

## CLIPPINGS FOR TODAY JUNE 30, 2024

### **A. MANILA BULLETIN:**

**DA czar: Tech-driven farming to attract younger generation**

### **B. PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

**Fostering financial freedom for Filipino farmers**

**PH a living lab in the quest to breed 'super corals'**

### **C. BUSINESS WORLD:**

**'No need' to import sugar due to ample stocks**

**Rice imports hit 2.28 MMT as of late June**

### **D. ABANTE:**

**3 probinsya binalot ng red tide**

### **E. PEOPLE'S JOURNAL:**

**IBP stands with Filipino fishermen**

### **F. MANILA STANDARD:**

**Eruption victims to receive cash aid amid increased volcanic activity in Kanlaon**

**Laguna farm produces world-class products**

### **G. THE MANILA TIMES:**

**Planters back plan to import sugar**

### **H. BUSINESS MIRROR:**

**Philippine coral reefs under siege**

**Fish oral vaccine developed vs tilapia bacterial infection**

**Robots are stepping into one of Asia's dirtiest farm jobs**

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# DA czar: Tech-driven farming to attract younger generation

BY JEL SANTOS

Jun 30, 2024 04:16 PM



DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. (JEL SANTOS/MANILA BULLETIN)

Embracing technological advancements is essential to attract the younger generation to farming and to address the sector's declining productivity and profitability, Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco “Kiko” Tiu Laurel Jr. said.

In a forum organized by the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI), Laurel noted that although agriculture employs nearly one-fifth of the Filipino workforce, it contributes less than 10 percent to the country's Gross Domestic Product.

With the average age of Filipino farmers now at 56 years old, Laurel highlighted the urgent need for modernization to counteract the aging farming population.

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

The DA chief cited successful local innovations in Hermosa and Dinalupihan, Bataan, where technologies such as small water impounding systems, fertigation techniques, and drip irrigation have significantly improved crop production.

These advancements, he said, have reduced fertilizer use by up to 70 percent and water consumption by 30 percent, optimizing resource efficiency and lowering costs.

Looking to the future, Laurel expressed interest in scaling up agricultural practices with large-scale greenhouse facilities, inspired by South Korea's extensive use of such technology.

He committed to personally investing in testing these greenhouse technologies before endorsing widespread adoption.

Drawing inspiration from Vietnam's agricultural policies, which include subsidies and guaranteed earnings for farmers, Laurel stressed the need for similar support measures in the Philippines.

As such, the DA chief called for a paradigm shift in agricultural education to focus on modern farming techniques, equipping landowners and tenants with the knowledge needed to maximize productivity and income.

As to financial support, Laurel advocated for increased access to government-backed loans, noting that the Agricultural Credit Policy Council has disbursed only P100 million out of P600 million available funds. He also underscored the importance of robust crop insurance coverage to mitigate risks for farmers and foster confidence in adopting new technologies.

The four-year plan crafted by Laurel's team seeks to increase agri-fishery production through increased mechanization, improved post-harvest systems and infrastructures, efficient logistics, expanded market access, digitalization, and strengthened partnerships with farmers, fisherfolk, and the private sector.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/6/30/da-czar-tech-driven-farming-to-attract-younger-generation>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Fostering financial freedom for Filipino farmers

By: [Marie Josephine M. Ocampo](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 08:51 PM June 30, 2024

It cannot be denied that the agriculture sector is the country's lifeblood. Farmers who till the land and grow the food we put on our tables significantly contribute to our economic growth.

According to the Department of Budget and Management's (DBM) latest data, the sector accounted for 9.1 percent of the Philippines' gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023. Despite their importance, however, Filipino farmers face challenges in securing financing to help them thrive.

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas' (BSP) 2021 Financial Inclusion Survey states that farmers or workers in the agriculture sector had the highest financial exclusion level, with 73 percent having no accounts.

The survey found that the top reasons for not owning a bank account were the lack of enough money and documentary requirements for opening an account.

## **Partnerships for financial inclusion**

How do we promote financial inclusion among our farmers? One way to achieve this is to make financing options for the agriculture sector accessible. This entails creating financial products and services that are affordable and do not require the submission of many complicated documents.

This is why BanKo, the microfinance arm of the Bank of Philippine Islands (BPI), developed and recently launched the Agri-NegosyoKo Loan Program.

This facility has been developed with our farmers in mind. Through it, farmers can access loans ranging from P50,000 to P300,000. The interest rate per month is only 2.3 percent.

For the application requirements, only one valid ID is needed (e.g., a barangay certificate), together with an ID picture, and a certificate of membership in a cooperative.

BanKo will also go to the cooperatives to guide farmers on the application process. We make sure that we build trust and confidence among our farmers through face-to-face meetings with community leaders to address their local needs.

Through these direct and personal engagements, BanKo will be able to provide the necessary support and guidance in the loan availment process.

To address the barriers to owning a bank account, the Agri-NegosyoKo Loan program ensures that applicants will receive their loan through the PondoKo Savings account. This is a bank account that will be opened together with the loan application.

The account includes an ATM card that will allow our farmers to easily access their money anytime that they need it.

On top of making this loan product accessible, we partnered with Agrilever to promote this loan facility. Agrilever is an agri-tech company that uses technology and digital transformation to positively impact farmers through flexible financing, market access, digital agronomy services, and crop insurance.

Through this partnership, farmers who are members of Agrilever's clustered farming initiative apply for the Agri-NegosyoKo Loan. This facility will significantly help them in buying essential supplies (seeds, fertilizers, and others) and upgrading their machinery.

## **Alignment with key policies**

Recognizing the importance of the agriculture sector, the government has set out to implement policies that aim to help our farmers. An example of this is the New Agri-Agra Law (Republic Act 11901). This policy mandates banks to allocate at least 25 percent of banks' loanable funds to the agriculture and fisheries sector to increase their access to credit.

