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**MANILA BUULLETIN:**

# **IAC-IMO sets October deadline for sugar import**

**BY CHINO S. LEYCO**

Jul 1, 2024 09:21 AM

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The Marcos administration's inter-agency committee on inflation said that the importation of refined sugar must arrive in the country before October this year to help bridge the local production gap.

At its meeting on Friday, June 28, the Inter-Agency Committee on Inflation and Market Outlook (IAC-IMO) instructed the Department of Agriculture (DA) to facilitate the importation of 200,000 metric tons of refined sugar.

Chaired by Secretary Frederick Go from the Office of the Special Assistant to the President for Investment and Economic Affairs, the IAC-IMO pointed out that the sugar should arrive "no later than October 2024."

The IAC-IMO said that the importation is crucial for addressing production shortfalls and replenishing stocks, especially in the second half of 2024.

Last week, the DA announced its plan to issue a special order permitting the importation of 200,000 metric tons of refined sugar this month.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said the importation is crucial to ensure an adequate supply of sugar and maintain price stability in the country.

"I'm planning that if we are going to import sugar, we should have an arrival of at least 200,000 tons by September," Tiu Laurel told reporters.

According to the DA chief, the sugar supply in the country is projected to decline between August and September, necessitating the need for imports.

"Therefore, we need to bridge the sugar gap with at least 200,000 tons by September-October," he added.

Tiu Laurel further said that the DA has been in discussions with sugar producers for six months and intends to meet with the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) on July 10 or 11 to further address the issue.

The agriculture chief noted that the current price of sugar in the country ranges from P75 to P80 per kilogram.

As of June 26, based on the DA's monitoring, retail prices of refined sugar in Metro Manila range from P74 to P92 per kilogram.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/7/1/iac-imo-sets-october-deadline-for-sugar-import>

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# Boosting food security is top priority

BY [MANILA BULLETIN](#)

Jul 2, 2024 00:17 AM



Food security is high on the agenda of the Marcos administration.

Over the weekend, the Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Commission (PAOCC) raised the alarm on foreigners renting or buying large tracts of land in Nueva Ecija and other rice-producing provinces, as well as areas in Palawan facing the West Philippine Sea. The Constitution provides that the ownership of private lands is limited to Filipino citizens or corporations with at least 60 percent Filipino capital.

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Last week, President Marcos emphasized the key role played by local government units (LGUs) that are in the frontlines of the administration's concerted efforts to achieve its goal of Zero Hunger in 2027. Cash awards were given to outstanding barangays, municipalities, cities and provinces that achieved the best results. He called for sustenance of the whole-of-nation approach so that, through synchronized efforts, this vital goal may be achieved sooner. According to DSWD data, nearly 12 percent of Filipino families or around three million households experienced hunger at least once during the last quarter of 2023. One of three Filipino children under five years is still suffering from stunted growth due to malnutrition. Compared to other countries in East and Southeast Asia, the Philippines still trails in the Global Hunger Index with a score of 14.8, or moderately hungry, versus the regional score of 8.2.

These data underline the urgency of the DSWD's Zero Hunger program which involves the provision to beneficiary families of food stamps to buy food commodities from participating stores.

Assuring the affordability of rice which is the Filipinos' staple food is imperative in attaining food security. President Marcos, who chairs the board of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), issued Executive Order 62, lowering tariffs on imported rice from 35 percent to 15 percent, as part of the Comprehensive Target Program for 2024-2028.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has monitored that the price of imported well-milled rice ranges from ₱52 to ₱55 per kilogram while the regular-milled variety sells for as much as ₱51 per kilo; local commercial well-milled rice sells for ₱48 to ₱55 per kilo while the price of the regular-milled variant ranges from ₱45 to ₱52 per kilo. The DA's target price is ₱29 per kilo, made available at Kadiwa outlets, to complement direct subsidies already being extended to the marginalized and vulnerable sectors, such as the food stamps and conditional cash transfers.

NEDA attributed the high international price of rice to the global impact of the El Niño phenomenon and rising demand. It is keen on keeping the price of rice down. Based on Philippine Statistics (PSA) estimates, "rice contributed to about two percentage points or over 50 percent to headline inflation in the last three months."

Urgent actions need to be taken on other fronts, including, among others: farmer subsidies and improved credit access; investments in irrigation systems and storage facilities; intensive research and development of high-yield rice varieties; promotion of sustainable farming practices; strengthening cooperative systems; and enhancing market linkages and export opportunities.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/7/2/boosting-food-security-is-top-priority>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# No onion crisis; stocks enough until next year

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

July 2, 2024 | 12:00am



This photo shows a market vendor at Balintawak Market standing in-front piles of onions while he sorts out fresh and spoiled produce.

Ian Laqui / Philstar.com

MANILA, Philippines — Filipinos won't be shredding tears over onion prices as the commodity is expected to remain affordable throughout the year since the country's stocks of the vegetable are projected to last until early next year.

The country's red onion and shallot stocks as of June 21 reached 161,973.73 metric tons (MT), which could last for 276 days based on a nationwide daily consumption rate of 585.52 MT, according to the latest report by the government's allium monitoring team.

The government report obtained by The STAR showed that the current fresh red onion and shallot supplies would be sufficient for at least nine months or until March 25, 2025.

The present inventory of red onions are all from local production since the government halted the importation of the vegetable at the start of the year due to a projected bumper harvest.

The temporary import ban on onions has been extended by Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. until the end of this month.

Meanwhile, the country's current supply of fresh yellow onions of about 11,569.07 MT would last for two months and 18 days or until Sept. 8, based on the monitoring report.

Overall, the combined red and yellow onions as well as shallots stocks nationwide would last for 237 days or until Feb. 13 next year.

Given the current inventory for red onions, the Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. (PCAFI) is proposing that the import ban on the commodity be extended further by the government.

PCAFI president Danilo Fausto said the present red onion supplies would last until the next harvest of the country, which usually begins in February and peaks in March.

“This is an unprecedented (level) of inventory. This is proof that if you give farmers a good price then they would produce more,” he said.

Fausto added that there is no reason anymore for retail prices of red onions to skyrocket to between P500 and P700 per kilogram like what happened in early last year.

If there would be any importations this year, Fausto said, it should be for yellow onions since the current inventory of the vegetable would be all consumed by early September.

Yellow onions are usually the ones used by the food service industry for their dishes.

The retail prices of locally-produced red onions in Metro Manila markets range from P80 per kilogram to P150 per kilogram while yellow onions range between P60 and P120 per kilogram, based on Department of Agriculture's price monitoring reports.

The STAR broke the story in May that the country's onion production in the first half is en route to an unprecedented level driven by expansion in planted areas by farmers, encouraged by high prices last year.

The Department of Agriculture earlier projected that onion harvest in the second quarter could reach at least 170,000 MT, bringing total first half production to over 370,000 MT.

The Philippines harvests bulk of its onion output during the first semester, with minimal production during the second half of the year due to climatic conditions.

The total local onion production in the first half usually serves as the basis for the government in determining the amount of imports that would be allowed in a given year.

Filipinos grappled with unprecedented onion prices that hit as high as P700 per kilogram between the latter part of 2022 and early months of last year.

The rise in onion prices was caused by insufficient supply after the government opted to disallow the entry of imports to protect local farmers.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/07/02/2366988/no-onion-crisis-stocks-enough-until-next-year>



**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# USDA: Goats exported to Philippines free of diseases

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

July 2, 2024 | 12:00am



Photo showing Q fever and a man holding a goat.

MANILA, Philippines — The imported goats that tested positive for Q fever were free of diseases when they arrived in the Philippines in January, a spokesperson for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) said.

