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MANILA BULLETIN:

PH Competition Commission to file charges vs 12 onion importers, traders

BY ARGYLL CYRUS GEDUCOS

Aug 25, 2024 06:51 AM

AT A GLANCE

- Under SONA Directive No. PBBM-2023-021, President Marcos ordered the PCC and other government agencies to pursue the filing of cases against smugglers, hoarders, and those engaged in anti-competitive practices.

In response to President Marcos' directive to go after smugglers and hoarders, the Philippine Competition Commission (PCC) will be filing a case against 12 onion importers and traders engaged in anti-competitive practices.



Unsplash

In a memorandum for President Marcos coursed through Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin, the PCC said the companies and individuals engaged in onion importation and trading violated the Philippine Competition Act.

The PCC Enforcement Office recommended a total fine of P2.4 billion against the violators.

Based on the PCC Enforcement Office's probe, the respondents agreed to allocate the supply of onions in the country.

It said evidence showed the respondents assigned among themselves sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances (SPSIC) issued by the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Plant Industry (DA-BPI) and distributed the volume of onion allowed for importation.

"By agreeing to allocate SPSICs and divide among themselves the actual volume of imports, respondents effectively controlled more than 50 percent of the volume of onions imported into the Philippines during the relevant period," the PCC's memorandum dated Aug. 13 read.

"This is an anti-competitive agreement penalized under Section 14(b)(2) of the PCA," it added.

According to the PCC, the respondents "colluded" to lessen competition in the market.

"Evidence showed that respondents, despite being competitors, shared, exchanged, and discussed sensitive business information such as price, suppliers, customers, volume, shipping, distribution, and storage," it said.

With such a scheme, the PCC said the importers and traders avoided competing with each other and failed to independently decide on their policies and substituted the risk of competition with cooperation.

"Such an agreement has the object of restriction or distortion of competition and has inherent restrictive effects upon competition," it said.

Under SONA Directive No. PBBM-2023-021, President Marcos ordered the PCC and other government agencies to pursue the filing of cases against smugglers, hoarders, and those engaged in anti-competitive practices.

https://mb.com.ph/2024/8/25/ph-competition-commission-to-file-charges-vs-12-onion-importers-traders#google_vignette

MANILA BULLETIN:

It's National Coconut Week: Improve production, enhance nutrition

BY MANILA BULLETIN

Aug 25, 2024 00:12 AM



Today, we pause to think about the value of the coconut, also referred to as the “tree of life” for its wide array of nutritional value and uses. From its water, a high-electrolyte beverage, to its fresh meat with essential vitamins and minerals, to desiccated meat used in baking; to the popular virgin coconut oil (VCO) – the coconut is the “rock star” of local fruits for its widespread popularity. Who does not know or recognize the coconut in the Philippines?

The Philippines is the second largest producer of coconuts in the world, next to Indonesia. Based on 2018 data, there are over 347 million fruit-bearing coconut trees in the country, where 69 out of 82 provinces grow it, according to the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCAARRD).

August is National Coconut Month. From Aug. 24 to 30, the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) celebrates the 38th National Coconut Week “to pay tribute of honor and thanksgiving for the blessings and benefits derived from the coconut industry and to establish a continuing awareness of its lasting importance to our national life.”

The highlight of this year's celebration will be the National Ceremonial Planting on Aug. 28, 2024, which will be done simultaneously around the country, in line with President Marcos' goal of planting 100 million coconut trees by 2028. The planting activity aims to address the increasing senility and loss of bearing trees which has reduced the country's output of coconut fruits and its products.

In June, PCA administrator Dexter Buted, who had sought for a higher budget next year to improve coconut production, said the planting activity will help push the country to be the leading coconut producer worldwide.

The activities that will be held to celebrate the 38th National Coconut Week are designed to encourage more people to be aware of the many uses of coconut as a cooking ingredient, a source of livelihood, and for nutrition. It will also have activities that will help the farmers to live more healthy lives while boosting their production. Among these are:

A Coconut Culinary Show will present coconut-inspired recipes for nutritious and delicious food using coconut milk (gata), butter, water, nata de coco, sap syrup, sap vinegar, sugar, flour and virgin coconut oil.