Products such as the Agri-NegosyoKo Loan can significantly help not just in complying with the law, but in ensuring that the products and services that we offer are aligned with the government's goal of financially empowering the agriculture sector.

This goal was echoed by BSP Deputy Governor Bernadette Romulo-Puyat, who graced the media launch of the Agri-NegosyoKo Loan on June 5, 2024.

Puyat said that enhancing the agriculture financing ecosystem is one of the strategic objectives of the National Strategy for Financial Inclusion (NSFI) 2022-2028. Through the Agri-NegosyoKoLoan, BanKo and Agrilever will be able to help achieve this objective.

## **Beyond financing**

Our efforts do not stop with making financing mechanisms accessible to the agriculture sector. A significant component of the program is financial education.

We believe that, for our farmers to be truly financially empowered, it is necessary to equip them with the skills and knowledge to help them manage their money properly. Thus, we have partnered with BPI Foundation to educate farmers and their family members about financial management, budgeting, and the importance of building a good credit standing.

Financial literacy is a vital component of economic empowerment. By teaching different ways to save, budget, and plan their expenses, we help farmers understand how to maximize their capital and sustain their income.

Farmers who avail themselves of the Agri-NegosyoKo Loan are covered by the Secure Assist Lite insurance. This is a microinsurance product that provides financial benefits for accidental death and permanent disability, hospital cash assistance, burial cash assistance, and property cash assistance.

### **Investing in the agri sector**

The Philippines' economic development is deeply intertwined with the success of the agriculture sector. By empowering farmers with access to financial resources, we invest in their success and in the future of the country's food security and economic prosperity.

Accessible and affordable financing facilities are crucial tools that will help strengthen farming communities, boost their livelihood, and ensure that the whole country continues to benefit from the food and resources that the agricultural sector provides.

— *Contributed*

<https://business.inquirer.net/466171/fostering-financial-freedom-for-filipino-farmers>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

## **PH a living lab in the quest to breed ‘super corals’**

By: [Krixia Subingsubing](#) - Reporter / [@KrixiasINQ](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 05:34 AM June 30, 2024



**MARINE LIFE REVIVAL** Marine scientist Dexter dela Cruz shows a sample of the corals that are the focus of a reef restoration project between his team from the University of the Philippines and counterparts from the Southern Cross University in Australia. They have made some progress at the Hundred Islands National Park in Alaminos, Pangasinan, using a method involving coral larvae grown in the lab and later seeded in a target area. —photos by Richard A. Reyes

**BOLINAO, PANGASINAN, Philippines** — Three years ago, the emerald waters off Quezon Island—one of the 124 islets that make up the famed Hundred Islands National Park in Alaminos City—concealed a vast wasteland of dead corals.



The seabed was basically all rubble, recalled marine scientist Dexter dela Cruz. Very few coral had survived the combined effects of bleaching and the increase in ocean temperatures induced by climate change.

That year, Dela Cruz and his mentor, Australian coral expert Peter Harrison, and a team from the Marine Science Institute of the University of the Philippines (UP-MSI) worked to seed coral larvae on the degraded reefs, hoping to see new life spring from the underwater graveyard.

By 2023, fields of coral covering close to a hectare had grown back, the deathly white expanse replaced by reds and browns.

It was a drop in the bucket given the speed and scale in which corals—habitat for some 25 percent of marine species—are dying off across the warming planet. But Dela Cruz and his peers believe the method they employed can help head off catastrophic extinctions.

### **Wanted: ‘Super corals’**

By seeding coral larvae, Dela Cruz said they hoped not only to recover what had been lost but also breed “super corals ... that are future-ready,” hardier specimens that can withstand heat waves and other environmental stresses.

And more importantly, they hoped to pass on the technique to fishermen, nature reserve wardens, local governments and other stewards who stand to benefit the most from a thriving marine ecosystem.

“The end product of every research is when people use it ... when they use your science and apply it to something good,” he said at a recent media briefing on the seeding project.

“This is my luminous whale,” the 41-year-old said of his goal, finding a metaphor in the mythical sea creature pursued by Nanami and her biologist father in the 1994 anime “Tico and Friends,” which inspired him to be a marine scientist himself.

The UP-MSI, together with Australia's Southern Cross University (SCU), currently leads an effort in Philippine coral restoration funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) since 2012. They have quietly made progress at the Bolinao Marine Laboratory located in Barangay Luciente 1, a village at the mouth of Lingayen Gulf facing the West Philippine Sea.



The area of restoration of damaged reefs using coral larval reseedling in Hundred Islands, Alaminos, Pangasinan. Inquirer photo/Richard A. Reyes

## **‘Overwhelmed’**

The ACIAR research is done in collaboration with Peter Harrison, founding director of SCU's Marine Ecology Research Centre and Dela Cruz's supervisor during his doctorate studies.

Often mistaken for plants, corals are animals that also serve as habitat for fish, invertebrates and algae. Under ideal circumstances, they are virtually immortal since they reproduce asexually by cloning themselves.

In the 1980s, Harrison was part of a team that was the first to observe hundreds of coral species in Australia's Great Barrier Reef (GBR) spawning gametes (sperm and egg) into the sea in synchronous mass spawnings.

Taking a cue from the lunar cycle, the spawnings appear to the naked eye as a colorful blizzard of tiny flecks, which will fertilize and form coral larvae in about five to seven days, before settling back onto the reefs. At least one in a million coral larvae survive long enough to reach sexual maturity in about two to three years.

It's a small number, "but in nature that works reasonably well," Harrison said at the briefing. "Unfortunately we're in a global coral crisis; the coral and reef resilience that is naturally present in these systems is being overwhelmed" both by human activity and climate-induced impacts like heat waves and mass bleaching events.