The USDA spokesperson said its Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) unit is already aware that the Philippines has temporarily suspended the importation of live goats from the entire US following the incident.

“Our records indicate these goats were tested negative for Q fever in the United States in December 2023. The animals were exported and arrived in the Philippines on Jan. 11, 2024,” the official told The STAR.

“Q fever testing was then performed again by the Philippine Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) during import quarantine on Feb. 6, 2024, with negative results,” the official added.

The USDA spokesperson said the additional Q fever tests conducted by the BAI on the imported goats last April 3, where some animals tested positive, were already beyond the incubation period for the disease.

“The incubation period for Q fever ranges from two (to) 48 days. The animals had been physically in the Philippines for 81 days prior to the Q fever test conducted on April 3, 2024,” the spokesperson said.

Agriculture Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. earlier issued Memorandum Order (MO) 26 that formalized the temporary ban on the importation of live goats from the US.

Tiu Laurel ordered the ban after the recent importation of the live goats from US tested positive for Q fever last June 19.

“This is a developing issue. APHIS will continue to work with BAI to encourage transparent communication and swift removal of the ban to re-open market access for live goats,” the USDA spokesperson said.

Sources told The STAR that the temporary import ban has also affected the importation of goats under a dairy improvement project that is funded through US Public Law 480.

Under MO 26, live goat shipments from the US that are already in transit or loaded prior to the official communication of the import ban shall be allowed entry to the Philippines subject to quarantine rules and testing requirements.

A notice has been posted on the USDA-APHIS website indicating that the Philippines, as of June 26, temporarily imposed an import ban on live goats from the US.

Goats and sheep that are exported to Philippines must come from an area that does not have a disease outbreak, including Q fever, for the past six months, based on the guidelines posted on the USDA-APHIS website.

The animals must also test negative for any diseases 30 days prior to their export to the Philippines, according to the guidelines.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/07/02/2366996/usda-goats-exported-philippines-free-diseases>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# More Kadiwa stores to sell P29/kilo rice

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

July 2, 2024 | 12:00am



People line up at the Kadiwa center in the Department of Agriculture office in Quezon City yesterday to buy rice at P29 per kilo.

Michael Varcas.

MANILA, Philippines — Rice at P29 per kilo will be available at more Kadiwa centers beginning this Friday with the official rollout of the “Bigas 29” program of the Department of Agriculture, according to a ranking DA official.

“We will announce on Thursday the improvement and evolution of this ‘Bigas 29.’ On Friday, we will visit select Kadiwa centers for this project,” DA Assistant Secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa said at a press conference yesterday.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. has announced that the National Food Authority Council, which he chairs, has approved the recommendation to sell aging but good NFA rice stocks at P29 per kilo through Kadiwa stores.

De Mesa, however, clarified that the P29-per-kilo rice sold at Kadiwa stores will not only come from the NFA inventory.

“The P29 will be for vulnerable sectors. We will announce on Thursday the program for the general public,” De Mesa added.

By vulnerable sectors, he meant persons with disabilities, solo parents, senior citizens and indigenous peoples, who collectively comprise 6.9 million households.

The agriculture official noted that the P29 per kilo rice was initially available in three Kadiwa outlets.

“There will be improvement from the present, but I cannot disclose yet the additional number of Kadiwa (stores),” he said.

He added that the P29 per kilo rice would be available not only in Metro Manila, but also in other areas nationwide.

Aside from rice, other agricultural products will be available at Kadiwa centers, according to De Mesa.

“It will include agri fisheries, more improved Kadiwa,” he said after a majority of the Kadiwa centers became inactive for more than a year.

Tiu Laurel has said that each beneficiary household of the P29 per kilo rice is entitled to purchase 10 kilos per month, requiring rice supply of 69,000 metric tons every month.

The implementation of the P29 per kilo rice will cost the government between P1.39 billion and P1.53 billion per month, according to the agriculture chief.

He said that to secure rice supply for the initiative, the DA plans to import 363,697 metric tons of rice to augment national buffer stocks, while the NFA will procure 559,535 metric tons of palay from local farmers.

He added that securing rice buffer stocks to cover 19 days of national consumption would cost at least P28.39 billion.

## **TRO vs EO 62**

Meanwhile, De Mesa warned the public that a prolonged temporary restraining order (TRO) against Executive Order 62 on reduced tariff on imported rice could affect the country’s overall stock of the staple after farmers’ groups said they are bent on filing a petition for an injunction against the 15-percent tariff before the Supreme Court (SC).

“The worry of Secretary (Tiu Laurel Jr.) is that if there will be TRO, importers will not import. There will be delays (in the arrivals of imported rice). We will have problems in the stocks if this TRO will continue,” he said at the same press conference.

Farmers' groups vowed to ask the SC to stop the implementation of the EO that allows a 15-percent tariff on imported rice, down from the current 35 percent, until 2028.

“Imported rice will not arrive as scheduled. We don't know until when the TRO will be implemented, so we will have problems with the overall stock,” De Mesa said.

He added that the DA is preparing for any eventuality to prevent a possible shortage of the grains.

“We still have local stocks and the level of importation is high. As of the first week of June, we have 2.2 million metric tons of (imported rice),” he said.

Rice importers will have reservations in importing rice if the lower tariff will not be implemented, according to the DA official.

“The importers will have second thoughts if they don't know if the tariff will go down to 15 percent or will remain at 35 percent,” he said.

De Mesa also noted that the retail price of rice remains stable between P48 and P52 per kilo for regular and well-milled rice, based on the DA's monitoring.

Local well-milled rice is sold for as high as P55 per kilo; local premium rice, P58 per kilo; local special rice, P65 per kilo; imported regular milled rice, P51 per kilo; imported well-milled rice, P55 per kilo; imported premium rice, P62 per kilo and imported special rice, P65 per kilo.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/07/02/2367036/more-kadiwa-stores-sell-p29kilo-rice>



**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# P35 minimum wage hike in Metro OK'd

[Mayen Jaymalin](#) - The Philippine Star

July 2, 2024 | 12:00am



Workers are seen performing their duties at a constructi site in Taguig on February 7, 2024.

STAR / Ernie Penaredondo

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MANILA, Philippines — The Regional Tripartite Wages and Productivity Board has approved an increase of P35 in the daily minimum wage of workers in the National Capital Region (NCR).

The National Wages and Productivity Commission (NWPC) released the order yesterday, increasing the minimum wage to P645 for non-agriculture workers, from P610.

The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) said the new wage rate would take effect on June 17, or 15 days from its publication in a newspaper of general circulation.

The last minimum wage increase in Metro Manila was implemented on July 16, 2023 at P610 for the non-agricultural sector and P573 for the agriculture sector.

According to DOLE, up to 988,243 minimum wage earners in the NCR will directly benefit from the wage order.

“About 1.7 million workers earning above the minimum pay may also benefit due to adjustments arising from the correction of wage distortion,” the DOLE said.

The labor department said the wage hike translates to an increase of at least 5.7 percent from the current daily minimum wage in Metro Manila.

It is equivalent to a five percent increase in wage-related benefits covering the 13th month pay, service incentive leave as well as social security benefits such as SSS, PhilHealth and Pag-IBIG.

The Employers Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP) said it would comply with the approved daily minimum wage for NCR workers.

“We will ask our members to implement the wage increase,” ECOP president Sergio Ortiz Luis Jr. said.

## **Insult for workers**

Gabriela party-list Rep. Arlene Brosas described the P35 wage adjustment as “insulting.”

Brosas said the wage hike is a “mere pittance that fails to address the dire economic situation of Filipino workers and their families.”

