to wreak havoc on our crops.”

While field validation is still being done, preliminary data from the Regional Crop Protection Center (RCPC) of the Department of Agriculture Caraga Region showed a total of 770 farmers were affected by the FAW infestation that damaged around 1,378.65 hectares of agricultural land area in Agusan del Sur, Agusan del Norte, Butuan City and a small area in the municipality of Cagdianao in the Dinagat Island province.

Ana Marie Plaza, Officer-in-Charge, RCPC of DA Caraga, said they monitored the FAW in the region in 2020. Still, this cropping season's infestation is unprecedented compared to previous years.

“In 2020, during the height of the pandemic, we started monitoring the presence of FAW in our corn crops in Caraga. From 2021 until 2023, the number of infected corn plants has been very minimal that it did not even show that much dent on our farmers' yield. But we're surprised it spiked beyond our expectations in this year's cropping,” said Plaza.

In Plaza's view, the sudden rise in FAW infestation in Agusan del Sur might have something to do with the abrupt change in the weather pattern with the onset of warmer temperatures which increased from March to May.

“We’ve noticed that most of the infected farms and the towns affected by the FAW this year are those same areas that were flooding back in February, so from the straight two months of rain and flood, after it ended, by mid-March we had the rise in temperature and the intense heat resulting in a dry spell by March. These are favorable conditions for the worm to multiply and infect more farms,” said Plaza.

Plaza said the pupae of the FAW might have stayed under the soil affected by the flooding, and emerged after the waters receded. The hot summer weather favored their faster development.

Several published scientific studies on the FAW—the most recent in March 2023 entitled, “Climate Change Can Trigger Fall Armyworm Outbreaks: A Developmental Response Experiment With Two Mexican Maize Landraces,” pointed to the faster development of *Spodoptera frugiperda* when the weather is warm.

In a February 2022 study from China, “The Effect of Temperatures and Hosts on the Life Cycle of *Spodoptera frugiperda* (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae),” the research team reported that when temperatures rose, the developmental period of FAW at each stage shortened significantly, with instar larvae developing rapidly on maize at 25°C and 30°C, while feeding on maize at 30°C resulted in a lower mortality rate, a shorter developmental time and longevity, and a higher ability to produce an abundance of offspring compared to lower temperatures.

Resistant to commercial pesticides

THE assessment report made by the Agusan del Sur Provincial Agriculture and Veterinarian Office indicated that most farmers sprayed insecticide more than five times, but the FAW infestation persisted.

Farmer Robin Nowhere, 61, from Purok 5, Barangay San Nicolas in the town of Talacogon, expressed his disbelief amid the efforts they’ve made in spraying pesticides; the worms doubled in numbers.

“Although I only have a small land where I planted corn, our expense from plowing and preparing the land, the seedlings, planting, and fertilizers has increased because of how much we have paid for in spraying of pesticides. We’ve already used different types just to make it work, but they just keep on producing more and it has devastated the middle part of the farm,” said Nowhere.

Nowhere added that, “This is the first time in our entire life that we’ve seen this kind of infestation on our crops. Last February, I lost more than P10,000 after the flood waters swept through our farm. We hoped that this cropping season we could recover from that loss and also pay some of our debts, but I never expected this kind of problem. This time I estimate our loss to be nearly P20,000 because of the expensive pesticides.”

Plaza warns farmers against experimenting and mixing different cocktails of pesticides as this causes more problems without eliminating the worms and further enhancing their survivability.

“We’ve received reports that out of desperation, some farmers are mixing different types of pesticides and increasing the amount sprayed into the infested crops. The problem with this is that it will not be effective and it will have an opposite result as it will only enhance their immunity against the pesticides,” said Plaza.

To make the pesticides work, Plaza said, the farmers should individually open the portion where the worms are located in each plant and direct the nozzle of the sprayer on the affected stalk.

Natural solutions

Plaza revealed that while farmers are trying to experiment with what type of pesticides should they spray, their team is working on using an environmentally friendly, all-natural safer solution to the pest problem.

The RSPC conducted a series of information campaigns to help educate farmers on how to better fight the infestation using biological control agents (BCA).

Plaza enumerated the BCAs they are advising farmers to use: “Our farmers can use the Fall armyworm lure; this is a pheromone-based solution, this will attract the male moths and catch them, we usually hang 40 lure traps per hectare.”

“We also have *Trichogramma evanescens*, a small parasitic wasp, an egg parasitoid which means it needs a host to survive; in this case, it will use the moth’s eggs to live by consuming it from within. We recommend 100 Tricho per hectare,” she said.

