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MANILA BULLETIN:

Pension for farmers, fishermen pushed in House

BY ELLSON QUISMORIO

Aug 19, 2024 09:14 AM

AT A GLANCE

- Senior Citizen Party-list Rep. Rodolfo Ordanes sees the need to institutionalize a pension system for Filipino farmers and fishermen. Ordanes filed House Bill (HB) No.10740 or the proposed "Agriculture Pension Act" for this purpose.



(MANILA

BULLETIN)

Senior Citizen Party-list Rep. Rodolfo Ordanes sees the need to institutionalize a pension system for Filipino farmers and fishermen.

For this purpose, Ordanes filed House Bill (HB) No.10740 or the proposed "Agriculture Pension Act".

The proposed pension scheme will be consistent with the package benefits under the Social Security System (SSS) and relevant to the programs of the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation (PCIC).

"This will provide farmers and fisherfolks with a modest, dependable source of income security upon their retirement," said Ordanes.

“The program shall consists of a comprehensive set of objectives, targets, and a holistic approach to providing sickness, maternity, disability, retirement, death, and funeral benefits to farmers and fisherfolks,” he added.

Ordanes says the workers in agricultural sector are considered as the backbones of the economy, and thus need to be taken care of.

He lamented the existing condition of the farmers and fisherfolks whom he said remain the poorest and the most vulnerable members of the society.

“Their work is characterized by seasonal employment, exposure to climate risks, inadequate access to financial resources, which collectively contribute to their economic insecurity, especially in old age,” Ordanes said in the explanatory note of HB No.10740.

“As such, this bill aims to meet the unique needs of the country’s agricultural workers. It aims to ensure financial security in old age by providing a regular and reliable pension upon retirement as part of acknowledging their lifelong contribution to the nation’s food supply and economic stability,” he added.

Once the bill is enacted, it would be the PCIC and the SSS that would join forces to fulfill the objective of the law.

As to the budget for the pension, he said the amount necessary to carry out the initial implementation will come from the savings of the national government—and later, from 10 percent of the total amount of duties collected from the importation of agricultural products.

"The PCIC and the SSS shall collaborate with and secure the technical assistance of the DA in all stages of implementation of this Act. The DA shall ensure the objectives of the Program are met and shall evaluate and monitor the Program’s contribution to the productivity," the measure read.

https://mb.com.ph/2024/8/19/pension-for-farmers-fishermen-pushed-in-house#google_vignette

MANILA BULLETIN:

Metro Pacific eyes eggs, carabao milk businesses

BY JAMES A. LOYOLA

Aug 19, 2024 05:16 AM

Metro Pacific Agro Ventures (MPAV), a unit of conglomerate Metro Pacific Investments Corporation, is considering the chicken egg and carabao milk businesses while continuing to ramp up its dairy and vegetable capacities.

In an interview, MPAV President Juan Victor Hernandez said their core strategy is to look at the Filipino plate, and they have now added fresh dairy and greens, “but we want to enter the protein segment.”

“Protein could either be meat, eggs, or aquaculture. All of those are very interesting. (But) to be frank, with meat, we’re kind of cautious because of the ASF (African Swine Fever) in terms of pork. For chicken, there’s the Avian flu. But for eggs, that’s a very interesting area. So we’re looking at that,” he noted.

Hernandez said they also want to look into carabaos because it is being raised all over the Philippines.

“It is the quintessential symbol of agriculture but we only use it for tilling the land. In other countries, they actually milk the carabao, so if I can get, for example, two liters of milk from every farmer, that’s extra income for the farmer that I can process the cheese from,” he explained.

Meanwhile, Hernandez said MPAV expects to be self-sufficient in terms of milk supply by 2026 with its acquisition of Universal Harvester Dairy Farms Inc. or Bukidnon Milk Company.

MPAV is also beefing up the capacity of the dairy of Carmen’s Best (Laguna Creamery) as well as preparing for the commercial operation of the country’s largest integrated dairy facility in Bay, Laguna through a joint venture with the LR Group of Israel.

Since Universal Harvester is the largest dairy facility in Mindanao, Hernandez said “They are very complimentary to our existing dairy business in Laguna. They don’t have an ice cream business. We do. So, that automatically gives us the opportunity to produce ice cream in Mindanao and distribute in Visayas and Mindanao, which is more efficient from a cost perspective.”

Meanwhile, he said “We’ve reached 140 milking cows in Laguna. Before, it was, on average, about 95 or 97, We never broke the 100 mark. But, because of the investments that we’ve done in Laguna Creamery, by the end of July, we already have 140 and growing.

“In fact, our target for December is we will already achieve 200 milking cows in Laguna, which effectively we will be able to double production of ice cream by then.

“Now, with the acquisition of Bukidnon milk company in Maramag, they have a 1,000 herd, 200 of which is milking. So that will immediately add to the pool of milk supply that is required by the company to further grow. They have about close to 300 heifers, young cows that can enter the milking pool.”

All these, combined with the Israeli joint venture, which will open by the first quarter of 2025, Hernandez said “we will be able to achieve already what we call our dairy self sufficiency by 2026. I think that's very critical for the dairy business to move forward.”

Once their milk supply is sufficient, MPAV intends to work on expanding its dairy line for the production of fresh milk which, Hernandez said “will now start the growth path for the dairy line... we want that to be as big as the ice cream business.”