“This is an insult to Filipino workers. It’s different from the P25 wage hike implemented in 1989, and lower than the P40 hike granted last year. How can the government expect Metro Manila workers to survive on P645 per day when the family living wage stands at P1,200 and prices continue to soar?” she said.

Brosas said the new minimum wage “falls short of what Filipino families need to live with dignity.”

She pushed for the passage of House Bill 7568, which seeks an across-the-board wage adjustment of P750.

Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas secretary general Jerome Adonis lamented that the wage hike is P5 lower than last year’s increase.

The labor group also criticized Marcos’ move to increase salaries through the regional wage boards instead of urging the House of Representatives to legislate a nationwide salary increase.

Adonis urged workers to hold protests during the President’s State of the Nation Address (SONA) on July 22.

Renato Reyes, president of Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, said the announcement of the daily minimum wage increase is meant to promote Marcos’ administration to the public.

“Pampapogi lang sa SONA ni Marcos ang kakarampot na wage hike,” Reyes said.

He said P645 is still not enough to keep up with the soaring prices of basic goods. – **Sheila Crisostomo, Emmanuel Tupas, Louella Desiderio**

<https://www.philstar.com/nation/2024/07/02/2367151/p35-minimum-wage-hike-metro-okd>



**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Agriculture group wants government to impose safeguard duties on rice

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

July 2, 2024 | 12:00am



Photos show workers unloading sacks of rice from a truck along Dagupan St. in Manila on February 7, 2024.

STAR / Ernie Penaredondo

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. (PCAFI) has urged President Marcos to impose special safeguards on rice imports to protect local farmers from the ill effects of potential import surges following the reduction of tariffs to 15 percent.

In an open letter to Marcos, PCAFI said the implementation of the special rice safeguard as provided under the rice tariffication law (RTL) would reassure the local rice sector of adequate protection in times of import surges.

“This means determining the volume or price triggers, as the case may be, as soon as possible,” PCAFI president Danilo Fausto said in the letter released to the media yesterday.

“The last administration, ignoring the said mandatory provision, did not even bother to compute for either one,” Fausto added.

Under Section 10 of the RTL, the government must impose a special safeguard duty (SSG) on rice imports to protect local industry from sudden or extreme price fluctuations.

The implementation of the SSG requires the determination of a trigger volume or a trigger price. The government can impose additional duties on imports whose value falls below a trigger price or when the volume of imports hits the established threshold.

Under Republic Act 8800 or the Safeguard Measures Act, the agriculture secretary can impose motu proprio the SSG on rice imports once the conditions set forth in the laws are satisfied.

PCAFI also proposed that the government mobilize more financial resources to the agriculture sector through a program of enhanced guarantees for credit and insurance for farmers and millers.

The national government should also engage local governments directly procure from their respective farmers and cooperatives especially during times of surplus or market failure.

The group recommended that the financial and storage capacity of the National Food Authority be expanded to accommodate more local palay production.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/07/02/2367017/agriculture-group-wants-government-impose-safeguard-duties-rice>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Wage hike of P35 for Metro Manila private sector workers approved – DOLE

By: [Zacarian Sarao](#) - Reporter / [@zacariansINQ](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 04:22 PM July 01, 2024



INQUIRER.net FILES

MANILA, Philippines — A P35 daily wage hike was approved for private sector workers in Metro Manila by the Regional Tripartite Wages and Productivity Board (RTWPB).

**The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) said the RTWPB’s order will take effect 15 days from its publication or on July 17.**

The increase will bring the the daily minimum wage in the region from P610 to P645 for the non-agriculture sector; and from P573 to P608 for the agriculture sector, service, and retail establishments employing 15 or fewer workers, and manufacturing establishments regularly employing less than 10 workers.

According to the DOLE, the new pay rates, which translate to roughly a 5.7 percent increase from the prevailing daily minimum salary rates in the region, “remain above the latest regional poverty threshold for a family of five.”

It added that the wage hike results in a comparable 5 percent increase in wage-related benefits covering 13th-month pay, service incentive leave (SIL), and social security benefits such as SSS, PhilHealth, and Pag-IBIG.

“The wage order is expected to directly benefit around 988,243 minimum wage earners in NCR (National Capital Region),” the DOLE said.

“About 1.7 million full-time wage and salary workers earning above the minimum wage may also indirectly benefit as a result of upward adjustments at the enterprise level arising from the correction of wage distortion,” it added.



Meanwhile, under the National Wages and Productivity Commission Omnibus Rules on Minimum Wage Determination, retail or service establishments with less than 10 workers and enterprises affected by natural calamities or human-induced disasters may apply to get exempted from the RTWPB wage hike order.

Barangay Micro Business Enterprises, on the other hand, are not covered by the minimum wage law pursuant to Republic Act No. 9178.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1956779/wage-hike-of-p35-for-metro-manila-private-sector-workers-approved-dole>



**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Central Luzon fishers, farmers hold pre-Sona protest

By: [Joanna Rose Aglibot](#), [Russel Loreto](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 05:20 AM July 02, 2024



WARMUP FOR SONA Farmers and agricultural workers led by militant organizations Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas and Bagong Alyansang Makabayan march on Bustillos Street on their way to Mendiola to protest what they called the worsening economic crisis in the country. —Grig C. Montegrande

SUBIC, ZAMBALES, Philippines — At least 500 fisherfolk and farmers from Central Luzon joined a protest in Manila on Monday to mark the third year in office of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and ahead of his yearly State of the Nation Address (Sona).

According to Pamalakaya national chair Fernando Hicap, fisherfolk and farmers from Zambales, Pampanga, and Tarlac, were among those who marched to Mendiola along with other peasants and farmers organizations from Southern Luzon provinces as well as workers, urban poor, youth and students.

In a joint statement, Pamalakaya and the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) said that they would make the current regime accountable for the worsening economic crisis, particularly the soaring prices of rice and other basic commodities.

“The rural sectors have more than a hundred reasons to protest against the policies and programs of Marcos who did nothing significant to genuinely alleviate the plight of poor farmers and fisherfolk,” they added.

### **Poverty incidence rates**

The rural-based activist groups cited the latest statistics showing the highest poverty incidence rates among fisherfolk and farmers at 30.6 percent and 30 percent, respectively.

“During the two years of Marcos’ tenure, fishermen and farmers did not feel any significant progress. We remain the poorest sector despite our country being an archipelago and agricultural,” Hicap said.

On the other hand, the KMP called the “Masaganang Bagong Pilipinas” program of the Marcos administration as an “empty rhetoric that does not transform into concrete actions.”

“There is no ‘Masaganang Bagong Pilipinas’ (prosperous new Philippines) in an administration that neglects food producers. The agricultural sector collapsed mainly due to the policy of easing imports,” it said.

According to the group, over 1.2 million jobs in the agriculture sector, including in rice production, were lost due to the importation policy.

The Pamalakaya also slammed the planned importation of 25,000 metric tons of galunggong and other pelagic fishes starting in October.

The KMP and allied organizations under the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan led the demonstrations near Mendiola and in other parts of the country.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1956855/central-luzon-fishers-farmers-hold-pre-sona-protest>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Immediate cut in rice prices unlikely, says BMI

By: [Jordeene B. Lagare](#) - @inquirerdotnet

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 02:01 AM July 02, 2024



Rice vendor Eddie Pascual, 58, wait for his usual clients at his rice stall in Marikina Public Market on Monday, June 10, 2024. The NEDA board has agreed to cut tariff on rice to 15 percent from 35 percent to help bring down the price of rice to P29 a kilo. Pascual expressed his reservation that the move will lower the price of rice per kilo. INQUIRER / GRIG C. MONTEGRANDE

Filipino consumers will not immediately feel the impact of the government's move to slash the tariff on imported rice to 15 percent from 35 percent, even if the volume will increase, according to BMI.