Another alternative pesticide suggested by RSPC is by using *Metarhizium anisopliae*, a pathogenic fungus that infects the insect larvae, attaching itself and infecting the FAW.

Then there is the Nuclear Polyhedrosis Virus (NPV), a viral disease that attacks the FAW after the larvae have eaten the NPV particles infecting the gut cell, and spreading to the blood within 24 hours killing the host larvae.

Plaza explained that while BCA solutions are available, the massive infestation has caught them off guard, resulting in a limited supply that not everyone can access immediately.

While the onset of the rainy season has already started, Caraga Region still experiences warm temperatures, and authorities are concerned that the FAW infestation will continue to spread and infect more areas throughout the region.

Meanwhile, despair is rising, and hunger looms.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/06/09/a-war-on-worms-in-warm-weather/>

Avocados: Mexico's 'green gold' export harming forests and waters

Viridiana Hernández Fernández, University of Iowa | The Conversation

June 9, 2024



Avocado plantation in Michoacán, Mexico

Table of ContentsHide

1. [The environmental effects of monoculture](#)
2. [Bred in California](#)
3. [How the Hass changed Michoacán](#)
4. [The guacamole wars](#)
5. [Beyond monoculture](#)

Consumers' love for avocados in the United States seems to know no bounds. From 2001 through 2020, consumption of this fruit laden with healthy fats tripled nationwide, rising to over 8 pounds per person yearly.

On average, 90% of those avocados are grown in the southwest Mexican state of Michoacán. As with other foods that have become trendy, such as acai berries, or widely used, such as palm oil, intensive avocado production is causing significant environmental damage.

My research on 20th-century Latin American environmental history examines how the transnational movement of people, foods and agricultural technologies has changed rural landscapes in Latin America. Currently, I'm writing a book on the development of a global avocado industry centered in Michoacán, the world's largest avocado-growing region.

My research shows that raising avocados is economically beneficial in the short term for farmers, which in Latin America typically means medium-sized operators and agribusinesses. It also helps growers—people in rural areas who grow subsistence crops. Over time, though, every serving of avocado toast takes a toll on Michoacán's land, forests and water supply. Rural growers, who lack the resources of large-scale farmers, feel those impacts most keenly.

The environmental effects of monoculture

Michoacán is the only place on earth that grows avocados year-round, thanks to its temperate climate, abundant rainfall and deep, porous volcanic soils that are rich in potassium, a vital plant nutrient. Even under favorable conditions, however, monocultures are never environmentally sustainable.

Introducing homogeneous, high-yielding plant varieties leads growers to abandon native crops. This makes the local ecosystem more vulnerable to threats such as pest infestations and reduces food options. It also erodes fertile soils and increases use of agrochemicals.

Monoculture also can drive deforestation. Mexican officials estimate that avocado production spurred the clearance of 2,900 to 24,700 acres of forests per year from 2010 through 2020. And it's resource intensive: Avocado trees consume four to five times more water than Michoacán's native pines, jeopardizing water resources for human consumption.

Bred in California

Avocados have been a part of the Mexican diet since ancient Mesoamerica, but the Hass—the most popular variety worldwide today—was bred in modern California.

In the late 19th century, scientists from the US Department of Agriculture embarked on a mission to collect and send home samples of food plants from around the world. The goal was to adapt and grow these plants in the United States, reducing the need for food imports.

Collecting plant genetic material from Latin America and imposing quarantines on avocados from Mexico starting in 1914 provided vital support for the development of a US avocado industry. Farmers in California and Florida bred multiple strains from the material that USDA explorers collected. But US consumers in the early 1900s weren't familiar with this new food and hesitated to buy avocados of various textures, sizes and colors.

In response, farmers began selecting plants that grew avocados with small seeds, abundant flesh, hard skin, a creamy texture—and, most importantly, high yields. According to industry lore, Rudolph Hass, a postman and amateur horticulturalist in Southern California, stumbled on a new variety in the late 1920s while trying to propagate a variety called Rideout.

Within several decades, the Hass became the dominant avocado grown in California. By the 1950s, Mexican farmers who had connections with US brokers had introduced the Hass south of the border.

How the Hass changed Michoacán

In the early 1960s, Michoacano cantaloupe farmers acquired lands to expand their production by growing avocados. Soon they focused on exclusively producing the Hass.