There will be symposiums on the benefits of coconut products held in collaboration with the Department of Trade and Industry-Bureau of Market Development Promotion and One Town One Product.

A health and medical program aimed at improving the well-being of coconut farmers and their families, will be launched in partnership with the Department of Health. The program will ensure that farmers and their families have access to essential medical services, leading to improved overall health and enhanced financial protection. This will be launched on Aug. 27 in line with the mandate of the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan (CFIDP).

To update farmers on new technologies, an online webinar will be conducted with the theme "Transforming the lives of Filipino coconut farmers through innovative and sustainable technologies."

Celebrate the coconut fruit in your own way because it is so much a part of our lives in this country. A beverage or food you consumed today likely had a coconut ingredient. A piece of furniture or furnishing around you came from the coconut husk.

From nutrition to function, these have been provided by the "tree of life" which is nurtured by the farmers.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/8/25/it-s-national-coconut-week-improve-production-enhance-nutrition>

The rail effect



[EYES WIDE OPEN](#) - [Iris Gonzales](#) - The Philippine Star

August 25, 2024 | 12:00am



Agricultural fields – planted with rice, sugar, corn or what-have-you – are abundant in this country. You’ll see them in forgotten and far-flung rural villages, on both sides of narrow provincial roads or national highways or at the foot of towering mountain ranges. They’re either straight, wide or undulating but all sprawling and evergreen – as far as the eye can see.

In some places, like in faraway Bicol, some of these fields are found in the shadows of passing trains – and unfortunately, that’s the closest they’ll ever meet, at least for now, as The STAR’s transport reporter Elijah Rosales wrote in a special report he co-authored with agriculture reporter Jasper Arcalas.

Their story is a two-part special report on the need to revive the fabled Bicol Express, the train between Manila and Bicol but this time, to include freight services. It’s an important story which I urge you all to read (See Rural resurgence requires rail revival, The STAR, published on Aug. 20 and 21).

The report puts the spotlight on Bicol, a food basket, and how reviving the train to Manila can help its farmers bring their produce faster and cheaper to their market, to our tables.

Fortunately, there are plans to launch such a cargo service.

In the report, Transportation Undersecretary Jeremy Regino said the government is looking for a financier for the Philippine National Railways South Long Haul.

This time, Usec. Regino said the government wants to retrofit the alignment to the south of Luzon for cargo purposes.

“The plan, if pursued, could change the game for the close to 600,000 farmers in Bicol,” the report said.

Regino told The STAR that the PNR would ask for P5 billion to pursue this project. He prays lawmakers would give it a chance, especially as it will benefit farmers. The PNR will spend the bulk of the P5 billion in building a dry port in Calamba where containers can be lifted in and out of the freight trains. The agency would also have to acquire flat cars, the rolling stock with open decks used mainly for cargo carriage.

It is one of the most important stories I’ve read so far this year and I fervently hope policymakers would take such plans into consideration.

Importance of rails

Those of us who have had the chance to visit other countries must have experienced taking the intercity or interstate trains, and on the central stations or while on the train ride itself, it’s hard not to notice the long, snaking freight trains, moving from one city, province or country to another.

How unfortunate that our country did not prioritize having our own freight rail. We have moved from one administration to another yet no leader had the vision to initiate such a critical infrastructure project.

We wrack our heads wondering how to strengthen our agriculture industry but we just needed to connect farmers in food baskets such as Bicol to their markets, at a lower cost.

The importance of rails, not just for the movement of people but for goods, too, cannot be over-emphasized. We’ve seen this in other countries.

Big news from Canada, for instance, is the impact of a massive rail shutdown which took effect recently.

The shutdown, brought about by a work stoppage of some 10,000 workers, covers the Canadian National Railway and Canadian Pacific Kansas City.

According to a news report published by freshfruitportal.com, concerns about the strike’s impact on agriculture are growing.