## **Vulnerable**

Triggered by heat stress, bleaching occurs when corals expel the "helpful" algae that live in their tissues, Dela Cruz explained. This expulsion causes them to turn white. It does not always lead to die-offs—sometimes corals reabsorb the algae and survive—but it makes them more vulnerable to disease.

It also makes them susceptible to the effects of climate change and global warming. In 2018, the United Nations scientific panel on climate change projected that an increase in global temperature by just 1.5 degrees Celsius could kill off 70 percent to 90 percent of the world's corals; a 2-degree increase can all but wipe them out at 99 percent.

As coral losses ultimately deplete fisheries and spell the demise of local marine-based tourism, "we need to think carefully about how to start restoring these reef systems," said Harrison.

## **PH as staging area**

The Australian expert has pioneered what he described as a form of "coral IVF (in vitro fertilization)," a process that involves capturing and growing coral spawn in a lab until this next generation is ready for seeding in degraded reefs.

It's cheaper and more genetically diverse, he said, than the most common method—asexual fragmentation—which involves breaking off pieces of coral for transplanting in a target area

Harrison tested the idea—for the first time—in Philippine waters in 2013, working with then Ph.D. candidate Dela Cruz. They had seeded some 400,000 larvae of *Acropora tenuis*, a near-threatened species of coral, in the waters off Anda, Pangasinan, in an area known as Magsaysay Reef.

After three years, they had established a breeding population, a showcase of the method's success outside the lab. The Philippines thus became a staging area for further experiments funded by the ACIAR: After Bolinao, Anda and the Hundred Islands, other coral plots were grown in the provinces of Batangas, Palawan and Cebu.

More milestones followed, but also some setbacks. In Mactan, Cebu, a reef they initially identified as a source for coral larvae became a restoration site instead after being damaged by a typhoon in 2020.

Looking forward, Dela Cruz said they also hope to replicate the Philippine accomplishments in the GBR, which hosts the world's widest array of coral species. For that next level, they need to breed more heat-tolerant corals of different species that can weather bleaching, he added.



## **Nighttime diving**

Until then, there are local feats worth celebrating and sustaining.

The Hundred Islands, for example, was an easy choice for the project. Though it was the first geographical feature in the country to be declared a natural park, its reefs had been suffering from destructive blast fishing since the 1980s, aside from naturally occurring threats like the spread of crown-of-thorns starfish.

The Alaminos municipal government imposes a decades-old fishing ban in the park, but Mayor Bryan Celeste said it remained a struggle to “restore it to its former glory.”

“Having corals there—if managed properly—can be a good tourism investment,” Celeste said.

Off Quezon Island, which remains closed to tourists, Dela Cruz and his team released over 18 million coral larvae of different species in 2018 and again in 2020. They got local residents involved—particularly the “Bantay Dagat” or reserve wardens—who hopefully could do the highly technical procedure on their own in the future.

The task requires some basic knowledge of coral taxonomy and physiology. The spawning process itself is not as easy as it sounds: reviving the reefs this way entails multiple nighttime dives, and covering vast areas could take several days or even weeks.

“You have to take stock of their (local stakeholders’) capacity. Adjust and create a menu that is suitable for them,” Dela Cruz said.

Last year, the fully grown corals in Quezon Island had matured enough to be a source of larvae. Small unhealed patches of previous bleaching remained, but overall “we saw the ecosystem becoming lively again,” Mayor Celeste said.

“We’ve seen a lot of big fish [species] that have started to come back.”

Still, Dela Cruz said, “there is no silver bullet, no ‘No. 1’ method that can solve the problem [of coral degradation]. We cannot fully restore all degraded corals. But if we can mitigate the losses, then that’s a step in the right direction.”

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1956405/ph-a-living-lab-in-the-quest-to-breed-super-corals>

## BUSINESS WORLD:

# ‘No need’ to import sugar due to ample stocks

June 30, 2024 | 8:10 pm



BUREAU OF CUSTOMS FACEBOOK PAGE

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

SUGAR inventories are considered sufficient until the beginning of the milling season later this year, producers said, rejecting the need to import.

Confederation of Sugar Producers Associations, Inc. (CONFED) President Aurelio J. Valderrama, Jr. said that the current rates of withdrawal from reserves indicate that inventory levels are ample, and can hold out until milling starts.

“We reiterate that any sugar import plan should be data-based, calibrated, totally transparent and fair, done in consultation with the industry and therefore immune from speculation and manipulation,” he added.

Last week, Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. said that the Department of Agriculture will clear imports of 200,000 metric tons (MT) of refined sugar to plug possible supply gaps during the milling offseason.

The national raw sugar inventory as of June 9 was up 29.3% during the 2023-2024 crop year to 436,229 MT, according to the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA).

Stocks of refined sugar, meanwhile, rose 14.1% to 492,985 MT during the current crop year.

Roehlano M. Briones, a senior research fellow with the Philippine Institute for Development Studies, said the planned imports are limited and would not bring down sugar prices during the milling offseason.

“Even with a bigger harvest, there may be strong demand. The problem is, the amount (for import) is limited to what will keep prices from rising, rather than (volumes sufficient to) bring sugar prices down,” Mr. Briones said via Viber.

Calixto V. Chikiamco, Foundation for Economic Freedom president, said that the government should let the private sector determine the demand and supply situation and “let them import to stabilize supply.”

The SRA’s Sugar Order No. 2 allowed buyers of domestically produced sugar to participate in the government’s import operation.

CONFED’s Mr. Valderrama said that the SRA has yet to announce the start of the milling season of the 2024-2025 crop year.

He added that no crop estimates have been released for the new crop year, which has been affected by El Niño.

Last year, the regulator had estimated a 10-15% decline in sugarcane production due to the effects of El Niño.