For its greenhouse business in Bulacan, construction is still ongoing and the first 3.5 hectares, the largest green house in the country, will start commercial operation in January 2025 and will be producing 800 metric tons of vegetables annually.

“And we've been given instructions already next year that the three and a half, we will double to seven, which is the original plan, seven hectares to produce 1600 metric tons of vegetables,” he added.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/8/19/metro-pacific-eyes-eggs-carabao-milk-businesses>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Trucks with ASF-infected hogs intercepted in Quezon City, Valenzuela

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

August 19, 2024 | 12:00am



Palabrica said 38 hogs were found in one of the trucks.

Cesar Ramirez

MANILA, Philippines — Two more trucks believed to be transporting hogs infected with African swine fever or ASF were intercepted at checkpoints in Quezon City and Valenzuela, the Department of Agriculture reported yesterday.

DA Assistant Secretary for swine and poultry Dante Palabrica said the trucks were seized at checkpoints along Commonwealth Avenue and Malanday in Valenzuela.

Palabrica said 38 hogs were found in one of the trucks. The other truck was transporting 11 pigs.

He said one of the trucks used a recycled local shipping permit. The other was transporting pigs that showed clinical signs of ASF.

According to Palabrica, the pigs were subjected to ASF testing.

“BAI (Bureau of Animal Industry) has increased the number of checkpoints in the National Capital Region to prevent the transport of sick pigs and chickens,” he said.

“Permits must be complete and genuine, otherwise, the animals will be immediately tested. If found positive for ASF, the hogs will be condemned,” Palabrica added.

He said local government units, the BAI and the National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS) are working closely to ensure that meat products sold in Metro Manila markets are safe and clean.

“Meat that has the NMIS seal is safe to consume,” Palabrica said.

On Friday, Agriculture Assistant Secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa said three trucks of hogs were intercepted at a checkpoint along Mindanao Avenue in Quezon City.

The hogs tested positive for ASF, he said.

The hogs came from Quezon province and were supposed to be brought to Pangasinan.

<https://www.philstar.com/nation/2024/08/19/2378845/trucks-asf-infected-hogs-intercepted-quezon-city-valenzuela>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Armyworm damage in Western Visayas hits P57 million

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

August 19, 2024 | 12:00am



A fall armyworm feasts on a rice crop.

Department of Agriculture-Philippine Rice Research Institute

MANILA, Philippines — The amount of damage caused by armyworms in Western Visayas has reached P57 million, according to the Department of Agriculture.

The DA operations center said the worms devoured 3,237 hectares of crops, particularly corn.

“Best possible efforts are being undertaken to carry out assistance and appropriate interventions for affected farmers,” the DA said.

The agency said joint monitoring and evaluation activities are being undertaken between DA regional offices and local government units to address the pestilence

not only in Western Visayas, but also in Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol, Eastern Visayas, Zamboanga peninsula, Northern Mindanao, Soccsksargen and Caraga.

Validation and assessment of crop-infested areas are ongoing to identify potential threats and develop incidence maps.

Control agents and registered insecticides are being applied to stop the spread of the pest.

“The Bureau of Plant Industry, an attached agency of the DA, has advised regional field offices through their respective regional crop protection centers and regulatory divisions to closely monitor any potential infestation of armyworms and other pests in their localities,” the DA said.

“Should there be any sign of armyworm infestations, farmers are encouraged to visit and report the matter to their respective municipal or city agriculture offices,” it added.

<https://www.philstar.com/nation/2024/08/19/2378899/armyworm-damage-western-visayas-hits-p57-million>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

ASF hog testing to start in Batangas ‘ground zero’

[Gilbert Bayoran](#), [Ric Sapnu](#), [Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

August 19, 2024 | 12:00am



The DA said the 10,000 doses of ASF vaccine purchased through emergency procurement were expected to arrive in the country yesterday.

AFP / File

MANILA, Philippines — Testing of hogs for the government’s African swine fever vaccination program will start in Lobo, Batangas, considered as the “ground zero” of the ASF outbreak, according to the Department of Agriculture.

DA Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa yesterday said only hogs that test negative for the virus would be covered by the ASF vaccination program.

De Mesa said hog registration in Lobo would start tomorrow.

”Blood samples will be taken from the hogs to determine if the animals are not positive for ASF,” De Mesa said, noting the process would take some time.

“The blood samples will be examined. Everything needs to undergo the process. Within the week, we can start the vaccination for the fatteners and growers that have undergone testing,” he added.

The DA said the 10,000 doses of ASF vaccine purchased through emergency procurement were expected to arrive in the country yesterday.

“The 10,000 doses under the emergency procurement were part of the 600,000 doses. After Batangas, (hogs) in other areas will be also vaccinated,” De Mesa said.

Alfred Ng, vice chairman of the National Federation of Hog Raisers Inc., said he received information that only 20 doses of ASF vaccine would be allotted for each backyard farm in Batangas.

Batangas Gov. Hermilando Mandanas said at least 10 areas – Calatagan, Balayan, Lobo, Lian, Lipa, Malvar, Rosario, San Juan, Talisay and Tuy – logged ASF outbreaks.

Mandanas said a hog farmer from Lobo committed suicide after suffering losses due to ASF.

As this developed, livestock checkpoints have been set up in Angeles City in Pampanga as a precaution against ASF.

Mayor Carmelo Lazatin ordered the city police to inspect all delivery trucks to prevent the entry of ASF-affected hogs from Batangas and Bulacan.