The coalition Stopthestrike.ca which gathers members of the agriculture sector, sent a letter to the Canadian Minister of Labor, Steve MacKinnon, stating, “Rail service disruptions jeopardize the timely delivery of our products to international markets, leading to delayed shipments, contract penalties and canceled orders.”

Furthermore, the report said, it is not only farmers and consumers that are affected but global food affordability and security as well.

Even traders from the US depend on the Canadian railway system.

According to a report from the USDA-Agricultural Marketing Service Grain Transportation, US-Canadian agricultural trade is largely dependent on rail as the products are moved by rail.

In 2023, \$28.2 billion of US agricultural products were exported to Canada, making Canada the third largest destination for agricultural exports (behind China and Mexico). In the same year, the United States imported \$40.1 billion of Canadian agricultural products, making Canada the second-largest origin of US agricultural imports (behind Mexico), according to the report, as quoted by the American Farm Bureau Federation.

This goes to show the importance of rail in moving agricultural products.

Now if only we had a cargo or freight train service here in our country instead of prioritizing road development to accommodate all those American car manufacturers in the post American colonial era.

I imagine that our roads would have been decongested because farmers wouldn't have to rely on trucks to transport their goods at higher prices.

I'm not so sure about the economic viability of operating a freight train. Perhaps it's not that lucrative, which is why no tycoon has proposed it.

But if the government looks beyond the viability of the freight rail itself, it would realize that every Filipino – taxpayer, consumer, motorist, farmer and every local industry – would benefit from having an efficient cargo service.

After all, where railroads go, people, goods and services follow, and where the railroads end, opportunities, much like the train doors, swing wide open.

<https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2024/08/25/2380306/rail-effect>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

West PH Sea: China Coast Guard ship rams BFAR vessel near Escoda Shoal

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

[Agence France-Presse](#), [INQUIRER.net](#) / 02:47 PM August 25, 2024



ABOARD BRP DATU SANDAY, West Philippine Sea —China Coast Guard ship 21551 rammed the BRP Datu Sanday 10 nautical miles from Escoda Shoal in the West Philippine Sea at about 2:11 p.m. | PHOTO: Nestor Corrales

MANILA, Philippines — A China Coast Guard (CCG) ship rammed a vessel of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) near Escoda (Sabina) Shoal in the West Philippine Sea (WPS) on Sunday afternoon.

Based on a video taken by the Inquirer, CCG Ship 21551 hit BRP Datu Sanday while some of its personnel were seen filming the incident.

The collision occurred about 10 nautical miles from Escoda Shoal at 2:11 p.m.

Another video posted by the Inquirer showed that the CCG ship 4102 fired a water cannon against BRP Datu Sanday while en route to the shoal.

Additionally, six CCG vessels simultaneously fired water cannons against the BFAR vessel.

INQUIRER.net has asked the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) for more details, but it has yet to reply as of posting time.

China's state broadcaster CCTV reported, "The Philippine vessel 3002 illegally intruded into the waters near Xianbin Reef in the Nansha Islands without permission from the Chinese government." CCTV referred to the Chinese names for Sabina Shoal and the Spratly Islands.

The vessel then "continued to dangerously approach a Chinese coast guard vessel conducting normal operations", CCTV said, adding that the coast guard had "taken control measures against the Philippine vessel in accordance with the law and regulations".

The Philippines a day earlier accused China of recently firing flares at one of its aircraft as it patrolled over the West Philippine Sea.

And on Monday, both countries said their coast guard ships had collided near the disputed Sabina Shoal, located 140 kilometers (86 miles) west of the Philippine island of Palawan and about 1,200 kilometers from Hainan island, the closest Chinese landmass.

Manila had said that it was the first hostile action by Beijing against it near Sabina, where both sides have stationed coast guard vessels in recent months and where the Philippines fears China is about to build an artificial island.

China and the Philippines have had repeated confrontations in the waters in recent months, including around a warship grounded years ago by Manila on the contested Second Thomas Shoal that hosts a garrison.

Last Aug. 13, the Philippine Navy monitored 92 Chinese vessels in various locations within the WPS from Aug. 6 to 12 this year.