The Fitch Group unit said: "the reduction will not have a noticeable impact on domestic prices" as it will take time for the cheaper rice to circulate in the country.

BMI also pointed out that international rice prices are still elevated due to factors such as India's rice export ban that have tightened the global rice market.

The research firm said the surge in the demand for imported rice might increase the pressure for global prices to go up.

It cited data from the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization that showed that export quotations for Vietnam's 25 percent and 5 percent broken rice hit \$543 per ton and \$568 per ton, respectively, in May this year, up by 18.6 percent and 17.1 percent, respectively, from a year ago.

BMI also mentioned the FAO's All Rice Price Index, which reached 137.3 points, up by 7.4 percent from 127.8 points recorded last year. **INQ**

<https://business.inquirer.net/466587/immediate-cut-in-rice-prices-unlikely-says-bmi>



**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Right path to food security

By: [Cielito F. Habito](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 04:30 AM July 02, 2024

What critical policy reforms must government pursue to achieve food security in the country?” was the question posed in a recent forum on food security. With so many opinions and recommendations flying about, I’m worried that we are hearing muddled and conflicting pronouncements from government that will not lead us anywhere closer to the food security everyone is talking about when what it means may not even be clear to most. We should thus clarify definitions at the outset.

Perhaps a good way to start is to define food insecurity, which we have grappled with for decades. It’s best seen in the high incidence of hunger, which the Social Weather Stations reports to have averaged 15.6 percent in the past 20 years, and peaked at 30.7 percent (nearly one in every three Filipinos) in September 2020, at the pandemic’s peak. It since moved down and bottomed out last year in March and September at 9.8 percent. But disturbingly, it has been rising again, to 12.6 percent in December, and on to 14.2 in March. This is the highest in three years since hitting 16.8 percent in May 2021 and is clearly linked to high food prices. Indeed, food inflation also speeded up since the year started with 3.5 percent, speeding up to 4.6, 5.6, and 6.0 percent in the following months. Hunger traces to the difficulty of access to food due mainly to high prices. In turn, our much higher food prices vs our neighbors reflect domestic supply shortfalls and high import tariffs that magnify already elevated world food prices.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) formally defines food security as “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” Keywords are physical and economic access, meaning food is both available and affordable. FAO defines availability to mean that supplies of food produced domestically or imported meet the population’s needs; affordability means prices are within reach with people’s incomes. It’s the latter that many ardent advocates for food self-sufficiency miss when they argue for as much domestic

production as possible, even if it means producing it at high cost under most unsuitable conditions.

As I've written before, it's not just production but productivity that counts. We must help farmers through lower costs, not higher prices, and produce food, especially our staple rice, at a cost that permits matching import prices. Many actually can. Failing this means penalizing all consumers in favor of high-cost farmers that they far outnumber, and who must be targeted with help without the collateral damage of high prices for all—including outright cash assistance if need be. In the end, the greatest good for the greatest number must be upheld in policy and in practice. It also allocates our resources to their best use to maximize the nation's wealth for the widest benefit. Our farms and farmers must be helped to match their foreign counterparts' costs with public goods like irrigation, farm-to-market roads, mechanization, postharvest facilities including cold storage systems, and efficient logistics to lower the cost of moving commodities from farms to end-users. Imports need not be feared or blocked if our producers can stand up to them.

Economists have long held this to be the goal of agricultural policy, hence opposing trade controls in favor of more open trade with calibrated protection (like using variable tariffs). It's not because they love imports, but because they want the discipline of the market to push government to help the farmers in the most meaningful and sustainable way that will truly uplift their lives. Trade critics who brand economists as “import lovers” and “farmer haters”—with Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan, son of a tenant farmer, as pet punching bag—are being most cruel and unfair. I know he only has the greatest good for the greatest number in mind, which he is sworn to uphold in his job. I once held the same job and solemn responsibility (my grandfather was a rice farmer, too), and still get unfairly bashed as well.

So what policy reforms do we need, to finally gain food security? Topmost is a policy of farm consolidation, ideally through cooperatives that outsource expert management. But it's also time to rethink land ownership ceilings that keep our farming sector fragmented and costly, and our farmers poor. These ceilings must be eased for agribusiness investors to make investment in food attractive, rather than

risky and repulsive the way it became after agrarian reform forced commercial-scale farms to split up. We can quickly reinvigorate agriculture with this one policy reform.

But the bigger part of the need is not policy, but governance reform. On this, I have already written much and will not repeat myself here.

cielito.habito@gmail.com

<https://opinion.inquirer.net/174866/right-path-to-food-security>

**BUSINESS WORLD:**

# PHL tariff cuts could pressure global rice supply, prices — BMI

July 1, 2024 | 8:30 pm



REUTERS

THE REDUCTION in Philippine rice import tariffs could have a knock-on effect on global rice prices by inducing its major suppliers Vietnam and Thailand to commit greater volumes to the world's largest rice importer, thereby causing overall global supply to tighten, Fitch Solutions unit BMI said.

“We believe that reduced rice import duties in the Philippines will see import volumes increase, to the probable benefit of traders in Vietnam, the largest exporter of rice to the Philippines, and to a lesser extent Thailand,” BMI said in a report.

“Which, in turn, will — all other things being equal — stimulate upward price pressures in the international rice market,” it added.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. last month signed Executive Order (EO) No. 62, which slashed tariffs on rice imports to 15% from 35% previously, until 2028. This is part of a reduced tariff regime for other agricultural products such as pork and corn, intended as inflation-containment measures.

The EO calls for a review of the tariff schedule every four months.

“We note, however, that international rice prices remain elevated and that — with India’s rice export restrictions still in place and the negative impact of the recent El Niño event on rice production in Southeast Asia via below-average rainfall in mind — the international rice market remains tight, which could, therefore, see an increase in Philippine import demand stimulate upward international price pressures,” BMI said.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) expects Philippine rice imports to hit 4.7 million metric tons (MMT), upgrading its earlier forecast of 4.2 MMT.

As of June 6, the Philippines imported 2.17 MMT of rice. Vietnam accounted for almost three-fourths of overall shipments.

The Philippines imports about 20% of its rice requirement annually.

BMI sees Philippine rice prices easing eventually after the tariff cut but this will not have any impact in the immediate term.

“In the near term, we expect that the reduction in rice import tariffs could see domestic rice price pressures in the Philippines ease — notwithstanding the widening in the Philippine domestic rice production deficit between 2023/24 and 2024/25 that the USDA forecasts.”

“In the immediate term, however, the reduction will not have a noticeable impact on domestic prices due to the feedthrough time lag.”

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said the average retail price of domestically grown well-milled rice averaged P48-55 per kilogram as of June 29, up from P39-46 a year earlier.

Regular milled rice cost P45-52 from P35-42 per kilogram a year earlier.

The tariff cut is expected to cut rice prices by P6 to P7, the DA has said.

The National Economic and Development Authority has indicated its readiness to adjust tariffs if prices decline. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/07/01/605495/phl-tariff-cuts-could-pressure-global-rice-supply-prices-bmi/>



**BUSINESS WORLD:**

# Gov't urged to prepare for expected surge in rice imports

July 2, 2024 | 12:31 am



Rice is sold at a Kadiwa Store inside the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) in Malate, Manila, May 30, 2024.

— PHILIPPINE STAR/EDD GUMBAN

THE MARCOS ADMINISTRATION should ensure that the lower tariffs on imported rice will not result in a further decline in rice self-sufficiency, the Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food, Inc. (PCAFI) said.