SRA Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona said at the time that El Niño has inflicted damage on sugarcane due to be harvested in October.

It added that parts of Batangas, Southern Negros, and Mindanao have reported extensive sugarcane damage due to dry conditions.

“CONFED is asking SRA to begin consulting with the industry to discuss sugar policy for Crop Year 2024-2025,” he said.

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/06/30/605214/no-need-to-import-sugar-due-to-ample-stocks/>

**BUSINESS WORLD:**

# Rice imports hit 2.28 MMT as of late June

June 30, 2024 | 8:08 pm



BW FILE PHOTO

THE PHILIPPINES imported 2.28 million metric tons (MMT) of rice as of June 20, running ahead of the first half 2023 pace by 22.6%, according to the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI).

The Philippines imports about 20% of its rice requirement amid insufficient domestic production, but also to tame high rice prices.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. signed Executive Order No. 62, which reduced rice tariffs to 15% until 2028, as an inflation-containment measure. The new tariff regime is subject to review every four months.

The BPI said Vietnam remained the top supplier of rice as of late June, accounting for 73.2% of all imports in the year to date.

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

Thailand supplied 348,171.74 MT during the period, or 15.3% of the total, followed by Pakistan with 151,318.86 MT, or 6.6%.

Rounding out the top five were Myanmar and India which shipped 66,120 MT and 21,169 MT of rice, respectively.



The US Department of Agriculture projects Philippine rice imports of 4.6 MMT this year, upgrading its estimates from 3.9 MMT previously, citing high demand and the lowered tariffs.

The Department of Agriculture is projecting rice imports of 3.9 MMT this year. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/06/30/605212/rice-imports-hit-2-28-mmt-as-of-late-june/>

**ABANTE:**

## 3 probinsya binalot ng red tide

- Abante News
- June 29, 2024



POSITIBO pa rin sa paralytic shellfish poison o nakakalason na red tide ang mga shellfish sa tatlong probinsya, ayon sa Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) noong Biyernes.

Sa isang advisory, sinabi ng BFAR na ang mga shellfish na nakolekta mula sa mga Baybayin ng Daus at Tagbilaran City sa Bohol, Dumanquillas Bay sa Zamboanga del Sur at baybaying tubig ng San Benito sa Surigao del Norte ay hindi ligtas para sa pagkain ng tao.

Kasabay nito ay nagbabala rin ang BFAR na ang lasa at hitsura ng mga nakalalasang shellfish ay walang pinagkaiba sa mga hindi nakakalason kaya kinakailangan ang ibayong pagsusuri at pag-iingat.

Dagdag pa nito, kahit sa pagluluto ay hindi basta mawalang-bisa ang red tide toxin. (CS)

<https://www.abante.com.ph/2024/06/29/3-probinsya-binalot-ng-red-tide/>

**PEOPLE'S JOURNAL:**

# IBP stands with Filipino fishermen

Sunday, June 30, 2024 Journal Online



In a statement released over the weekend, the Integrated Bar of the Philippines urged government to provide protection to Filipino fishermen who ply their trade within the 200-mile Philippine exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

IBP president Antonio C. Pido and the IBP governing board unanimously adopted the position that “Filipino fishermen have the legal right to go fishing” within this EEZ. The IBP added that “the Philippine government is duty-bound to provide protection to our fishermen inside this zone.”

Article 13, section 7 of the 1987 Constitution requires the State to uphold the right of subsistence fishermen to have preferential treatment in the use of communal fishing grounds, both inland and offshore. This right is extended to protection against “foreign intrusion.”

The IBP also cites the Treaty of Paris signed in 1898 when Spain ceded the Philippine archipelago to the United States of America. This was reinforced and clarified in the Treaty of Washington of 1900 where the parties listed the additional islands that Spain turned over to the U.S.

“When the Philippines gained independence, all these islands covered by the Treaty of Paris and Treaty of Washington that form part of the Philippine archipelago became part of our country’s territory,” the IBP said.

In 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration issued a decision confirming that the Philippines has sovereign rights over its EEZ in the West Philippine Sea. This decision clarified that “the Philippines shall enjoy all economic rights within its EEZ, including fishing, resource exploration, and marine conservation,” the IBP concluded.

The IBP is the official and mandatory organization of all lawyers in the Philippines.

<https://journal.com.ph/ibp-stands-with-filipino-fishermen/>

**MANILA STANDARD**

# Laguna farm produces world-class products

By Manila Standard

June 29, 2024, 10:00 pm

In Sta. Maria, Laguna, a quaint farm holds more than just childhood memories for Jessica Gutierrez, chief executive of Amazing Foods Corp.

“My siblings and I were always in awe of the bountiful harvests at our grandparents’ farm. When the yields suddenly stopped, it was a challenge we knew we had to face,” Gutierrez recalled.

Dwindling returns from tenant farmers abandoning agriculture painted a concerning picture. Sta. Maria, despite its remoteness and poverty, held immense potential. The 13-hectare expanse dotted with coconut and fruit trees was waiting to be revitalized.



Inspired by the farm’s past harvests under her grandparents’ care, Gutierrez vowed to revitalize its potential.

## Early struggles

Sustainability was at the heart of Amazing Food Corp.’s vision. Inspired by government training sessions, the company saw a golden opportunity in virgin coconut oil (VCO) production.

Launched in 2005, Sta. Maria VCO faced initial struggles. The local market was slow to embrace coconut oil as a dietary staple, testing their resolve for the first three years. But Gutierrez and her siblings persevered, their belief in their vision unwavering.

Online platforms like Alibaba opened doors to the international market. Their first overseas client from Japan, followed by others in Sweden and Croatia, marked a breakthrough moment. Their commitment to organic certification created a sense of trust, proving to be a crucial factor in landing these pivotal deals.