Of this number, 10 were CCG vessels, nine were People's Liberation Army Navy ships, 68 were Chinese maritime militia vessels, and two were research survey vessels.

Ten of the 92 vessels were spotted at Panatag Shoal, 13 at Ayungin Shoal, 38 at the Pagasa Islands, five at Lawak Island, five at Panata Island, 13 at Sabina Shoal, four at Julian Felipe Reef, and 30 at Iroquois Reef.

China claims almost the entire South China Sea and has ignored an international tribunal ruling that its assertions have no legal basis.

It deploys boats to patrol the busy waterway and has built artificial islands that it has militarized to reinforce its claims.

For comprehensive coverage, in-depth analysis, visit our special page for [West Philippine Sea updates](#). Stay informed with articles, videos, and expert opinions.

<https://www.inquirer.net/411789/west-ph-sea-china-coast-guard-ship-rams-bfar-vessel-near-escoda-shoal/>

REMATE:

Barko ng BFAR pinalibutan ng 20 Chinese maritime militia vessels sa WPS

August 25, 2024 14:44



MANILA, Philippines – Pinalibutan ng nasa 20 barko ng Chinese maritime militia ang barko ng Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) habang namamahagi ng krudo at food packs sa mga mangingisda sa Iroquois Reef nitong Sabado ng umaga, Agosto 24.

Sa video, makikitang nakaikot ang mga barko ng China sa BRP Datu Romapenet.

Namataan din ang isang barko ng People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) sa layong 4 nautical miles mula sa barko ng BFAR.

Nitong Biyernes ng gabi, Agosto 23, binuntutan ng isa pang PLAN vessel na may bow number 527 ang Datu Romapenethabang patungo sa Iroquois reef.

Lumapit ito ng halos 300 metro mula sa barko ng BFAR.

Sa kabila nito ay nagpatuloy naman ang pamamahagi ng krudo at pagkain sa mga Filipino roon. **RNT/JGC**

<https://remate.ph/barko-ng-bfar-pinalibutan-ng-20-chinese-maritime-militia-vessels-sa-wps/>

REMATE:

ASF checkpoint sa QC nilampasan ng trak na puno ng mga baboy

August 25, 2024 10:49



MANILA, Philippines – Sinubukan umano ng isang truck driver na may dalang mga baboy, na lampasan ang African Swine Fever checkpoint sa Mindanao Avenue, Quezon City.

Sa ulat, ang trak ay may kargang siyam na baboy mula San Juan, Batangas at dadalhin sana patungong Caloocan City.

“Hinabol po doon tapos pinabalik nalang natin kasama ng ating kapulisan. Doon po namin natrace na wala po siyang lisensya,” sinabi ni Rodel Luces ng Quezon City Traffic Transportation Management Department.

“Wala po akong rason na takbuhan sila kasi kumpleto naman po ako ng papel. Lahat naman po ng checkpoint na nadaanan namin, kahit pulis po, hinihintuan ko,” depensa naman ng truck driver.

Sa pagsisiyasat, ilan sa mga baboy ay may rashes sa kanilang katawan na posibleng sintomas ng ASF.

Ipinadala na sa Bureau of Animal Industry ang mga ito para isailalim sa ASF testing. ***RNT/JGC***

<https://remate.ph/asf-checkpoint-sa-qc-nilampasan-ng-trak-na-puno-ng-mga-baboy/>

Philippines says China is “distorting the truth” on water cannon attack vs BFAR vessel



Screengrab from a video released by the National Task Force on the West Philippine Sea (NTF-WPS) on August 25, 2024, showing a China Coast Guard vessel intentionally ramming a Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) ship on a resupply mission to Escoda Shoal. (Courtesy: NTF-WPS)

By [Vince Lopez](#)

August 25, 2024, 5:53 pm

The National Task Force on the West Philippine Sea (NTF-WPS) accused China of “distorting the truth” again concerning its latest “aggressive maneuvers” on a Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) vessel that the Philippines deployed for a “humanitarian mission” near Escoda Shoal.