Many local Indigenous Purhépecha people, along with non-Indigenous *campesinos*, or country farmers, rented or sold land to the emerging avocado farmer class. In the 1980s, *campesinos* began to grow the fruit too. This was an expensive, long-term undertaking: It took four years for the trees to produce marketable avocados, but growers had to buy the trees, clear land for them and provide water, fertilizer and pesticides to help them grow.

Cantaloupe farmers could afford to invest capital for four years with no cash return. *Campesinos* had to rely on loans or remittances from family members abroad to develop avocado orchards.

As production expanded, agrochemical distributors, tree nurseries and packing houses sprouted on Purhépecha lands, clearing native pine trees and eroding the fertile soils. Mexico passed a law in 2003 that prohibited clearing forests for commercial agriculture, but by this time *campesinos* in Michoacán were already growing Hass avocados on a large scale.

The guacamole wars

After the adoption of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994, California avocado farmers lobbied to maintain a quarantine that the USDA had imposed on Mexican avocado trees in 1914 because of an alleged plague. After three years of drought in California and testing of Michoacán orchards for pests, Mexico began shipping Hass avocados to the US in 1997.

However, the only region the USDA certified to send avocados to the United States was Michoacán. Mexico had to allow the USDA to station agents in Michoacán to verify that certified orchards fulfilled agreed conditions to minimize the risks of plant diseases.

Companies such as Calavo, a California-based produce distributor, began to buy, pack and ship avocados grown in Michoacán to US customers. In the process, they became major competitors for California avocado farmers.

Beyond monoculture

Today, avocados are one of the most-regulated exports from Mexico. However, these rules do little to address the industry's environmental impacts.

Farmers in Michoacán continue to clear woodlands, spray agrochemicals, exhaust aquifers and buy Purhépecha communal property, converting it to smaller, privately owned lots. Rising profits have spurred violence and corruption as some local authorities collude with organized crime groups to expand the market.

Visiting Michoacán on February 26, 2024, US Ambassador to Mexico Ken Salazar pledged that the US would modify its protocol to block imports of avocados grown in illegal orchards. However, this won't restore local ecosystems.

As I see it, expecting small-scale growers to protect the environment, after the ecology and economy of Michoacán has been radically altered in the name of free

markets and development, puts responsibility in the wrong place. And boycotting Mexican avocados likely would simply lead growers to look for other markets.

Diversifying agriculture in the region and reforesting Michoacán could help to restore the Sierra Purhepecha's ecology and protect the rural economy. One Indigenous community there is successfully growing peaches and lemons for the domestic market and avocados for the international market, while also planting native pines on their communal lands. This is a potential model for other farmers, although it would be hard to replicate without state support.

In my view, importing avocados from different areas of Mexico and the world to reduce the Hass market share may be the most effective environmental protection strategy. In 2022, the USDA approved imports of avocados grown in the Mexican state of Jalisco. This is a start, but Jalisco will follow Michoacán's trajectory unless the US finds more sources and promotes more avocado types.

As US eaters' tastes become more adventurous, sampling avocados of different sizes, shapes, textures, tastes and origins could become a decision that's both epicurean and environmentally conscious.

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<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/06/09/avocados-mexicos-green-gold-export-harming-forests-and-waters/>

Rice straw to biogas: Transforming residues to revenues—and clean environs

Shielo Pasahol, Angeli Platino, Aina Buan and Lichelle Carlos

Despite the environmental laws prohibiting the improper disposal of rice straws, such as the Solid Waste Management Act of 2000 (Republic Act 9003) and the Clean Air Act of 1999 (Republic Act 8749), 70 percent of rice farmers burn rice straws, a Philippine Rice Research Institute report in 2016 states.

To resolve this dilemma, Straw Innovations Ltd. has partnered with the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca), Koolmill Systems and Aston University in a groundbreaking collaborative project, “Rice Straw Biogas Hub.”

This project aims to significantly reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emission by transforming agricultural rice production residue, of the rice straw, into a clean energy resource—such as biogas—through cutting-edge technologies.

Beyond introducing advanced technological development, the project also emphasizes in understanding the farmers’ viewpoints, and involving them as crucial partners in the global fight against climate change.

Biogas is an odorless and colorless gas consisting of methane and carbon. Its renewability and cost-effectiveness offer a sustainable alternative to liquefied petroleum gas and other fossil-based energy sources commonly used for cooking in households.

From waste to wealth

Searca, through its Emerging Innovation for Growth Department (EIGD), conducted a “Training on Biogas Production from Agricultural Wastes” on February 15 and 16.