Downgraded to ‘pink zone’

Meanwhile, the Bureau of Animal Industry, an attached agency of the DA, has downgraded from “red to pink zone” the ASF status of 44 local government units (LGUs) in Western Visayas.

As of Aug. 14, Hinigaran, Kabankalan, La Castellana, Pulupandan, San Carlos, Silay and Victorias in Negros as well as Ajuy, Banate, Barotac Viejo, Batad, Concepcion, Dingle, Dumangas, Iloilo City, Janiuay, Lambunao, Leganes, Mina, New Lucena, Oton, San Enrique, San Miguel, Santa Barbara and Zaraga in Iloilo have been downgraded from red or infected zone, to pink or buffer zone.

A similar improvement was noted in Buenavista and Jordan in Guimaras; Cuartero, Dao, Dumarao, Maayon and Mambusao in Capiz; San Jose and Sibalom in Antique, and Balete, Banga, Batan, Madalag, Makato, Malay, Malinao, Nabas, Numancia and New Washington in Aklan.

Despite the improved ASF status, the provincial government of Negros Occidental still bans the entry of hogs and pork products from the neighboring provinces of Cebu, Guimaras, Negros Oriental and Panay as well as the islands of Luzon and Mindanao.

<https://www.philstar.com/nation/2024/08/19/2378902/asf-hog-testing-start-batangas-ground-zero>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Unshackling the invisible chains that continue to enslave our farmers

By: [Edgardo C. Amistad](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 02:01 AM August 19, 2024

In the critical area of food supply chain, the farmers and the traders are the acknowledged key players. One is the producer of farm products and the other is the distribution channel. The linkage between the two is more prevalent in basic commodities, such as rice, corn and coconut.

To the cursory observers, the relationship seems symbiotic and mutually beneficial. Or is it?

Scanning the vast expanse of the Philippine countryside, the huge disparity in the farmers and the traders' lifestyles is quite noticeable. For instance, while the farmers reside in shanties or modest homes with spartan amenities in the villages' peripheries, the traders live in mansions with luxurious comforts in the town's prime locations.

From all indications, the relationship is anything but equitable.

Let's go deeper and examine how the interaction between those two main players in agriculture works.

The traders' entry point in their engagement with the farmers is not as buyers of farm products, but rather as creditors. The traders are the most dominant loan providers to the farmers. But although they earn substantial profits from those loans (charging an interest rate of 20 percent per month or even higher), their credit operation is more of a scheme to entice the farmers to sell their produce to them at their dictated price. The said price is, of course, lower than what the farmers can get from other buyers. This enables the traders to increase their margins and earn even bigger profits.

Subsistent living

The setup has been going on for generations. As a result, the farmers' incomes are inconsequential and merely for subsistence. There is hardly anything left for such farming necessities as adequate fertilizers, good seeds, new technology and machinery. No wonder, the prices of our farm products, like rice, are not competitive with those of our Asian neighbors.

Focusing further on the rice farmers' predicament, their situation is expected to worsen once the tariff on imported rice is reduced. The rationale behind that action is understandable—to make rice cheaper for the consuming public and force the farmers to compete and produce competitively priced rice.

But how can the farmers improve their productivity when they are drowning in a sea of debts from the traders, and the only lifeline they get from the government are mere palliatives. What the tariff reduction would do is further burden the farmers until they finally snap and give up. Then what? Be forever dependent on imported agricultural goods?

The conventional wisdom on why the traders are the farmers' lenders of first choice is because they don't require voluminous documents to fill out in applying for a loan, and the loan is readily available. That is true to some extent, but the traders' primary enticement is they provide not only production loans but also consumption and providential loans. Thus, if the farmers need cash to buy cellular phones for their kids, to cover the funeral expenses of a family member who died, or to raise funds for the fiesta celebration or the wedding of a daughter, etc., they go to the traders. Apparently, the traders' strategy is to bury the farmers in debt so they could control and manipulate the buying price of the farmers' produce.

Getting a loan from the traders is like mortgaging one's soul to the devil. Nonetheless, the farmers continue to be willing victims because they see no other viable alternatives.

Structural prerequisites

Notwithstanding their adversarial positions on many issues, there is unanimity between the farmers' supporters and the technocrats that agricultural reforms and structural changes need to be introduced to improve the farmers' productivity. However, they differ on the kind of approach. The technocrats talk of farm clustering, introduction of professional managers to run the cluster, use of modern machineries and technology, etc. Well and good. But these proposals are mere slogans, unless they are accompanied by how all of these will be operationalized and funded. In the meantime, the farmers are struggling just trying to keep their heads above water.

When the Rice Tariffication Law was discussed in a symposium I attended in 2018, a well-known economist strongly supported its enactment. However, he also noted the urgent necessity of providing assistance to the farmers to improve their productivity. When asked how come he failed to help put in place those reforms and programs when he was still holding a high position in government, he sheepishly answered that there were strong lobby groups and individuals opposing them. One wonders: if he couldn't do it while he was inside the government, wouldn't it be harder for him to succeed now that he is outside of it?

What our farmers need

Isn't it only logical that before we open our market for agricultural products to competition, we must first strengthen our farmers' capabilities? Aren't agricultural reforms and structural changes prerequisites for such a move? Otherwise, our farmers will be clobbered by the competition. And that is exactly what is happening now.