In a statement on Sunday, the NTF-WPS said the incident involved the BFAR’s BRP Datu Sanday, which encountered eight Chinese vessels while en route from Hasa-Hasa Shoal to Escoda Shoal on August 25, 2024.

During the mission, the BRP Datu Sanday was blocked by a combination of Chinese naval and coast guard vessels, including a People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) ship and multiple China Coast Guard (CCG) ships, according to the task force.

“The CCG vessels made close perilous maneuvers that resulted in ramming, blasted horns, and deployed water cannons against the BFAR vessel, eventually leading to the latter’s engine failure and forcing an early termination of the humanitarian operation,” the statement read.

The Chinese vessels’ actions were aimed at preventing the BFAR ship from resupplying Filipino fishermen with essential supplies such as diesel, food, and medical aid. The NTF-WPS described these moves as “unprofessional, aggressive, and illegal.”

The task force also dismissed Beijing’s claims that a Filipino crew had fallen overboard and were rescued by the CCG. It said these false reports are part of China’s broader strategy to distort the truth and manipulate public perception.

“This fake news and misinformation serve as a clear illustration of the PRC’s (People’s Republic of China) willingness to distort the truth and engage in disinformation to bolster its public image,” the NTF-WPS said.

The incident occurred within the Philippines’ exclusive economic zone (EEZ), approximately 60 nautical miles from Hasa-Hasa Shoal and 110 nautical miles from Escoda or Sabina Shoal.

The Philippine government reiterated its commitment to defending its territorial rights and called on China to cease actions that threaten regional stability.

Manila also urged Beijing to adhere to international law, specifically the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the 2016 Arbitral Award, which supports the Philippines’ claims in the WPS.

<https://www.manilastandard.net/news/top-stories/314488590/philippines-says-china-is-distorting-the-truth-on-water-cannon-attack-against-bfar-vessel.html>

Farmers, commuters urge road repair

By Harley Palangchao

August 25, 2024

BENGUET — The eroded section of the Halsema Highway in Bakun town that crippled transportation in one of the primary routes in the Cordillera region will be repaired soon, said Rep. Eric Go Yap.

The road section, which is within an identified geohazard area, eroded on Friday afternoon resulting in the disruption of movements of people and goods in northern Benguet and nearby provinces of Mountain Province, Ifugao and Ilocos Sur.

Thousands of farmers and commuters, including local officials, appealed for the immediate repair of the road section.



A MAJOR CONCERN Personnel of the Benguet Police Provincial Office secure the eroded section of the Halsema Highway in Gambang, Bakun, on Aug. 23, 2024. Thousands of commuters and farmers have appealed for the immediate repair of the damaged section of one of the major routes in the Cordillera region. BUGUIAS PNP PHOTO

At present, farmers and commuters have to navigate the Halsema-Cervantes, Ilocos Sur, via Naguilian Road and the Halsema-Buguias-Kabayan-Bokod Road to reach the trading centers in Baguio City and the capital town of La Trinidad.

Yap said authorities are looking at the lot above the eroded section as a possible immediate solution, and his office has started to look for possible sources of funds for the road repair project.

Yap also cited a development plan for the proposed cable-stayed bridge project that will cost P2.2 billion.

"After my visit to the road section earlier this year, we coordinated with the Department of Public Works and Highways, and tasked them to propose a permanent solution [with] the bridge projected at P2.2 billion. This will be a multiyear project," Yap said.

"While this incident will give birth to many other problems, we will always try to be proactive and find solutions. Meantime, I appeal for your cooperation and patience."

For now, the commuters in Benguet need to take the longer route to reach their destination.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/08/25/regions/farmers-commuters-urge-road-repair/1966587>

Tech or tilling: PHL ponders push, pull factors in farming

Jovee Marie N. de la Cruz
August 25, 2024



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LUCENA City, Quezon Province—Crow’s feet on many faces of people in the recent celebration of the Niyogyugan Festival here reveal not only the deep tradition of farming but also unearth a conundrum forcing policy makers to use their coconuts: aging farmers and tech-infatuated youth.