In a letter to President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., PCAFI President Danilo V. Fausto aired the group's "grave concerns" over the recent issuance of Executive Order No. 62 which slashed tariffs on rice to 15% until 2028.

"The challenge to EO 62 is how to implement it without a further decline in self-sufficiency in this age of climate change and geopolitical disruptions," he said.

Mr. Fausto said the government should reassure the rice sector by preparing for a surge in rice imports through the Special Rice Safeguard under Republic Act (RA) No. 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).

"This means determining the volume or price triggers, as the case may be, as soon possible. The last administration, ignoring the said mandatory provision, did not even bother to compute for either one," he said.

Mr. Fausto noted the RTL was implemented by the previous administration to benefit traders, to the detriment of consumers and rice farmers. He also claimed the law decreased the country's self-sufficiency to 75%-80% from 90%-95%.

Under the law, a special safeguard duty on rice "shall be imposed" in order to protect the Philippine rice industry from sudden or extreme price fluctuations.

This is in accordance with RA 8800, or the Safeguard Measures Act, as well as its implementing rules and regulations, the law stated.

Mr. Fausto said that EO 62 has generated "controversy" due to the non-conduct of "genuine and timely consultations." He said the National Economic and Development Authority's (NEDA) insistence that the hearings of the Tariff Commission last year constitute compliance with due process "damages its credibility as a crisis manager."

He said that the system is flawed as NEDA, which proposed the tariff cuts, has jurisdiction over the designated fact-finding body, the Tariff Commission.

"The sectors are left with no choice but to file a case on the issue of due process. By NEDA's logic, it can go back to hearings conducted 10 or 20 years ago and insist that the proceedings therein would constitute compliance as long as they involved the same sector," he said.

"This is dangerous. There will be no more new hearings," he added.

Raul Q. Montemayor, national manager of the Federation of Free Farmers, told *BusinessWorld* in a Viber message that the Special Rice Safeguard is "very weak."

"The additional tariff cannot exceed 1/3 of the applied tariff. In the case of rice, the maximum additional tariff we can apply is 5%, and it can be applied only from the time we breach the trigger up to the end of the year, even if the import surge spills over to the next year," Mr. Montemayor said.

"What will be more effective are the general safeguards, where there are no limitations on the additional tariff that can be imposed, and which can be put in place from 200 days up to 2 years. But this needs real-time data to determine if there is a surge and that the surge is hurting farmers," he added.

Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. Chief Economist Michael L. Ricafort said that lower rice import tariffs would mean a 20% discount on imported rice.

"Rice accounts for nearly 9% of the consumer price index (CPI) basket, so imported rice accounts for nearly 1.8% of the CPI basket," said Mr. Ricafort in a Viber message.

"Thus, lower imported rice tariffs and prices would help reduce headline inflation by about 0.36, on a standalone basis, but more if locally produced rice prices go down as a result of lower prices and tariffs on imported rice," he added.

"Thus, average inflation towards 3% becoming more feasible, going forward."

Asked about the imposition of safeguard duties, Mr. Ricafort said that it would "effectively increase the price of imported rice and would help support farmgate palay prices and the incomes of palay farmers."

Meanwhile, Mr. Fausto also recommended the allocation of more financial resources to help the agricultural sector through “enhanced guarantees for credit and insurance for farmers and millers.”

The government should also create programs to allow local government units to procure agricultural products directly from farmers and cooperatives during “times of surplus or market failure,” he said.

Mr. Fausto said the government should boost the National Food Authority’s (NFA) financial and storage capacity to buy more palay.

He also criticized the EO’s provision that allows the NEDA to review the tariffs on rice every four months.

“NEDA is a very ideological agency. It has a well-known bias against local producers, especially those in agriculture and fisheries,” he said. — **J.I.D.Tabile**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/top-stories/2024/07/02/605427/govt-urged-to-prepare-for-expected-surge-in-rice-imports/>



**REMATE:**

## **SINAG: Presyo ng bigas bakit ‘di pa bumababa?**

July 1, 2024 10:54



MANILA, Philippines- Kinuwestiyon ng farmers group na Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) nitong weekend kung bakit hindi pa bumababa ang presyo ng bigas sa kabila ng kautusan ng pamahalaan na pagbabago sa import duty rates.

Base kay SINAG President Rosendo So, makikita sa kanilang monitoring na ang presyo ng well-milled rice ay pumapalo sa P43 hanggang P44 kada kilo, habang ang regular milled rice ay nagkakahalaga ng P42 kada kilo.

“Ang tinataka natin, ‘yung retail price bakit hindi bumababa pa,” pahayag ni So, batay sa ulat nitong Linggo.

Ayon sa monitoring ng Department of Agriculture (DA), makikitang ang presyo ng bigas sa Metro Manila ay P47 hanggang P65 kada kilo para sa imported commercial rice, at mula P45 hanggang P65 kada kilo para sa local commercial rice noong Hunyo 27, 2024, depende sa variety.

Kasunod ito ng pagpapababa ni Pangulong Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr., sa ilalim ng Executive Order 62, ng tariff rates para sa bigas sa 15% hanggang 2028 mula sa nakaraang 35%.

“Every time na bumababa tayo ng taripa, ang gagawin lang ng exporting country is itataas nila ‘yung presyo nila doon,” ani So.

“Yung subsidy na dapat ay makolekta ng taripa papunta sa ating mga magsasaka eh ang mangyayari, kung itinaas nila ‘yung presyo sa exporting, advantageous doon sa mga magsasaka ng other countries,” patuloy niya.

Wala pang komento ang DA ukol dito. **RNT/SA**

<https://remate.ph/sinag-presyo-ng-bigas-bakit-di-pa-bumababa/>

**MANILA STANDARD**

# **CHR supports PBBM on food security program**



PCO Photo

By Rio N. Araja

**July 1, 2024, 11:40 pm**

The Commission on Human Rights (CHR) is supporting President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s directive to ensure food security and proper nutrition through a whole-of-government approach as part of the Philippine Development Plan to combat hunger and poverty.

“The Commission is one with the government in its initiative to combat hunger and malnutrition in the country. By prioritizing several policies that address these issues, we reflect our unwavering commitment to building a more equitable and healthy nation,” it said.

All government agencies and local government units are responsible for assisting with the implementation of the Enhanced Partnership Against Hunger and Poverty program that institutionalize efforts to alleviate hunger and promote food and nutrition security.

“Through programs like these, we are optimistic about creating a society that completely eradicates poverty, hunger, and malnutrition. Together, we aim to realize the aspiration that no Filipinos, especially children, will experience the debilitating effects of hunger and malnutrition,” the CHR said.

“We envision a future where every citizen has access to nutritious food and opportunities for a better quality of life. Let us work hand in hand to make this vision a reality,” it added.

<https://manilastandard.net/news/314466349/chr-supports-pbbm-on-food-security-program.html>

**MANILA STANDARD**

# Farmers ask gov't to review EO on tariffs



By Othel V. Campos

**July 1, 2024, 9:30 pm**

A group of farmers and agricultural stakeholders called on President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to revisit Executive Order (EO) 62 which modifies tariff rates amid concerns about its impact on Filipino rice farmers.

The Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. (PCAFI), in an open letter, underscored the lack of transparency in crafting the EO, particularly the supposed public consultations conducted by the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA).

EO 62, issued on June 29, 2024, ordered the modification of nomenclature and tariff rates on various products to ensure continues supply of goods and to protect the purchasing power of the Filipino people.



The group said the consultations were insufficient and failed to adequately address the potential negative consequences on the rice sector.

PCAFI urged the government to invoke safeguards against import surges, as mandated by the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).

This will involve setting clear guidelines for activating the special rice safeguard based on pre-determined volume or price triggers.