The training focused on the technical know-how in converting and utilizing rice straw and other agricultural waste as clean energy, replacing fossil fuels.

The lectures took place at Searca in Laguna, while the practical, hands-on session on biogas production was held at the Pacwood Site's biogas facility, managed by the Environmental Sanitation Center (ESC) in Tunasan, Muntinlupa City.

Nineteen agricultural officers and lead farmers from public and private agricultural institutions in Laguna and Nueva Ecija participated in the training.

Dr. Nur Azura Binti Adam, Searca's deputy director for programs, highlighted in her message the economic uses of "dayami" (rice straw), which provide environmental opportunities to mitigate climate change. Nur pointed out that "burning dayami is burning money."

Atty. Eric Reynoso, Searca's EIGD program head, gave an overview of the Rice Straw Biogas Hub (RSBH) initiative, explaining Searca's role in analyzing the GHG emissions of the rice value chain from preplanting to marketing and creating an enabling environment that will improve rice straw management.

From wasteful to useful

Dr. Victor Luis Jr., a biogas energy expert, discussed the conversion of rice straw into renewable energy resources anaerobically, or without oxygen.

Luis likened the process to an "assembly line" with two types of workers: acid-forming and methane-forming microbes. Every step and worker must coordinate and balance to achieve an ideal environment for anaerobic digestion.

The interactive discussion informed the delegates on how different anaerobic digesters work.

Although any organic material could be a potential substrate, Luis said that dry leaves, such as rice straws, can produce burnable biogas.

From formidable to affordable

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

She said the high-density polyethylene digester, known as “Subprom,” can potentially replace the commercially available digesters made with concrete and plastic.

Besides requiring less maintenance, Subprom has been proven to be more sustainable and cost-effective, amounting to less than \$400 with a lifespan of up to 15 years.

Unlike common digesters that need animal manure (from cow or swine), Subprom can run up to two months with hyacinth and rice straw as sole feedstocks—an impressive innovation, especially for households that own less than three swine, or even none.

Truc shared that Subprom digesters are now being adopted by Vietnam’s Ministry of Agriculture and Development.

Luis and Lichelle Dara Carlos, EIGD program specialist, expressed enthusiasm for the technology. They suggested to have a collaboration with Truc’s team to potentially bring Subprom digesters to the Philippines.

From linear to circular

The RSBH team and the participants learned more about the biogas conversion process through the waste management initiative of the ESC in Tunasan, Muntinlupa City.

Engr. Vincent Alon, ESC’s Solid Waste Management Division head, introduced the city’s waste segregation and management initiatives—shifting from a linear to a circular economy.

Muntinlupa City’s circular economy includes using kitchen, market and sometimes industrial and agricultural wastes for the consumption of animals, and as feedstock to the portable digester.

The resulting biogas can be used by consumers for cooking, while the digestate can be turned into compost or fertilizers for vegetable or horticultural gardening.

The highlight of the ESC initiative is the pilot testing of the one-cubic meter biogas digester that the Department of Science and Technology's Industrial Technology Development Institute (DOST-ITDI) designed for ESC's use.

The technology is part of DOST-ITDI's environmental solution to the increasing problem of waste mismanagement, especially on animal manure and household waste.

Engr. David Herrera, senior engineer in the Environmental and Biotechnology Division of the DOST-ITDI, presented the design and capacity of the agency's fabricated digester.

With its ability to convert into biogas the manures and agricultural wastes from public markets and households, it can process 210 kilograms of the substrate into methane, thereby, providing fuel for half an hour of cooking.

The ESC staff demonstrated the biodigestion process, from feeding the one-cubic meter digester with manure and their "secret" ingredients of fish gut and gills emulsion.

The mixture takes initially 30 days to mature. With its successful pilot demonstration, the municipality plans to expand operations using pig manure from its future slaughterhouse.

During the demonstrations, Alon and Herrera pointed out that biogas requires a specialized stove with a low-pressure nozzle larger than the standard LPG.

It also cannot be used for direct heating, such as in barbecue cooking.

The participants also toured the facility, including its urban mini farm with ostriches, pigs and sorting area for reject fruits, and vegetables collected from the markets and households within the municipality.

From small step to big sweep

From their insights, the participants emphasized that the youth can participate in initiatives for climate-change mitigation.

A participant from Laguna agreed that the training was essential in reducing global warming, and recognized that it is necessary for farmers.