To give the local farmers a fighting chance in their quest for a decent standard of living, we must do the following:

1. Set up a lending program that is attuned to the needs and requirements of the farmers. We must wean the farmers off their dependence on the traders. Only the government, with its vast resources, can do this.

2. Get the farmers involved and made a part of the lucrative agricultural trading business. This is where the money is in agriculture. While a farmer's harvest is subject to the vagaries of the weather, trading those produce is not.

3. Come up with a consensus on what agricultural reforms and programs to prioritize for implementation. The experts have varying opinions on this issue, which should be resolved. Once all is settled, then immediate implementation should commence.

Our agricultural sector's performance has been dismal for so long. The immediate victims are the farmers and not far behind the consumers. For an agricultural-based economy like ours, the prevailing situation is inexcusable. The time to get our act together is long overdue. INQ

This article reflects the personal opinion of the author and not the official stand of the Management Association of the Philippines or MAP. The author is member of the MAP Agribusiness Committee. He is also the adviser of the Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation and is the former president of UCPB-CIIF Finance and Development Corp. and UCPB-CIIF Foundation.

<https://business.inquirer.net/475537/unshackling-the-invisible-chains-that-continue-to-enslave-our-farmers>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Farm consolidation urged as priority for DA funding

August 19, 2024 | 12:04 am



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

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

THE Department of Agriculture's (DA) budget requests for next year should reflect a high priority for farm consolidation, which it needs to pursue to enhance production efficiency, an analyst said.

"They have to invest in farm clustering and consolidation and convince the private sector to partner with farmers' cooperatives and associations," Former Agriculture Undersecretary Fermin D. Adriano said via Viber.

At a budget hearing last week, Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. said that the DA will focus its spending on low-productivity areas.

"What we asked for is P500 billion, and right now it's only at P200 billion. If we can get P300 billion... I think that would be a big help," Mr. Laurel told reporters on the sidelines of the hearing.

The Agriculture department had been allocated P200.13 billion under the 2025 National Expenditure Plan (NEP), against the P167 billion the administration allocated to the department in the 2024 NEP.

The DA's proposed P500-billion budget for 2025, would have prominently featured agricultural infrastructure projects like cold storage facilities, farm to market roads, and the DA's flagship solar power irrigation project.

Instead, the infrastructure budgets were dominated by flood-control proposals by the Department of Public Works and Highways, while the budget for the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) was reduced.

Under the 2025 NEP, the NIA's allocation was cut to P42.57 million from P70.22 million a year earlier.

Leonardo A. Lanzona, an economics professor at the Ateneo De Manila, said the lack of land continues to constraint agricultural productivity.

"As the land cannot support a lot of labor to remain productive, industries will need to be developed... We need to increase its productivity as labor (and) land resources are shifted to other sectors," he said via Messenger.

Mr. Lanzona added that if not properly addressed, the high cost of food will continue to hinder the country's structural transformation and poverty reduction programs.

"Agriculture remains the single effective mechanism for pushing poverty down to single digits," he said.

He added that the government needs to subsidize agriculture as it tries to achieve upper middle-income status.

<https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2024/08/19/614704/farm-consolidation-urged-as-priority-for-da-funding/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

US undercounts bird flu in cattle as farmers shun testing

August 19, 2024 | 12:03 am



REUTERS

WASHINGTON/CHICAGO — The US bird-flu outbreak in dairy cattle is much larger than official figures suggest due to farmers' reluctance to test their animals and risk the economic consequences of a positive result, according to Reuters interviews with dairy experts, veterinarians, and farmers in six states with known cases.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has counted bird flu in about 190 dairy herds in 13 states since March. The virus's jump from birds to cows heightened concerns that it could adapt to spread among humans.

Scientists have warned that limited surveillance could weaken the US ability to respond to further human spread.

Thirteen dairy and poultry farm workers have been infected with bird flu this year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Reuters spoke with more than a dozen researchers, veterinarians, farmers, and livestock industry groups to understand whether the bird-flu spread in dairy cattle is being accurately tracked.

State animal and human health experts in three states who work closely with veterinarians and farmers said the government tally is likely an undercount because farmers are fearful of the economic hardship brought by a positive test, including being restricted from selling their milk or cattle for weeks.

The virus reduces milk production in cattle. The US, the world's second-largest cheese producer after the European Union, is the only country with known infections in cows.

"While we have nine official positives, there are many, many, many more farms that are impacted or infected that are just not testing," said Joe Armstrong, a veterinarian and cattle expert at the University of Minnesota, who has spoken with farmers across the state.

A more accurate cattle case count for Minnesota would be three to five times higher, Mr. Armstrong said.

A USDA spokesperson said the agency has encouraged testing by requiring negative tests for cows being shipped over state lines since April and offering a voluntary program for testing farmers' milk supplies weekly.

Twenty-four dairy herds are participating in that program, of roughly 24,000 farms nationally that sell milk, according to agency data.

Six farmers, veterinarians, and other experts said farmers were reluctant to test because they did not believe the virus is a serious concern, or because government incentives to test did not offset their expected losses.

Colorado farmer Terry Dye, 78, said his two dairies were infected this summer and he did not notify the state because he wanted to handle it privately. State agriculture officials eventually heard about the infections and quarantined his animals, he said.

"Sometimes it's more convenient to not know," said Mr. Dye. USDA offers to compensate farmers with infected animals for veterinary care and 90% of lost milk production. Forty-seven herds have signed up for agency financial assistance, though that total includes farms without infections that are seeking support for biosecurity costs.