### **New horizons**

Alongside their flagship Sta. Maria VCO, the company introduced L'amor, another successful brand catering to Asian markets.

As the company continued to traverse the path to global success, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) stood by them, playing a crucial role in their export journey. By enabling their participation in international trade fairs, including those in the EU, the government helped them reach a wider audience and cultivate global success.



Amazing Foods Corp. expanded its product line from VCO food supplements to a wider range of healthy and delicious options—all-natural coconut soaps, invigorating coco ginger tea and all-natural jams made with local fruits. They even incorporated root crop and fruit chips for a delightful snacking experience and soothing massage oils to complete their wellness offerings.

“The game-changer came in 2014 with the GSP+ program. This initiative granted us tariff-free access to the vast European Union market, opening a door to a massive audience and significantly boosting our competitiveness,” Gutierrez said.

With a quarter of their annual exports now destined for the EU, Amazing Foods is actively pursuing further expansion. Negotiations are underway with a Polish buyer for the export of coconut sugar and coco jam, demonstrating their commitment to reaching new markets within the European region.

Its participation in the ARISE Plus Philippines project proved to be an inflection point in its export journey.

“ARISE Plus Philippines exceeded our expectations. The training offered comprehensive training in areas like marketing, pricing strategies, and handling inquiries from potential buyers,” Gutierrez said.

Participation in prestigious international trade fairs like ANUGA in Germany has been instrumental in propelling Amazing Foods Corp. onto the global stage. Trade fairs like Anuga play a vital role in connecting the company with potential partners and expanding its global reach.

## **Sustainability**

The company continues to thrive on a year-round supply of fresh coconut from over 150 hectares of organic plantation.

“We adhere to strict organic farming practices, ensuring our products are free from synthetic inputs,” Gutierrez said.

Its dedication extends to its packaging choices, with the company opting for glass over plastic to avoid chemical leaching and support environmental sustainability.

“We are not just producing coconut oil, we are nurturing a culture of reverence for the environment and pioneering a sustainable future for the next generations,” Gutierrez said.

<https://www.manilastandard.net/business/314465679/laguna-farm-produces-world-class-products.html>

# **Eruption victims to receive cash aid amid increased volcanic activity in Kanlaon**

**By Caloy Lozada & Rex Espiritu**

**June 30, 2024, 12:05 pm**

About 14,000 families in Canlaon City, Negros Oriental will receive financial support from the government beginning this Monday, July 1, in the wake of the June 3 eruption of Mount Kanlaon, Mayor Jose Chubasco Cardenas announced.

This comes as the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS) and the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) report a surge in volcanic activity in Kanlaon and Taal Volcanoes.

Cardenas said the assistance ranges from P3,000 to P10,000 per family through the Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situations (AICS) program of the national government. A quarter of the expected beneficiaries are persons with disabilities (PWDs) and senior citizens.

The mayor thanked President Marcos for the swift response and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), which has already distributed essential relief packs to affected families. Cardenas stated it is their priority to ensure that every family gets help to recover from the incident.

In addition to AICS, programs like the Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (TUPAD), Abot Kamay ang Pagtulong (AKAP), and Presidential Assistance for Farmers, Fishermen, and their Families (PAFFF) are also mobilizing resources to support the community.

President Marcos visited Negros Oriental on June 27, 2024, to allocate P50 million to aid farmers and fishermen in their recovery efforts. The local government unit (LGU) is currently validating 5,000 vegetable farmers and 3,236 rice farmers to ensure they receive the necessary support.

As relief efforts continue, PHIVOLCS and NDRRMC reported significant volcanic activity. Over the weekend, Kanlaon experienced 14 volcanic earthquakes, a marked

increase from the previous count. It also emitted a record high of 5,397 tons of sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) per day from its summit crater.

Meanwhile, Taal Volcano also showed heightened activity. On June 29, 2024, it experienced two weak phreatic (steam-driven) events, each lasting about a minute. These produced steam-laden plumes rising 800 meters above the main crater; SO<sub>2</sub> emissions from Taal averaged 6,571 tons per day.

Both PHIVOLCS and NDRRMC have reiterated strict prohibitions against entering the Permanent Danger Zones around Kanlaon and Taal due to their potential for sudden hazardous eruptions.

The agencies emphasize the importance of vigilance and readiness, assuring the public that any significant changes in volcanic activity will be promptly communicated.

<https://www.manilastandard.net/news/314465791/eruption-victims-to-receive-cash-aid-amid-increased-volcanic-activity-in-kanlaon.html>



# Planters back plan to import sugar

By Eugene Adiong

June 30, 2024

**BACOLOD CITY** — The United Sugar Producers Federation of the Philippines (Unifed) is supporting the plan of the Department of Agriculture to import 200,000 metric tons of refined sugar.

"This will fill in the shortage before harvest season starts in September," Manuel Lamata, Unifed president, said.

In a statement on Thursday, Lamata also said the harvest this coming crop year will be delayed due to the recent El Niño and that when they were consulted about the matter, they approved the proposal.

Meanwhile, SRA Administrator Pablo Azcona said it will not give "a definite figure as it will be based on the stock inventory come September when the milling season starts." He clarified that the program that Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. was referring to is Sugar Order 2, or the pre-qualification of possible importers by having them pre-qualify by buying local farmer sugar first.

The order increased the farmer price to a stable P2,700 to P2,800 per 50-kilogram bag of raw sugar, which also stabilized retail prices of refined sugar at P73 to P100 per kilogram.

This program pre-qualified an import volume of almost 200,000 tons of refined sugar and was planned in January and formally signed on March 8, Azcona said.

"We have pre-qualified and pre-allocated based on their actual support for the local farmers. As we said previously, we will activate an import plan should the trigger stock level be reached to ensure a

stable supply and stable price for our retail and industrial consumers, as well as to ensure that our farmers will not be affected," he said.