According to Dr. Liza Mariano, chief of the Quezon Provincial Agriculturist Office, a quiet crisis has been unfolding: farmers are getting older and fewer young people are stepping in to take their place.

For Mariano, this generational gap in the agriculture workforce is a growing concern that could have serious implications not only for the future of the coconut industry but also the country’s food security.

“We’re struggling to engage the youth [to go into farming]. We’re trying to address this with scholarships and livelihood programs; but the challenge remains. No one wants to engage,” she said adding that “the reality is stark.”

Mariano said that just a few decades ago, the average age of farmers was around 53. Today, that number has risen to 58; “and it continues to climb.”

While she noted that the reasons for this trend are complex, these boil down to the harsh truth that farming is hard work. And it’s becoming increasingly difficult to make a living from it, Mariano said.



Dr. Liza Mariano, chief of the Quezon Provincial Agriculturist Office (left), and Quezon Governor Angelina Tan. “We’re struggling to engage the youth in farming. We’re trying to address this with scholarships and livelihood programs; but the challenge remains. No one wants to engage. The reality is stark,” Mariano said.

Just don't

MARIANO said that as a parent, she would dissuade her child from going into farming.

“Don't farm, son. It's hard. Just do TikTok or vlogging to make money,” not farming, the agriculturist recalls telling her child. This, Mariano added, is a sentiment shared by many in the agriculture community. The combo of captivating city jobs and glittery digital careers has pushed too many young Filipinos away from farms, she said.

With fewer young people entering agriculture, Mariano said there is a likelihood that the country will lose the whole gamut of knowledge and skills necessary to sustain and increase farming.

According to House Committee on Agriculture Chairman Wilfrido Mark M. Enverga, rapid urbanization has led to a significant portion of the rural population, particularly the youth, abandoning agricultural activities in favor of more lucrative professions in urban areas. This trend poses a serious threat to the future of Philippine agriculture, Enverga said.

The lawmaker noted that currently, the average age of Filipino farmers is 58 years old.

“With the youth sector comprising 44 million individuals aged 15 to 40, there is an urgent need to engage this demographic in agriculture,” Enverga said. “The challenge is not just about sustaining the agricultural sector but also about ensuring national food security by 2030.”



TOURISTS visit Pagbilao’s agri-tourism booth at the Niyogyugan Festival in Lucena City, Quezon Province. The festival celebrates coconut farmers and local tourism. Held annually, it showcases Quezon’s rich agricultural heritage and its status as the top coconut-producing province in the Philippines. (Jovee Marie N. Dela Cruz)

Only natural

FOR over 70 years now, coconut farming has been the primary means of livelihood for Luzviminda Giangan’s family in San Antonio, Quezon Province.

For the Giangan family, coconut farming is more than a livelihood; it’s a way of life passed down through generations. Luzviminda’s grandparents were coconut farmers.

“And my parents continued the tradition. I continue farming; and now my children are also doing it. It was only natural for me to carry it forward,” she said. Despite

the odds, her family has never given up coconut farming. Luzviminda said she and her children are determined to keep that legacy alive.

Luzviminda said she wants her daughter and son to see that there is a livelihood and future in farming.

“It’s not as hard as people think if you know how to manage it and use technology to your advantage,” she said, adding that farming methods have changed significantly since the days of their forefathers.

“Technology has played a lot in enhancing our traditional ways into a more productive and sustainable way. In this way, better tools and ways of doing things have made the life of a coconut farmer better,” she said.

“Farming doesn’t have to be hard forever. There are ways to improve and develop our practices. We just need to be open, aware, and willing to accept changes,” Luzviminda added. “We’re no longer traditional farmers—we need to adapt to the environment and use the technology available to us.”



Luzviminda (right) and Sophia Lois V. Giangan. Luzviminda believes, “Farming doesn’t have to be hard forever. We just need to be open to improving and developing our practices.” Sophia Lois adds, “I enjoy farming because it not only offers many learnings but also allows us to help farm workers and their families.”