USDA tests raw milk from cows to identify the virus in herds. The Food and Drug Administration has separately tested commercial milk supplies and says pasteurization kills the virus, so milk is safe to drink.

Experts said ways to better track the spread include more states mandating raw-milk testing or higher compensation to farmers. Michigan and Colorado have taken aggressive approaches to containing bird flu in cattle, though experts there still think cases are being missed.

Phil Durst, an educator with Michigan State University who has spoken with farmers whose herds contracted the virus, said Michigan's 27 positive herds are likely an undercount by at least a third.

Jenna Guthmiller, an assistant professor of immunology at the University of Colorado who has studied the virus, said Colorado's 63 positive herds are also likely an undercount.

After a series of outbreaks, Colorado on July 22 became the only state to require dairy farms to test bulk supplies of milk each week. The tests have uncovered 10 infected herds that have been quarantined.

“Once we better understand the scope and scale of the outbreak, we can put measures in place to mitigate further spread,” said Maggie Baldwin, Colorado’s state veterinarian.

Some farmers do not test because they distrust government officials or information about the risks of bird flu to cattle and humans, four sources said.

“There’s plenty of dairy farms that I’ve heard about that just don’t believe it,” said Jason Schmidt, a dairy farmer in eastern Kansas.

In Oklahoma, a dairy that suspected it was infected in April did not submit stored milk samples to USDA for testing until July, according to the state. The herd had recovered by the time testing confirmed an outbreak, and Oklahoma has not had other reported cases, the state said.

In states with few or no infected cows, farmers and veterinarians are concerned that when the virus arrives or resurges, they won’t be able to track it.

“The longstanding adage is that the cure for fever is don’t take a temperature. So, if we don’t test, then we’re not positive,” said Mark Hardesty, a dairy cattle veterinarian in Ohio, which reported one dairy herd infection in April.

Wisconsin, the No. 2 milk-producing and top cheese-producing state, has not reported any bird-flu cases in cattle.

Dairy farmers likely would not test even if they suspected symptoms in their herds, said Keith Poulsen, director of the Wisconsin Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory. “It’s still cheaper to just go through a herd outbreak, recover, and move on down the road,” Mr. Poulsen said. — **Reuters**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2024/08/19/614703/us-undercounts-bird-flu-in-cattle-as-farmers-shun-testing/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

High hopes in Israel for cocoa that survived Gaza frontline conditions

August 19, 2024 | 12:01 am



REUTERS

ESHKOL COUNCIL, Israel — Farming can develop in mysterious ways. Israeli researchers learned about that when the war in Gaza seemed to have all but wrecked their work on a more resilient strain of the cocoa plant that could help alleviate a global shortage of the beans.

Just days after Israel's agriculture research center, the Volcani Institute, sent 140 seedlings to a facility in southern Israel to study how this tropical plant could be grown in dry conditions, the area came under attack by the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas.

The Oct. 7 assault that sparked the war in Gaza, paralyzed southern Israel and left the facility shut down for months without electricity or irrigation.

“When we came back in January, we saw everything around us, all the experiments that died,” said Talli Ilani, a researcher at the R&D Darom site. Everything except for 18 cocoa seedlings.

While the team had not planned on testing the selected cocoa strains specifically for drought resistance, they may have found just that. “It’s a very unusual result, to find a strain that can withstand 3-1/2 months

of drought as new fresh seedlings and also severe cold front,” said Ellen Graber, a senior principal scientist at the Volcani Institute.

“It means that we may be able to develop strains that can expand the growing regions for cocoa.”

Bad weather and disease have hurt cocoa production and sent global cocoa prices soaring. Ms. Graber now plans to clone the surviving plants — which she refers to as “super heroes” — and test them for other qualities such as resistance to pests, and identify the genes responsible for their resilience.

The Volcani Institute has developed resilient plant strains in the past, including drought-resistant wheat that ripens earlier and with a higher nutrient content, as well as a chill-resistant basil that yields all year round. — **Reuters**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2024/08/19/614701/high-hopes-in-israel-for-cocoa-that-survived-gaza-frontline-conditions/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

China central bank pledges billions worth of funding to speed along recovery in disaster-hit farm regions

August 19, 2024 | 12:02 am



REUTERS

BEIJING/HONG KONG — China's central bank said it will provide an additional 100 billion yuan (\$14 billion) to banks to support rebuilding areas devastated by floods, after recent extreme weather damaged around 6 million acres of crops.

The world's largest agricultural importer has in recent weeks been plagued by Typhoon Gaemi lashing its eastern seaboard, record rains in its southern rice fields, and intense heat waves across its northern corn and wheat yielding regions.

After state media reported Vice Premier Liu Guozhong called for China's vast agricultural sector to push for a bumper harvest this autumn, the central bank announced it will issue a further 100 billion yuan of a re-lending facility to support 12 areas with flood prevention and reconstruction initiatives.

The People's Bank of China (PBoC) will direct the funding towards Fujian, Guangdong, Henan, Heilongjiang, Hunan, Jilin, Jiangxi, Liaoning, Shaanxi and Sichuan provinces, along with the megacity of

Chongqing and the Guangxi region, and to farmers, small and micro-sized firms and households, a statement said.

The PBoC had issued a total of 2.61 trillion yuan in re-lending quotas to support agriculturalists and small firms.