The open letter stressed the need for increased financial resources for agriculture.

PCAFI recommended programs that offer enhanced credit and insurance guarantees for farmers and rice millers.

The letter proposed collaboration with progressive local government units (LGUs) to directly procure rice from farmers and cooperatives, particularly during periods of surplus harvest or market downturns.

It also suggested a program that allows Filipinos with the financial means to directly sponsor individual farmers or cooperatives, supporting both production and marketing efforts.

The group expressed concern about the perceived National Economic Development Authority's bias against local producers and its historical focus on import liberalization over domestic support programs.

PCAFI cited the need to address the structural issues affecting Philippine agriculture and encouraged the DA to increase the financial and storage capacity of the National Food Authority (NFA) to procure more palay.

It also stressed the importance of investing in domestic production and modernization to reduce reliance on imported rice and create a more sustainable food security strategy.

<https://manilastandard.net/business/314466420/farmers-ask-govt-to-review-eo-on-tariffs.html>



# Confed rejects DA's sugar import plans

By Janine Alexis Miguel

July 1, 2024

THE Confederation of Sugarcane Producers' Associations (Confed) is opposing the Department of Agriculture's (DA) plan to import sugar, as the current inventory of the commodity can last without importation until the start of the next milling season.

Confed President Aurelio Gerardo Valderrama said they wrote a letter to Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr, expressing concern about the government's plan to import 200,000 metric tons of refined sugar in September.

Citing data from the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA), Valderrama said that the country still had an adequate inventory of both raw and refined sugar at 436,229 MT and 492,985 MT, respectively.

Estimates from the SRA show that the country's monthly sugar demand is between 180,000 MT and 240,000 MT.

"Current rates of withdrawal indicate that local inventory can last without importation until the start of the milling season later this year," Valderrama said in a statement over the weekend.

Last week, Tiu Laurel made the announcement to import refined sugar to fill a supply gap and prevent a surge in prices.

He added that the decision to import sugar was made because the DA expects local stocks to decline by August and September.

The group noted that the SRA had not made an announcement yet on the start of milling for the 2024-2025 crop year, and no crop estimates

have been made so far, with the new crop year being impacted by the El Niño phenomenon.

"Consistent with our frequently-stated position, we reiterate that any sugar importation plan should be data-based, calibrated, totally transparent and fair, done in consultation with industry stakeholders and therefore immune from speculation and manipulation," Valderrama said.

He also urged the SRA to begin consulting with the industry to discuss sugar policy for crop year 2024-2025.

Tiu Laurel, meanwhile, said the DA was scheduled to discuss the plan with the SRA on July 10 or 11. The meeting will determine if the importation plan will proceed.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/07/01/business/top-business/confed-rejects-das-sugar-import-plans/1954273>

# DA: Farmers must get better access to credit

By Janine Alexis Miguel

July 1, 2024

AGRICULTURE chief Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. is pushing for increased access by farmers to government-backed loans, emphasizing the need to support the agricultural sector more effectively.

Tiu Laurel cited the case of the Agricultural Credit Policy Council (ACPC), which has disbursed only P100 million out of its P600 million in available funds.

The agriculture chief added that a robust crop insurance coverage could help "mitigate risks for farmers" and create an environment where food producers can adopt new technologies and sustainable practices.

He added that Filipino farmers need supporting measures similar to what Vietnam is doing in providing subsidies, credit and crop insurance for its farmers.

In March, the Department of Agriculture permitted partner lenders to charge a 2-percent annual interest rate on a state-funded loan for small farmers and fisherfolk. This is on top of the 3.5-percent service fee on loans extended under the ACPC's Agri-Negosyo (ANYO) Loan program, totaling a 5.5-percent finance charge per annum.

A recent survey by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) showed that loans for agriculture and related services accounted for 18.1 percent of the total loans of the banking sector in 2022, or an increase from 17.6 percent in 2021.

Released in May, the 2022 Countryside Bank Survey report showed that the increase was mainly seen from the lending activities of rural and cooperative banks.

The central bank also attributed the growth in agricultural loans to the need to provide working capital, acquire farm equipment, undertake sustainable projects, digitalize farming activities, and promote agri-tourism activities. Lending to agriculture has been largely for the acquisition of seeds, fertilizers and farm inputs.

In line with this, Tiu Laurel underscored the significance of providing strong financial support to the farming sector to adopt new technologies and best practices. "Focus must be on comprehensive training in modern farming techniques instead of traditional methods," he added, referring to the latter as "bahay kubo technology."

Technology-based farms are seen to revolutionize Philippine agriculture and increase productivity and profitability while attracting a younger generation of Filipinos to farming and fishing, Tiu Laurel added.

"The big challenge we face is making farming profitable... The solution lies in embracing technology-based farming methods," he said.

The agriculture chief also expressed interest in utilizing large-scale greenhouse facilities, citing South Korea's use of the technology on 52,000 hectares of farmland. In contrast, the Philippines only has 500 hectares utilizing greenhouse farming technology.

"I am committed to personally investing in testing these greenhouse technologies before endorsing widespread adoption," Tiu Laurel said.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/07/01/business/da-farmers-must-get-better-access-to-credit/1954275>

# Lower rice tariff to benefit Vietnam

By Janine Alexis Miguel

July 2, 2024

REDUCED rice import duties in the Philippines will likely benefit traders of the staple in Vietnam and stimulate price pressures in the international market, a Fitch Group unit said.

BMI Country Risk & Industry Research said in a report that Executive Order (EO) 62, which cut the rice import tariff to 15 percent from 35 percent, would also cause an increase in the country's rice import volume.

"We believe that reduced rice import duties in the Philippines will see import volumes increase, to the probable benefit of traders in Vietnam, the largest exporter of rice to the Philippines," it said.

Citing data from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, the Fitch unit said that the average retail prices for regular- and well-milled rice in the Philippines stood at P51.03 per kilogram (kg) and P56.06 per kg, respectively, as of May this year. The said prices were higher by around 25 percent than last year's.

Data from the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Plant Industry showed that Vietnam delivered 1.68 million metric tons (MT) of rice to the Philippines from January to end-June. This represents a 73-percent share to the country's total rice imports of 2.28 million MT.

Thailand, meanwhile, ranked second with 348,171 MT of rice delivered or 15 percent of the total.

With regards to the production target, the DA said that it is aiming for the country to produce 20.4 million MT of "palay" (unmilled rice), equivalent to 13.7 million MT of rice this year.

In its latest monthly report, the USDA said that the Philippines will likely import 4.7 million (MT) of rice this year, retaining its position as the world's top rice importer.

The USDA's latest forecast is a 20-percent increase from the 3.9 million MT of rice imported in 2023.

BMI also said that while EO 62 could ease pressure on domestic prices of rice, its impact will not be noticeable in the short term.

For its part, the Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. (PCAFI) said that the challenge from EO 62 is how to implement it without causing a decline in the country's rice self-sufficiency.

PCAFI President Danilo Fausto also urged the government to determine when the volume of rice imports is too much by setting volume or price triggers.

The group also said that the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) is undermining its credibility as a crisis manager by claiming that the Tariff Commission's hearings in October last year and March on rice tariffs were compliant with due process requirements.

**"The sectors are left with no choice but to file a case on the issue of due process. By NEDA's logic, it can go back to hearings conducted 10 or 20 years ago, and insists that the proceedings therein would constitute compliance as long as it involved the same sector," said Fausto.**

**<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/07/02/business/top-business/lower-rice-tariff-to-benefit-vietnam/1954527>**



# Farmers benefit from tobacco excise tax

By Philippine News Agency

July 2, 2024

**LAOAG CITY** – Forty nine registered farmers associations in San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte received P16 million worth of farm machinery and equipment on Monday courtesy of the municipality's share of the tobacco excise tax.