**Azcona said that 5 million farmers, farmworkers, their families and people dependent on the sugarcane industry are also 100 percent retail consumers.**

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/06/30/regions/planters-back-plan-to-import-sugar/1954173>

# Philippine coral reefs under siege

Jonathan L. Mayuga

June 30, 2024



**A STAND of Acropora, or staghorn coral, shelters dozens of juvenile two-stripe damselfish in Jessie Beazley Reef, Palawan.**

**The Philippine Coral Bleaching Watch recently shared an alarming trend of coral bleaching in the Philippines.**

**“We are seeing more areas in Northern, Central and Western Philippines in Alert Level 2 where significant bleaching is expected,” the group said on June 22 on its Facebook account, adding that coral mortality is “likely” to happen.**

**Areas in Alert Level 2 include Dasol Bay; parts of the Palawan region, including El Nido; Calabarzon, such as Tayabas Bay; Marinduque; parts of Negros; Sulu Sea; Moro Gulf; and Celebes Sea off the coast of Mindanao.**

**It added that bleaching is likely happening in areas with Alert Level 1—particularly parts of Southern Philippines, Zamboanga Peninsula, parts of Mindoro, Romblon, Sibuyan, Masbate and Samar.**

**Coral bleaching, which almost always leads to the death of corals, is caused by various factors.**



**DYING corals affected by coral bleaching at the Tubbataha Reefs.**

### **Effect of climate change**

**Coral bleaching is caused by prolonged high temperatures due to the warming of the oceans caused by climate change and other man-made factors, Danny Ocampo told the BusinessMirror via Messenger on June 18.**

**Ocampo has documented an alarming coral bleaching episode at the Tubbataha Reefs in Palawan early this month.**

**Among the man-made factors that warms the ocean water include the discharge of warm water from power plants.**

**“As individuals, we should do our best to help stop climate change by calling on our government to adhere to commitments to reduce our carbon footprints and stop single-use plastics since they are made from fossil fuel that leads to climate change,” said Ocampo, an ocean conservation advocate.**

**“We should also support real solutions that protect and rehabilitate coral reefs, such as the establishment of marine protected areas and stopping destructive land fill or reclamation projects that destroy our coastal habitats,” he added.**

### **Diverse coral species**

**“Our country is special because we are part of the Coral Triangle, an area that encompasses six nations. The region got its name because it hosts over 600 species of reef-building corals—the most anywhere,” explained Gregg Yan, executive director of Best Alternatives and a certified Reef Check Eco-Diver.**

**“Sadly, the world’s shallow-water coral reefs are quite literally, in hot water. The culprits are, of course, man-made climate change, spurred by greenhouse gas emissions from burning fossil fuels, coupled with intensive agriculture,” Yan told the BusinessMirror on Messenger on June 23.**

**Citing various scientific studies, Yan said coral bleaching happens when the water temperature gets too hot, forcing corals to expel the symbiotic algae which give them both color and sustenance.**

### **Beneficial species**

**Yan said corals are animals that ‘farm’ microscopic algae called zooxanthellae and zoochlorellae in their tissues. These tiny plants provide the majority of the coral’s food through photosynthesis.**

**“When the algae are expelled because water heats up for too long, corals die of starvation,” he explained.**

**Yan said scientists predict that unless climate change is stopped in this generation, most coral reefs might disappear by 2100.**

**“A study in Nature warns that by 2050 over 98 percent of the world’s shallow-water reefs will be affected by massive coral bleaching episodes every year until they either adapt or die,” he pointed out.**

**Reports of massive bleaching happening in various parts of the country, he said, is a sobering news for those of us who love the sea.**

### **Hope in ‘mesophotic’ reefs**

**Nonetheless, he said the “big blue” harbors many secrets, including a section of the ocean that people are only beginning to understand.**

**“Found at depths ranging from 100 to over 400 feet—beyond the reach of most scuba divers—these twilight reefs thrive under little illumination and great water pressure,” Yan said.**

**“Though we know that many types of deep-sea corals thrive under little light, these new reefs were teeming with almost the same kinds of life—corals, fish, and even seaweed—that live in shallow-water reefs like Tubbataha Reef or the Great Barrier Reef,” he said.**

**He explained that reefs called “mesophotic”—“meso” meaning middle, while ‘photic’ referring to light—are found in the “middle zone” between the ocean’s brightly-lit surface and its darker depths.**

### **Deepwater corals**

**“The sprawling deep-water coral complexes lie all over the world, 100 feet to 400 feet beneath the blue. These areas are potential refuge for many types of life as the cool water shields many animals from warming temperatures,” he said.**

**Yan said depth also protects them from coastal overfishing like blast fishing, and storm surges.**

**“Though still understudied, the world’s mesophotic reefs—including our very own Philippine Rise—are the last stands of wild corals, akin to a sunken Noah’s Ark, if the world’s shallow water reefs die out. It’s our duty**

as ‘citizens’ to make sure that we don’t drop the ball and let climate change wipe out the coral reefs ringing our islands,” he said.

Groups studying mesophotic reefs include Maude University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute (UP MSI), UP Los Banos, Silliman University, and international organizations, he noted.

### **Coral bleaching: A global problem**

Coral bleaching is not unique to the Philippines. Asean Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) Executive Director Theresa Mundita S. Lim said during the intense heat in this year’s dry season, when coral bleaching has significantly impacted the Asean region.

“This bleaching event, part of the fourth global coral bleaching event, has been driven by a combination of climate change and an El Niño pattern, which has elevated sea surface temperatures across the globe,”

Lim said that in the Southeast Asian region, severe coral bleaching has been observed in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand.

Reports indicate that reefs off the western coast of Indonesia are among those suffering extensive damage, citing reports from the United States’ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Coral Reef Watch.