“The PBoC will urge its branches in relevant provinces to make good use of the newly added re-lending quotas... ensure the funding needs of disaster-stricken enterprises and help them resume production,” it added.

China suffered 76.9 billion yuan in economic losses from natural disasters last month, with 88% of those losses caused by heavy rains and floods, according to the Ministry of Emergency Management.

It was the biggest amount of losses for the month of July since 2021, ministry data showed.

Mr. Liu, during his visit to Liaoning and Jilin provinces over the weekend and Monday, urged officials to improve the agriculture sector’s capacity for disaster prevention and mitigation, according to the official Xinhua news agency.

He also “urged measures to drain accumulated water, promote the restoration of affected crops and guide farmers in replanting areas where crops were destroyed,” the report added.

Producers from the US to Brazil and Indonesia will be watching to see whether China will increase its food imports to meet the demands of its 1.4 billion people.

A cut in domestic farm output could bolster the Asian giant’s demand for overseas supplies, which would impact global food supply and prices.

Beijing envisions 92% self-sufficiency in staple grains and beans by 2033, up from 84% during 2021-2023. But an increase in the number of extreme weather events calls that into question.

Natural disasters in July affected almost 26.4 million people across China, with 328 either dead or missing. More than one million people were relocated, 12,000 houses collapsed and 157,000 more were damaged. Some 2.42 million hectares (5.98 million acres) of crop area were also affected. — **Reuters**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2024/08/19/614702/china-central-bank-pledges-billions-worth-of-funding-to-speed-along-recovery-in-disaster-hit-farm-regions/>

MPIC farm unit seeks milk self-sufficiency

By Earl John Alfaro

August 19, 2024

METRO Pacific Agro Ventures (MPAV), the agribusiness arm of Manuel V. Pangilinan-led Metro Pacific Investment Corp. (MPIC), is aiming to be self-sufficient in the milk business by 2026 following its recent acquisition of Universal Harvester Dairy Farms Inc. (UHDFI), the operator of Bukidnon Milk Co. (BMC) for P700 million.

Jovy Hernandez, MPAV chief executive officer, said the new acquisition was "very complimentary to our existing dairy business in Laguna and gives us the opportunity to produce ice cream in Mindanao and distribute in [the] Visayas and Mindanao."

Hernandez added that the newly acquired dairy farm allows MPAV to hit two targets at once — ice cream production and milk supply.

"Finally, we've reached 140 milking cows in Laguna. Before, it was, on average, about 95-97 [cows]. We never broke the 100 mark. But because of the investments that we've done in Laguna Creamery, at the end of July, we already have 140 [milking cows], and [the number is growing]," he added.

MPAV aims to reach 200 milking cows by December to double the company's output.

With its acquisition of Universal Harvesters, the company can enter the milk market because Bukidnon Milk has a 1,000-strong herd, 200 of which are milking cows that could be immediately added to the pool of milk supply.

"They have about close to 300. We call them heifers, meaning they're young cows" that have not had a calf yet, that can enter the milking pool, Hernandez explained.

"If you add now the investments that we've had with our Israeli partners, LR Group, that will open the largest integrated dairy facility in Laguna by [the first quarter] of 2025. We will be able to achieve what we call our dairy milk supply self-sufficiency [target] by 2026," he added.

The Laguna Creamery Inc. (TLCI) is known for its popular brands, Carmen's Best ice cream and Holly's Milk, and has doubled its sales in just two years.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/08/19/business/corporate-news/mpic-farm-unit-seeks-milk-self-sufficiency/1964927>

MPIC to expand agri venture

By Ruelle Castro

August 19, 2024

The agriculture venture of conglomerate Metro Pacific Investments Corp. is looking at egg production and carabao milk as it works to bring its other businesses to profitability, according to Juan Victor Hernandez, MPAV president.

“Protein could either be meat, eggs or aquaculture. All of those are very interesting. (But) to be frank, with meat, we’re kind of cautious because of the ASF (African swine fever) in terms of pork. For chicken, there’s the Avian flu. But for eggs, that’s a very interesting area. So we’re looking at that,” Hernandez said, noting that the two areas complement the company’s core strategy of looking at the “Filipino plate.”

As for carabao milk, Hernandez said it will be a big boost to local farmers while giving MPAV other sources for its materials to process cheese.

“There are many carabaos in the Philippines, (the carabao) is the quintessential symbol of agriculture. But we only use it for tilling the land. In other countries, they actually milk the carabao. So if I can get, for example, two liters from every farmer, that’s extra income for the farmer that I can process the cheese from,” he said.

Hernandez said the agri venture is now “doing well” from a revenue standpoint, with all metrics up.

“We’re now working on our EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization) and core income. If we look at the different components, we’re happy to announce on the ice cream side, we’re already positive EBITDA and making net income on ice cream. We have to work on the dairy side because that’s also lower margin from a business perspective. We’re able to grow the volumes there. We’re confident we’ll be able to have positive EBITDA by next year as a total dairy business,” he said.

Hernandez said MPAV expects to be self-sufficient in terms of milk supply by 2026 with the acquisition of Mindanao-based Universal Harvester Dairy Farms Inc., or the Bukidnon Milk Company, while addressing the dairy and ice cream needs of Visayas and Mindanao.

“...Bukidnon Milk Company in Maramag (has) a herd of 1,000 (cows) ... 200 of which is (for milking). So that will immediately add to the pool of milk supply that is required by the company to further grow. They have about close to 300 heifers, young cows that can enter the milking pool,” he said.