"This is sourced from the local government unit's share of tobacco excise tax. All our farmers will benefit from it," Mayor Angel Miguel Hernando said in a media interview during the mass distribution at the town plaza.

The beneficiaries got hand tractors with trailers, water pumps, irrigation hoses, grass cutters, and mechanical table scales, among others.

Hernando said the agriculture assistance was based on requests of farmers during the consultation meetings of the municipality.

"These are replenishments from the previous machinery they received before to cushion the impact of climate change and help them with the high cost of agriculture input. Those that they received about five years ago may have depreciated so we continue to assist them to boost their production," he said.

For farmer Zaldy Rumbaoa of Barangay San Pablo, the most challenging part of growing tobacco and other high-value crops is access to water.

"We are so thankful that the local government is always there to support us in so many ways, from production to marketing of our products," he said in Ilokano.

Under Republic Act 7171 and RA 8240, tobacco-growing municipalities get a share of tobacco excise tax collections based on the volume of leaves produced by their local tobacco growers.

For 2022, San Nicolas received a P38 million share.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/07/02/regions/farmers-benefit-from-tobacco-excise-tax/1954511>

# Scientists wary of bird flu pandemic 'unfolding in slow motion'

By Reuters

July 2, 2024

CHICAGO/LONDON. – Scientists tracking the spread of bird flu are increasingly concerned that gaps in surveillance may keep them several steps behind a new pandemic, according to Reuters interviews with more than a dozen leading disease experts.

Many of them have been monitoring the new subtype of H5N1 avian flu in migratory birds since 2020. But the spread of the virus to 129 dairy herds in 12 US states signals a change that could bring it closer to becoming transmissible between humans. Infections also have been found in other mammals, from alpacas to house cats.

“It almost seems like a pandemic unfolding in slow motion,” said Scott Hensley, a professor of microbiology at the University of Pennsylvania. “Right now, the threat is pretty low... but that could change in a heartbeat.”

The earlier the warning of a jump to humans, the sooner global health officials can take steps to protect people by launching vaccine development, wide-scale testing and containment measures.

Federal surveillance of US dairy cows is currently limited to testing herds before they cross state lines. State testing efforts are inconsistent, while testing of people exposed to sick cattle is scant, government health officials and pandemic flu experts told Reuters.

“You need to know which are the positive farms, how many of the cows are positive, how well the virus spreads, how long these cows remain infectious, the exact transmission route,” said Dutch flu virologist Ron Fouchier of the Erasmus Medical Center in Rotterdam.

Dr. Jeanne Marrazzo, director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said surveillance for humans is “very, very limited.”

Marrazzo described the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s human flu surveillance network as “really a passive reporting, passive presentation mechanism.”

The US Department of Agriculture is more proactive in testing cows, but does not make public which farms are affected, she said.

Several experts said differing approaches from animal and human health agencies could hamper a quicker response.

“If you were designing the system from scratch, you would have one agency,” said Gigi Gronvall, a biosecurity expert at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security. “This is not the only example where we have environmental or animal problems that cause human problems.”

A USDA spokesperson said the agency is working “around the clock” with CDC and other partners in a “whole-of-government response,” adding that ongoing research shows “America’s food supply remains safe, sick cows generally recover after a few weeks, and the risk to human health remains low.”

The CDC, in a statement said, “USDA, and state and local health departments across the country have been preparing for the emergence of a novel influenza virus for nearly 2 decades and continually monitor for even the smallest changes in the virus.”

### ‘A note of caution’

Some pandemics, including COVID-19, arrive with little warning. In the last flu pandemic, caused by H1N1 in 2009, the virus and its predecessors had first spread among animals for several years, Hensley said, but more surveillance would have helped health authorities prepare.

Three people in the US have tested positive for H5N1 avian flu since late March after contact with cows, experiencing mild symptoms. One person in Mexico was infected with a separate H5 strain not previously seen in humans, and with no known exposure to animals.

Other cases were reported in India, China and Australia, caused by different strains.

The World Health Organization says H5N1’s risk to humans is low because there is no evidence of human transmission. Some tools are available if that changes, including limited amounts of existing H5N1 vaccine and antiviral medications like Tamiflu.

There are mechanisms to launch larger-scale production of tests, treatments and vaccines, if needed, said the UN agency’s head of flu, Wenqing Zhang.

Other experts said there is sufficient concern to start preparing for a potential spread in humans, although triggers for taking action differ depending on the role played in the response, said Richard Hatchett, chief executive of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI). His organization acted early on funding COVID vaccine development and is now in talks with research partners about H5N1.

CEPI aims to create a library of prototype vaccines for pathogens with pandemic potential.

This would help drugmakers initiate large-scale production and distribute shots where necessary within 100 days of an outbreak.

Some countries are taking steps to protect people against H5N1. The United States and Europe are securing doses of “pre-pandemic” flu vaccine that could be used for high-risk groups, including farm or lab workers. Finland is expected to become the first country to inoculate fur and poultry farm workers, as well as animal health response workers.

Expanding vaccine access is also complex, said the WHO's Zhang. Manufacturers of potential pandemic flu vaccines make seasonal flu shots and cannot produce both at once, she said.

Since most flu vaccines are made using virus grown in eggs, it could take up to six months to produce pandemic shots. The US is in talks with Moderna to use their faster mRNA technology for pandemic flu shots.

[https://malaya.com.ph/news\\_news/scientists-wary-of-bird-flu-pandemic-unfolding-in-slow-motion/](https://malaya.com.ph/news_news/scientists-wary-of-bird-flu-pandemic-unfolding-in-slow-motion/)

# **‘Tariff cuts won’t lead to cheaper rice soon’**

**Cai U. Ordinario**

**July 2, 2024**

**THE reduction in rice tariffs may not immediately lead to lower prices as international market quotations remain elevated, according to BMI, a Fitch Solutions company.**

**BMI also said the shortfall in rice production, forecasted by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), will contribute to the high cost of rice in the domestic market.**

**Citing data from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), BMI said the average retail prices for regular- and well-milled rice in the Philippines stood at P51.03 per kilogram and P56.06 per kilogram, respectively, both of which were around 25 percent higher than 12 months earlier.**

**“In the near term, we expect that the reduction in rice import tariffs could see domestic rice price pressures in the Philippines ease—notwithstanding the widening in the Philippine domestic rice production deficit between 2023/24 and 2024/25 that the USDA forecasts,” BMI said.**

**“In the immediate term, however, the reduction will not have a noticeable impact on domestic prices due to the feedthrough time lag,” it added.**

**The reduction in rice tariffs, however, will significantly benefit the country’s largest source of imported rice, Vietnam, particularly its rice traders.**

**Given the reduction in tariff, this could lead to larger rice import volumes from the Philippines leading to even higher rice prices in the international market.**

**The Philippines was considered the world’s second-largest rice importer in 2023. The country cornered 5 percent of the global import market in value terms.**



**“We note, however, that international rice prices remain elevated and that—with India’s rice export restrictions still in place and the negative impact of the recent**

**El Niño event on rice production in Southeast Asia via below-average rainfall in mind—the international rice market remains tight, which could, therefore, see an increase in Philippine import demand stimulate upward international price pressures,” BMI said.**

**Citing government data, BMI said total grain imports, including rice as well as corn, wheat, and other grains, in the first quarter of 2024 amounted to \$1.173 billion, equivalent to a 27.9-percent increase compared to the first quarter of 2023.**

**Of this amount, \$489 million or 41.7 percent was sourced in Vietnam at \$355 million and Thailand at \$134 million.**

**In May 2024, BMI noted that FAO’s All Rice Price Index (FARPI) came in at 137.3, equivalent to a 7.4 percent increase on its level of May 2023.**

**In August 2023, the FARPI increased 10 percent month on month due to India’s introduction of an export ban on basmati rice and a 20- percent export duty on parboiled rice and has since oscillated around 140.**

## **Interest rates**

**BMI said given recent developments and expectations that the impact of the lower rice tariffs will be delayed, it expects the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) to only cut interest rates starting in September.**

**The BSP is expected to cut rates by 50 basis points, lower than its initial forecast of 75 basis points.**

**This means the BSP’s next policy meeting in August will see the Monetary Board retaining rates and holding off until the US Federal Reserve begins its loosening cycle.**

**This is despite BSP Governor Eli M. Remolona Jr. hinting at the possibility of a rate cut in August. “In our view, such an early cut remains out of the question even if price pressures ease substantially,” BMI said.**

However, BMI said the largest barrier to the decision of the BSP to loosen monetary policy is currency stability.