“Thailand has also been experiencing extreme heat, exacerbating the stress on coral reefs and leading to noticeable bleaching events. These high temperatures not only stress the corals but can also result in direct mortality if prolonged,” says Lim.

### **Asean response**

According to Lim, to address this issue, some Asean member states focus on activities that address man-made pressures that directly aggravate climate impacts on the already stressed coral reefs.

“These include controlling marine pollution, closing down dive sites, reducing tourist influx in marine parks affected by coral bleaching, and coral restoration initiatives,” she said.

**The widespread nature of these coral-bleaching events, however, requires large-scale actions to complement national efforts to mitigate local stressors on coral reefs.**

**“Regional efforts such as the Effectively Managing Networks of Marine Protected Areas [Enmaps] Project of the ACB and UNDP [United Nations Development Fund], launched a few weeks ago, aim to identify and design marine protected area networks to enhance the resilience of marine protected areas to climate change, support ecosystem-based adaptation, and enhance food security across the Asean region,” Lim explained.**

**By strategically configuring Marine Protected Area networks based on the latest available science, Enmaps seeks to contribute to the long-term health and sustainability of coral reef ecosystems, in the face of existing climate-related stressors, such as coral bleaching.**

### **Reversible phenomenon**

**However, according to Lim, coral bleaching is reversible. A healthy, biodiversity-rich marine ecosystem is nature’s means to help the reefs revive and restore themselves.**

**“The oceans are more resilient to climate fluctuations than we think, but if exposed to other threats—such as marine pollution; unsustainable fishing practices that reduce marine species populations which keep algal growths on bleached corals in check; irresponsible tourism practices that further cause damage to coral reef areas; oil spills; and invasive species—the chances for recovery would be poor,” Lim said.**

### **Worst-case scenario**

**“This is the worst-case scenario for Asean—if we can no longer protect our marine biodiversity from these man-made pressures, then nature can also no longer protect us from climate-related impacts, such as storm surges, sea level rise, coral deaths, and fish mortalities,” she said.**

**She warned that failure to create the ideal conditions to reverse coral bleaching will permanently damage the valuable coral reefs and will have significant socio-economic impacts in the region.**



**Lim posits that there are possible solutions, including cooperation among Asean member states to identify and protect biodiversity-significant marine areas in the region, establish marine protected area networks based on the best available scientific data on interconnectivity, and continue to raise awareness on coral bleaching and what the public can do to help coral reefs recover quickly.**

**The ACB head added that the Asean region may not be the biggest emitter of carbon and greenhouse gases, and is considered among those richest in marine biodiversity.**

**“We should learn and work together to protect and harness this wealth effectively and sustainably, and make it part of our solution to withstand the worst impacts of the global climate crisis,” Lim said.**

**Image credits: COURTESY OF GREGG YAN, COURTESY OF DANNY OCAMPO**

**<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/06/30/philippine-coral-reefs-under-siege/>**

# **Fish oral vaccine developed vs tilapia bacterial infection**

**Rizza B. Ramoran | S&T Media Services**

**June 30, 2024**

**Bacterial infections in tilapia, a bane in the fish industry, may soon be a thing of the past, thanks to the research on fish oral vaccine.**

**The project, “Use of Fish Oral Vaccine in Tilapia Aquaculture System,” produced an oral vaccine to combat the problem of bacterial infection caused by Motile Aeromonad Septicemia (MAS) in fish, which continues to increase mortality rates in local species like tilapia.**

**The research was under the Department of Science and Technology’s Collaborative Research and Development to Leverage Philippine Economy (DOST-Cradle) Program, the Trinity University of Asia (TUA), in partnership with Santeh Feeds Corp.**

**The project noted that in Taal Lake alone, about 50 percent of approximately 600 million fingerlings stocked annually died of infection and other causes.**



**FISHVAX Aero, the developed tilapia oral vaccine against Aeromonas spp. with one peso coin on top to show its size.**

**Fish mortalities are caused by various factors, including bacterial infections, such as highly fatal hemorrhagic septicemia, or MAS. Around P150 million are lost yearly due to fingerling mortalities.**

**“Through R&D [research and development], we can support local industries by developing science-based solutions to address their concerns,” said Science Secretary Renato U. Solidum Jr.**

**“The fish oral vaccine through feeds will be able to support our tilapia industry, most especially our backyard farmers, since it is easy to administer and is a cost-effective solution in ensuring that the fish stock is less susceptible to diseases.”**

**This DOST Cradle Project implemented by TUA took the fish industry to a higher level by developing a fish oral vaccine that could be incorporated into fish feeds.**

**“This oral vaccine was initiated to increase fish production through better fish health management and possible prevention of the threat of zoonotic infection that might come from these pathogens,” said Dr. Anacleto M. Argayosa, the project leader from TUA.**

**The vaccine is developed by having tilapia microbial pathogens mass-cultivated and inactivated using applicable techniques.**

**The inactivated cells are protected through a naturally occurring nanomaterial as a carrier. The encapsulated bacterial cells carrying the antigens are mixed with the feeds and given as normal feeds during mass immunization.**

**“When we were offered to partner with Doctor Argayosa on this project, we were hopeful that the vaccine will solve the farmers’ long-running problem of low fish survival,” said Daniel V. Cabrera, national sales manager of Santeh Feeds Corp.**

**“We also hope that the cost of the vaccine that is added to the fish feed will not significantly impact the cost of the feed. If this happens, we are helping the farmers and the tilapia farming industry to become more sustainable,” Cabrera added.**

**Tilapia has been considered as one of the most affordable fishes in the country. Its annual sales volume of around P24 billion has contributed to the country's economic growth and food security.**

**The Philippines is one of the top tilapia-producing countries in the world. However, due to bacterial infections, an increasing tilapia mortality rate has been observed.**