“They are very complementary to our existing dairy business in Laguna. They don’t have an ice cream business. We do. So, that automatically gives us the opportunity to produce ice cream in Mindanao and distribute in Visayas and Mindanao, which is more efficient from a cost perspective,” Hernandez added.

MPAV is beefing up the capacity of the dairy of Carmen's Best (Laguna Creamery) and is preparing for the commercial operation of the country's largest integrated dairy facility in Bay, Laguna through a joint venture with the LR Group of Israel.

"We've reached 140 milking cows in Laguna. Before, it was, on average, about 95 or 97.

We never broke the 100-mark. But because of the investments that we've done in Laguna Creamery, by the end of July, we already have 140 and growing," Hernandez said.

"Our target for December is (to) achieve 200 milking cows in Laguna, which... will double production of ice cream," he added.

Once the Laguna facility goes online by the first quarter of 2025, MPAV will achieve "dairy self-sufficiency" by 2026, noted Hernandez.

With this, Hernandez said the company "will now start the growth path for the dairy line" by diversifying into fresh milk.

"We want that to be as big as the ice cream business," he added.

MPAV is also working to expand its 3.5-hectare, 800- metric ton annual output vegetable greenhouse in San Rafael, Bulacan, set to start commercial operation by January.

"We've been given instructions already next year that the three and a half will double to seven (hectares, which) is the original plan to produce 1,600 metric tons of vegetables," he said.

https://malaya.com.ph/news_business/mpic-to-expand-agri-venture

More ASF-infected swine seized in QC, Valenzuela

Ada Pelonia
August 19, 2024

THE Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) seized two more trucks carrying hogs suspected to be infected with African swine fever (ASF) at checkpoints on Commonwealth Avenue, Quezon City, and Malanday, Valenzuela City, over the weekend.

BAI reported that one of the trucks was found carrying 38 hogs, while the other had 11. It added that the pigs are currently being tested for the deadly hog disease.

“Upon inspection, it was discovered that one of the trucks was using a recycled Local Shipping Permit [LSP] while the other was transporting pigs that showed clinical signs of African Swine Fever,” BAI said in a statement.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) earlier set up checkpoints following the rapid spread of ASF in Batangas.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary for Swine and Poultry Dante Palabrica said the agency has increased the number of checkpoints in the north and south of the capital region to prevent the transport of sick pigs and chickens.

“Permits must be complete and genuine, otherwise, the animals will be immediately tested. If found positive for disease, the animals will be condemned,” Palabrica said.

“The local governments, BAI, and the National Meat Inspection Service [NMIS] are working closely to ensure that meat sold in our markets is safe and clean. Meat that has the NMIS seal is safe to consume,” he added.

The DA said it continues to enforce stricter measures to protect the livestock industry and ensure public safety amidst the threat of ASF.

Meanwhile, the department wants to fast-track the emergency procurement of ASF vaccines to address the outbreak. (See: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/08/08/da-plans-purchase-of-asf-vaccines-after-outbreak-in-batangas/>)

Calabarzon, which includes Batangas, was the top hog producer in the Philippines in the first quarter, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

As of January 1, PSA said the swine inventory in Batangas rose by 22.4 percent year-on-year to 943,180 heads. This is because commercial raisers are encouraged to increase their stocks due to no ASF incidence, and increasing farmgate price.

The department is eyeing the roll-out of the ASF vaccine this week to curb the spread of the fatal hog disease that slashed the country's pork output since it was detected in the country in 2019.

Based on BAI monitoring, 64 towns and 251 barangays have active ASF cases as of August 8.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/08/19/more-asf-infected-swine-seized-in-qc-valenzuela>

Philippines starts shipping raw sugar to US

By Philippine News Agency
August 19, 2024

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) announced on Sunday the start of loading for the shipment of 25,300 metric tons (MT) of raw sugar to fulfill the country's sugar allocation quota to the United States as provided in Sugar Order (SO) 3.

The manual loading of the sugar supply from Negros Occidental began on Saturday, with 1,500 MT to be loaded daily for about 15 days to the cargo vessel Tate J docked at Bredco Port in the province.

"It will take about 15 days to load the shipment, provided we have good weather. It will take 30 days for the cargo to reach US soil," SRA Administrator Pablo Luis Azcona said in a statement.

"This will balance out the supply of raw sugar in the country when milling starts this September," he added.

SRA records showed about 30 sugar traders participated in the administration's call last year to buy domestic sugar to stabilize farmgate prices, which dropped to a low of P2,400 per bag of 50 kilograms.

In exchange, traders can import and export when needed.

They bought raw sugar at an average price of P2,700 per bag, and sold it at the US export price of only P1,800 per bag.

"We thank the traders who participated in the program even if they are exporting sugar now at an estimated loss of P900 to P1,200 per bag of sugar," Azcona said.

The opportunity to import refined sugar will give them a little profit to recoup their expenses, he added.

To hasten the loading of the US-bound sugar, the city government here granted the SRA an exemption from the truck ban, which is in effect 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on weekdays.

This allows the uninterrupted loading of sugar within 15 days, or else the exporters will be charged additional fees for each day of delay, unless disruption of loading is weather-related.

"We also thank Bacolod City Mayor Alfredo Abelardo Benitez for lifting the truck ban for sugar loaded trucks en route to the port," Azcona said.