The peso, BMI said, is among the “poorest performing currencies in the region,” second only to Japan.

“As such, the BSP will be extremely mindful of a pre-emptive return to monetary loosening, for fear of exacerbating weakness in the already weak peso,” BMI said.

“This feeds into our expectations for the BSP to embark on its first cut only in October at the earliest. The monetary cycles of both the Philippines and the Fed tend to track each other closely,” it added.

### Moody’s Analytics

Moody’s Analytics, meanwhile, shares this view. “The Philippine central bank left its policy rate at 6.5 percent. Like many peers in the region, it won’t be looking to cut until the US Federal Reserve makes the first move,” Moody’s Analytics said.

Earlier, the reduction in rice tariffs boosted the optimism of monetary officials that a rate cut could happen in August, according to the BSP.

On Thursday, Remolona said the Monetary Board decided to maintain the BSP’s Target Reverse Repurchase (RRP) rate at 6.5 percent. The interest rates on the overnight deposit and lending facilities will remain 6 percent and 7 percent, respectively.

Remolona said the Monetary Board is now “less hawkish” or “more dovish” than before, as inflation is expected to slow to the midpoint of the 2 to 4 percent target range. (See: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/06/28/lower-rice-tariff-fuels-bsp-interest-rate-cut-optimism/>).

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/07/02/tariff-cuts-wont-lead-to-cheaper-rice-soon/>

# **Nalugi sa resort, kumita sa pagtanim...Eostre Integrated Farm**

**ANG MAGSASAKANG REPORTER - Mer Layson**

July 2, 2024 | 12:00am

**Ngayong araw na ito ay ibabahagi ko sa inyo ang magandang journey ng isang lettuce farmer sa Nagcarlan, Laguna na nalugi sa kanyang resort pero kumita sa pag-tanim.**

**Ang aking tinutukoy ay si Joseph Lee Corpuz, owner ng Eostre Integrated Farm ng 5475 Calauan Nagcarlan Road, Brgy. Manaca, Nagcarlan Laguna.**

**Ayon kay Joseph, isang buwan bago magkaroon ng pandemya ng COVID-19 ay kabubukas lamang ng kanilang resort.**

**Nagkaroon ng lockdown sa iba't ibang panig ng bansa partikular sa Laguna kaya walang pumupunta, namamasyal at nagbabakasyon sa kanilang resort hanggang malugi.**

**Dahil sa lockdown at wala siyang pinagkakaabalaan, kaya naisipan niyang mag-tanim sa mga bote na kanyang isinabit sa kanilang bakod.**

**Ayon kay Joseph, noong una ang ginagawa niyang pagtanim ay para magkaroon sila ng makakain ng kanyang pamilya at libangan na rin niya dahil wala siyang gina-gawa.**

**Hanggang tangkilikin ng kanyang mga kabarangay ang kanyang mga ani at unti-unti ay kumita siya sa pagtanim.**

**Mula sa pagtanim sa mga bote ay nagtanim na rin siya sa mga styrobox, nagkaroon ng green house at maging NFT ang kanyang method of farming.**

**“Unti-unting lumaki at lumawak ang aking taniman dahil sa loob lamang ng 40-days ay nakakapag-harvest na ako,” ani Joseph.**

**Bukod sa NFT Hydroponics method of Farming ng iba't ibang variety ng lettuce ay nagtanim din sa lupa si Joseph na kung tawagin ay conventional farming.**

**Sa ngayon, maging sa silong, sa loob ng kubo at loob ng bahay ay may tanim na rin si Joseph.**

**“Outdoor at indoor plant ay nagtanim na rin ako ngayon at patuloy pa akong nag-aaral at nananaliksik ng mga makabagong pamamaraan ng pagtanim,” sabi ni Jo-seph.**

**Maganda ang location ng farm ni Joseph dahil nasa gilid sila ng highway at nakikita ng mga matorista ang kanyang magagandang tanim.**

**Bukod sa paghahalaman ay nag-aa-laga rin ng rabbit si Joseph at ang manure ng kanyang mga alaga ang siyang ginagamit niya bilang natural o organic na pataba sa kanyang mga tanim na talong, okra at iba pa.**

**Ang dating swimming pool ay pinaplano na rin ni Joseph na i-convert sa Aquaponics method of farming o isda sa ilalim at halaman sa ibabaw.**

**Nagbebenta na rin ng mga punla, seedlings at hydroponics farm material at nag-a-semble ng green house si Joseph kung saan ay dinarayo na siya ng mga kostumer.**

**Nagka-conduct rin ng libreng seminar si Joseph sa mga gustong matuto ng pag-tatanim sa pamamagitan ng hydroponics method of farming.**

**Sa mga gustong bumili ng mga produkto ni Joseph at nais matuto ng pagtatanim ay i-text lamang ninyo siya sa 09183536745.**

**Sabahin lamang po ninyo na nabasa ninyo sa kolum ng Magsasakang Reporter sa Pilipino Star Ngayon (PSN) ang kanyang magandang journey sa pagtatanim.**

**Sa Linggo July 7, 2024 ay mapapanood ninyo ang interview kay Joseph at tour sa kanyang farm sa Masaganang Buhay TV Show ng Magsasakang Reporter.**

**Samantala, para sa iba pang tips at sikreto sa pagtatanim ng iba't ibang uri ng halaman sa pamamagitan ng organikong pamamaraan ay maaari po kayong manood at makinig ng aking TV program na Masaganang Buhay tuwing Linggo, alas-7:00 hanggang alas-8:00 ng umaga sa OnePH Cignal TV, Channel 1 ng TV-5. Mapapanood din sa RPTV, Facebook at Youtube.**

**Maaari rin kayong manood at mag-subscribe at mag-follow sa aking Youtube Channel na ANG MAGSASAKANG REPORTER at Facebook profile na Mer Layson at Facebook page na Ang Magsasakang Reporter, TV host Vlogger, Tiktok na Magsasakang Reporter para sa iba pang kaalaman at impormasyon sa pagtatanim ng iba't ibang uri ng halaman sa pamamagitan ng organikong pamamaraan.**

**Tuwing araw ng Martes ay regular ninyong mababasa ang aking kolum dito sa Pilipino Star Ngayon (PSN) ng Star Media Group.**

**Sa mga tanong at komento ay maaari ninyo akong i-text, huwag po tawag, sa 09178675197.**

**STAY SAFE, HAPPY FARMING, GOD BLESS US ALL.**

**<https://www.philstar.com/pilipino-star-ngayon/opinyon/2024/07/02/2367010/nalugi-sa-resort-kumita-sa-pagtatanimeostre-integrated-farm>**