Values valued

LUZVIMINDA—whose name is a portmanteau of the names of the country’s three major island groups Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao—said the future of their farm is now in the hands of a new generation.

She points to her 15-year-old daughter, Sophia Lois V. Giangan.

According to Sophia, the future of farming lies in one’s capacity to adapt to changes and innovate to make processes more efficient. She said she finds happiness in the work her parents are doing and shares her passion with them.

“Nag-e-enjoy din ako sa farming kasi bukod sa maraming natututunan, marami kaming natutulungan na mga tao or mga farm workers [I also enjoy farming because, besides the many learnings, we are able to help people or farm workers],” Sophia said, adding that the latter are now able to send their children to school.

These children are now being encouraged by Sophia to take up farming.

“My advice [to these children] is to always see the opportunities and learnings that can be gained from farming,” Sophia said.

The younger Giangan believes farming is not only a noble profession but also a solution to food security.

“The youth must be made aware that food security is one of our main challenges,” Sophia said, partly in Filipino.

According to the provincial government, Quezon has a total agricultural area of nearly 4,168 square kilometers or double the size of Davao City and nearly the size of Tokyo, Japan. The figure also represents nearly half (47.87 percent) of the total provincial land area.

The total area planted with coconuts covers nearly 379,138 hectares (nearly 3,791 km²), making Quezon the province with the largest coconut production area in the Philippines. In the year 2020, Quezon was credited with producing nearly 1.5 million metric tons, making it the top coconut-producing province in the country.



Franco Bondecini of Yakap at Halik, a multipurpose cooperative based in Quezon: “Production is not the problem. It’s the price. That’s why it’s good for us to have a cooperative so there will be no middleman.”

Explore markets

THE Giangan family considers the Niyogyugan Festival as an opportunity to highlight the hard work and dedication of coconut farmers in Quezon.

“It’s not just a celebration. It’s a chance to connect with buyers, explore new markets and share our products with a wider audience,” Sophia said.

But unlike the Giangan family who owns their own land, Franco J. Bondecini of the Yakap at Halik multipurpose cooperative said young people are dissuaded from farming because of the problem of tenancy.

Bondecini said the opportunities are limited for tenants and, of course, their children. He added that children of farmers who own the land have a higher degree of motivation to continue the family’s engagement in agriculture.

Farm tenancy also offers little financial security, added Bondecini, who is also a municipal agriculturist.

“Production is not the problem. It’s the price,” he said, “That’s why it’s good for us to have a cooperative so there will be no middleman.”

Bondecì said the presence of a middleman ensures the price is high for the consumer while the farmer’s income remains low.

This situation is appalling because, according to Enverga, agriculture is the primary source of income for most rural families.

Engaging the youth

THE Quezon provincial government seeks to encourage young people into agriculture by providing scholarships and livelihood programs. According to Mariano, these initiatives are designed to show young people that farming can be a viable and rewarding career path.

Scholarship programs provide young Filipinos with the education and training needed to succeed in modern agriculture, she said. By equipping them with the latest knowledge and skills, these programs make farming more attractive and sustainable for the next generation, according to Mariano.

Livelihood programs, meanwhile, offer young farmers financial support and resources to start their own agricultural businesses, Quezon Governor Angelina D. Tan said. The programs are also designed to reduce the barriers to entry for young people and encourage innovation and entrepreneurship within the farming community, Tan added.

One of these programs is the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan (CFIDP), funded from the coconut levy fund. The CFIDP includes scholarships for children of coconut farmers.

The Quezon provincial government is also conducting a study on the development of coconut industry growth areas in Quezon. This initiative, which is expected to finish by June next year, aims to establish a value chain analysis and an agri-business model to increase productivity and income for local farmers.

Income issue

THE Quezon provincial government also tries to address agriculture's lack of appeal by making the income derived from farming palatable.

Mariano believes young people's reluctance to engage in farming is not just because the job exacts physical labor; it's also about the perceived lack of support and opportunities within the sector. Also, farming is often seen as a low-income, high-risk profession with limited prospects for growth or success.