SO 3 allows "the Philippines to fulfill its US quota allocation of 25,300 MT," the first export of sugar this year in order to participate in future import programs.

The Office of the US Trade Representative previously said the Philippines would be able to deliver an additional 145,235 MT raw value of raw cane sugar in 2025, covering the period Oct. 1, 2024 to Sept. 30, 2025.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/08/19/business/top-business/philippines-starts-shipping-raw-sugar-to-us>

Fall armyworms damage corn in W. Visayas

Ada Pelonia
August 19, 2024



A fall armyworm crawls along the corn stalk after a farmer in Caraga region—earlier hit by infestation—opens the node where it is hiding.

Fall armyworms have damaged P57 million worth of standing corn crops, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

In its initial report, the DA said the volume of production losses incurred in Western Visayas was pegged at 734 metric tons (MT) planted by 5,279 farmers.

The DA reported that the affected area reached 3,237 hectares (ha), but corn planted in 2,820 ha may still be recovered.

The department said it provided interventions to affected farms, such as the distribution of biocontrol agents and registered insecticides to farmers for

immediate pest control, continuous production of biocontrol agents and maintaining a buffer stock of recommended insecticides, and the conduct of training sessions on pest management strategies, among others.

The Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) also released management strategies to combat the infestation of FAW.

Among these recommendations are the inspection, quarantine, destruction of infested material, and the conduct of early planting, weed management, proper fertilization, irrigation, cultivation, crop rotation, and avoidance adjacent sequential planting.

It added the installation of adult pheromone traps to attract (usually) male insects to monitor pest populations and provide early detection capabilities to enable farmers implement timely interventions, such as applying biological control agents (BCAs), use of chemical controls, and employing other effective measures.

“BCAs are available for free at the BPI-Crop Pest Management Division and Regional Crop Protection Centers (RCPCs) nationwide,” the report read.

The United States Department of Agriculture-Foreign Agricultural Service in Manila (USDA-FAS Manila) said in its recent report that the country’s corn production in the marketing year (MY) 2024-2025 may decline due to fall armyworms infesting local farms. (*See: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/07/12/phl-corn-production-seen-declining-on-fall-armyworm-damage-report/>*)

“FAS Manila forecasts lower MY 2024/25 corn production as multiple producers and industry contacts report reduced area planted and ongoing issues with Fall Army Worm,” the report read.

The USDA-FAS Manila projected that local corn production in MY 2024-2025 would decline by 2.38 percent to 8.2 million metric tons (MMT) from 8.4 MMT in the previous MY.

In June, BusinessMirror carried a special report on the fall armyworm devastation of corn fields in the Caraga region, which a regional crop protection specialist attributed to temperature changes.

Though they have monitored the fall armyworm in the region in 2020, this cropping season's infestation is unprecedented compared to previous years. (See: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/06/09/a-war-on-worms-in-warm-weather/>)

With lower corn production due to fall armyworm, imports of both corn and wheat are expected to rise to meet growing feed demand.

Figures from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed that corn production in April to June fell by 20.3 percent to 1.174 million metric tons (MMT), from last year's 1.473 MMT.

PSA data also showed that corn production in the first half reached 3.706 MMT, or 7.17 percent lower than the 3.993 MMT recorded a year ago. Output of yellow corn used in animal feeds declined to 3.030 MMT from last year's 3.258 MMT.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, fall armyworm infestation causes stunting and destruction of developing tassels and kernels, which reduces **grain quality and yield**.

Image credits: [Erwin Mascariñas](#)

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/08/19/fall-armyworms-damage-corn-in-w-visayas>

ABANTE TONITE

African Swine Fever gapang sa mga probinsya, NCR bantay-sarado

August 18, 2024

Nakapasok na ang sakit na African Swine Fever (ASF) ng mga alagang baboy sa ilang bahagi ng mga probinsya ng Cagayan, Isabela at Nueva Vizcaya kaya naglagay na rin ng checkpoint ang mga local government unit (LGU).

Ayon kay Department of Agriculture (DA) Cagayan Valley anti-ASF focal person Dr. Manuel Galang Jr., DA at mga LGU ay nagpatupad ng pork ban sa mga apektadong lugar upang mapigil ang virus habang nagtalaga na rin ng mga checkpoint ang Regional African Swine Fever Task Force.

Sabi ng opisyal, kabilang sa mga apektadong lugar ang mga bayan ng Sta. Fe, Dupax Del Norte, Dupax Del Sur at Bambang sa Nueva Vizcaya; Angadanan at San Guillermo sa Isabela; at Enrile at Iguig sa Cagayan.

Hindi bababa sa 124 na baboy ang sinunog na sa mga apektadong lugar, ayon kay Galang.

Sa kabila nito, inihayag ni Galang na “isolated” pa rin ang mga kaso ng ASF at kakaunti lamang ang mga nayon sa mga apektadong lugar.

Dagdag pa nito na nasa 600,000 doses ng anti-ASF vaccine ang kanilang inaasahan na darating sa lalong madaling panahon sa Region 2 o Cagayan Valley.

Samantala, nagdagdag ng quarantine checkpoint ang DA at Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) sa National Capital Region (NCR) habang nakikipagtulungan na rin sila sa National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS) upang matiyak na ligtas kainin ang karneng baboy na mabibili sa mga pamilihan. (Allan Bergonia/Dong King Zarate)

<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2024/08/18/african-swine-fever-gapang-sa-mga-probinsya-ncr-bantay-sarado>