**The DOST-funded project has successfully produced a fish oral vaccine called Fishvax Aero deployed in Laguna and Batangas.**

**As a major accomplishment, 50 percent relative survival (RPS) of the fingerlings tested in San Luis, Batangas, showed promising results for further application of the Fishvax Aero for the second dose and subsequent grow-out.**

**Survival rate through the RPS is the standard value to measure the vaccine's efficacy. The vaccine tends to be more effective with higher RPS.**

**Continued application of Fishvax Aero in the succeeding cultures and phases minimized tilapia mortalities.**

**A policy on using fish oral vaccine technology is set to be recommended upon project completion. This technology is expected to benefit the tilapia fish farmers and would eventually contribute to the aquaculture industry in the country.**

**Image credits: PHOTO FROM TUA PROJECT TEAM**

**<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/06/30/fish-oral-vaccine-developed-vs-tilapia-bacterial-infection/>**

# **Robots are stepping into one of Asia's dirtiest farm jobs**

**Bloomberg News**

**June 30, 2024**

**A drone buzzes between trees on a humid Malaysian morning, monitoring the oil palm fruits as they ripen. Self-driving trucks rumble over the vast plantation's uneven ground, laying fertilizer and picking up the densely packed harvested bunches.**

**These are just some of the robots the Southeast Asian nation's top palm growers hope will take over the sector's most difficult and dirty jobs, plugging chronic worker shortages that have disrupted supplies of the world's most-consumed edible oil.**

**With global stockpiles set for the first back-to-back decline in more than 40 years, Malaysia has every reason to push for automation to boost production. Increased awareness of the industry's problematic reliance on migrant workers—clouded by restrictions and labor abuses—has also encouraged companies to find alternative solutions, said Mohamad Helmy Othman Basha, group managing director of SD Guthrie Bhd., a government-linked company previously known as Sime Darby Plantation.**

**“To depend on foreign workers for all these key tasks is actually putting this industry at a very high risk,” Helmy said. “This is why we have to take this plunge. We really have to place these bets.”**

**Perfecting the robots and deploying them at a commercially viable scale will take years, even as firms pour millions into developing such technology and retraining their staff to use it. But producers are pressing ahead.**

**The plantation workforce in Malaysia—the world's No. 2 palm oil producer—was hollowed out during the pandemic, when border restrictions meant companies couldn't bring in the foreign workers they so heavily rely on. It was the country's worst-ever worker shortage and palm oil production plummeted, pushing prices to record highs. The industry lost billions.**

**SD Guthrie learned its lesson. Where possible, the firm has started using machines to take over non-harvesting jobs like spraying pesticide or monitoring fruit and yields. Where the industry average is currently for one worker to maintain 8-10 hectares of land, the company wants to boost that to about 17 hectares per worker with the aid of automation.**

**The company's investment into robots is set to reach 100 million ringgit (\$21.2 million)—or about half its research and development budget—by year-end and it “will spend whatever is required to find a solution,” according to Helmy. Nearly 30 percent of its annual R&D budget will be spent on this initiative in the next three to four years.**

**The robots aren't fully autonomous yet, meaning there is still a need for skilled workers to control and maneuver them. Plus, trickier tasks remain in the hands of humans—like safely cutting down ripe fruit bunches from trees that can be as tall as six-story buildings.**

**But the technological advances have already opened up an avenue for women to join a traditionally male-dominated workforce. Sri Norhidayu Kussain, a 41-year-old woman, says the robots help with backbreaking tasks like lifting 30-kilogram (66-pound) fruit bunches and loading them into trucks.**

**“The work is now easier because these machines have successfully reduced the need for physical labor. It's no longer like before when only men could do these type of jobs,” said Norhidayu, who operates a pesticide-spraying vehicle that can do the job of six workers at SD Guthrie's Sungai Linau estate in Malaysia's central state of Selangor.**

**Women make up 3 percent of the company's roughly 700 machine operators and Helmy says the company is trying to attract more.**

**Labor shortfalls have long been a headache for Malaysian businesses, partially because of strict immigration rules targeting low-skilled workers that in turn have encouraged trafficking and left thousands of undocumented workers without legal protection. International scrutiny of labor abuses has pushed the country to reduce its reliance across several industries including manufacturing, construction and plantations.**

**SD Guthrie itself faced allegations of forced labor that resulted in a two-year US ban on imports of its products in 2020—something that Helmy said urged the firm to explore automation.**

**“Automation, if rolled out strategically will not hurt workers’ livelihoods,” said Adrian Pereira, executive director at the North South Initiative, a Malaysia-based non-governmental organization focused on social justice. “We really hope government-linked companies will take the lead and demonstrate that this sector can be free of forced labor soon.”**

**SD Guthrie is the first plantation company in the country to set up a research facility dedicated to developing robots. Other palm giants like Golden Agri-Resources Ltd. and IOI Corp Bhd. have also invested in mechanization and artificial intelligence to help harvest the oil used in everything from chocolate to soaps and fuel.**

**A plantation run entirely by robots will not be a reality soon. Technical issues like getting the robots to self-navigate through hilly terrain or correctly identify ripe fruit bunches, have held back past automation initiatives. This is in stark contrast to crops like soybeans or rapeseed—waist-high row crops grown on flat fields—where farmers can tend to hundreds of hectares with tractors and giant harvesting machines.**

**But speaking amid whirring and beeping prototypes at the company’s robotics lab in Selangor, the firm’s Chief Digital Officer Aditya Tuli said change was here to stay.**

**“Once we start mechanizing, we do imagine that there will be an increase or a positive impact to production numbers,” he said. “We are chasing that.”**

**<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/06/30/robots-are-stepping-into-one-of-asias-dirtiest-farm-jobs/>**