But it would only be worthwhile if farmers would stop rice-straw burning.

Thus, he said the LGUs should strengthen their measures in prohibiting GHG emission activities, saying, “Change starts with LGUs.”

John Marion De Gracia, a participant from the Science City of Muñoz, Nueva Ecija, expressed his willingness to adopt the technology so “we could become a model for the country.”

Luis noted the public’s role as stewards of the environment.

“We must take care of our present for the next generation,” he said.

Most of the participants expressed a desire to adopt the biodigester.

For them, technology would help prevent poor rice straw handling and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Also, they emphasized the importance of influencing mindsets through farmer-level training.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/06/09/rice-straw-to-biogas-transforming-residues-to-revenues-and-clean-environs/>

REMATE:

Farmers groups aapela sa rice import tariff cut

June 9, 2024 10:24



MANILA, Philippines- Nakatakdang hamunin ng farm sector groups sa korte ang desisyon ng National Economic and Development Authority Board kamakailan na tapyasan ang tariff rates sa imported rice.

Sa isang panayam nitong Sabado, sinabi ni Federation of Free Farmers Chairman Leonardo Montemayor na magdedesisyon ang agriculture groups ngayong Linggo kung magkakasa ng legal remedy, tulad ng temporary restraining order (TRO), sakaling mag-isyu si Pangulong Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. ng Executive Order na nag-aatas ng tariff cuts. Inaprubahan ng NEDA Board ang pagtapyas sa duty rate ng bigas sa 15% para sa in-quota at out-quota rates hanggang 2028.

Inaprubahan din ng board ang pagpapanatili hanggang 2028 sa mas mababang tariff rates sa mais, karne ng baboy, at mechanically deboned meat sa ilalim ng EO No. 50, series of 2023.

“Malaking dagok po sa amin ‘yan,” giit ni Montemayor. “Ang direktang makikinabang dito ay importers... Tariff cuts, do not solve the problem.”

Kasama ng FFF ang Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura, Agricultural Sector Alliance of the Philippines, sa farm sector groups, na nakatakdang mag-anunsyo ngayong Linggo, Hunyo 9, ng kanilang aksyon laban sa import tariff cuts. **RNT/SA**

<https://remate.ph/farmers-groups-aapela-sa-rice-import-tariff-cut/>

REMATE:

Ibon mula Australia haharangin ng DA

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MANILA, Philippines- Ipinagbawal ng Philippine government, sa pamamagitan ng Department of Agriculture (DA), ang pag-aangkat ng mga ibon mula sa Australia kasunod ng mga kumpirmadong kaso ng bird flu sa nasabing bansa.

Sinabi ng DA nitong Sabado na ipinag-utos ang ban sa pag-aangkat ng domestic at wild birds galing Australia matapos isumite ng Chief Veterinary Officer nito ang naiulat na outbreaks ng H7N3 at H7N9 —subtypes ng highly pathogenic avian influenza virus—sa World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH).

Naiulat ang outbreaks noong Mayo 23 sa Meredith at Mayo 25 sa Terang sa state of Victoria.

Nakumpirma ng Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness ang impeksyon.

Kasunod nito, sinabi ng DA na ipinalabas ni Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. ang Memorandum order No. 21.

Ipinag-utos nito sa Bureau of Animal Industry na suspendihin ang pag-isyu ng Sanitary and Phytosanitary Import Clearances (SPSIC)

para sa imports ng Australia na wild at domestic birds, kabilang ang poultry meat, day-old chicks, eggs, at semen.

“All shipments coming from Australia that are in transit/load/accepted unto port before the official communication of this order to the Australian authorities shall be allowed provided that the products were slaughtered/produced on or before May 9, 2024,” pahayag ni Tiu Laurel sa kautusang nilagdaan noong Hunyo 6.

Hangang nitong Abril 2024, inihayag ng DA na ang Australia ang ika-apat na pinakamalaking source ng imported chicken meat, na may kabuuang volume na 5,365 metric tons, katumbas ng 4% ng kabuuang volume ng chicken imports.

Bukod dito, ang Australia ang ikatlong pinakamalaking source ng mechanically deboned meat (MDM), sa 4,162 metric tons, o 6.1% ng kabuuang volume ng MDM imports.

Sa parehong panahon, nakapag-angkat ang Pilipinas ng 46,987 heads ng day-old chicks at 30,780 piraso ng hatching eggs. **RNT/SA**

<https://remate.ph/ibon-mula-australia-haharangin-ng-da/>