"The struggle is real," the agriculturist said, adding that the average monthly income for coconut farmers here is about P5,000 (nearly \$89)—well below the poverty threshold.

That amount makes coconut farmers in Quezon historically among the poorest, alongside fishermen.

According to Agriculture Undersecretary Nora dela Cruz Oliveros, farmers experienced the highest incidence of poverty, with the rate rising from 38 percent in 2009 to 40.8 percent in 2015.

Mariano said the Quezon provincial government addresses the issue by developing value-added products and implementing livelihood programs to supplement farmers' incomes.

Ingenuity: coco coir log for spill

ONE example of value-added products is the coir log, which was tested to contain an oil spill that posed a significant threat to Pampanga's vital fishing industry. According to Tan, the province of Quezon sent 300 logs of coconut coir after the Pampanga provincial government sought assistance.

"Our coconut industry partners did an incredible job: the oil spill was contained in a matter of days. In just three days, they produced and delivered 500 coconut logs, exceeding the initial request. This is a testament to the ingenuity and dedication of our farmers and processors," Mariano said.

A coir log is a byproduct of the coconut tree and is well known for its capacity to absorb oil.

“We realized the potential of these logs as an essential tool in disaster response,” she explained. “We don’t know when the next disaster might occur, but we are now better prepared to respond swiftly and effectively.”

Currently, Mariano said the province exports coconut sugar to the United States, having secured the necessary license. Likewise, the province is also looking to expand its export of lambanog, which is renowned as the second-best spirit in the world.

According to Mariano, the province also plans to put up a laboratory for methanol testing to boost exports.

Farm owners like the Giangans, on the other hand, diversify their family income by going into the dairy and handicraft businesses.

“We produce cow’s milk and goat’s milk, adding another layer of sustainability to our farm,” Luzviminda said. Aside from producing coconut meat (copra), the family also produces virgin coconut oil.

The family business also produces baskets, bowls, and other crafts from the coconut tree.

“These products showcase our creativity and resourcefulness,” Luzviminda said.



Moncini “Muneer” Hinay (left) and Raaina Hinay of Kids Who Farm. Moncini says, “Our food doesn’t come from a box; it’s produced by our farmers and food producers.” Raaina adds, “We provide a platform for proactive community engagement. Start small—learning to grow your own food begins at home.”

Other efforts

A GROUP addressing the problem not unique to Quezon province is the Kids Who Farm Sustainable Food Systems Inc. (KWH), a non-profit start-up organized in 2019 by the father-and-daughter duo of Moncini A. Hinay and Raaina P. Hinay.

Muneer, as Moncini is popularly called, said KWF seeks to reverse the persistent trend of aging Filipino farmers by building the expertise of the youth in agriculture and creating urban green job incubation opportunities to engage them in the business of farming to secure food for the future.

Muneer told the BusinessMirror that KWH is the brainchild of his daughter. He said Raaina wanted to help her school garden in Catalina Vda De Jalon Memorial School in Tumaga, Zamboanga City.

While it was founded in Zamboanga City, the KWF has trained over 6,000 individuals across the country on urban agriculture and sustainable production.

Together with his daughter, the KWF has also established 38 community food gardens and school micro-farm projects in 25 barangays in Zamboanga City, providing fresh and hyperlocal food access to local residents, especially during the pandemic.

The KWH provides learning and technology transfer sessions to interested communities, youth groups and sectors. It mentors young farmers and potential young agriculture entrepreneurs. The organization also mobilizes resources and leverages its expertise to get funding and logistics support from its partners, such as the Department of Agriculture.

“Our food doesn’t come from a box: It’s being produced by our farmers and food producers,” Muneer said.

Raaina, for her part, believes that young Filipinos just need inspiration.

“Our work at Kids Who Farm is just part and parcel of the solution to the challenge faced by young people who want to engage in agriculture or just appreciate food and farming. We are providing them a platform to proactively participate in impact-driven community engagement,” she said. “We always start small or start with a single pot. Learning how to grow your food should start at home with oneself.”

Legislative action

TO address the pressing challenge of aging Filipino farmers, several bills have been introduced in Congress to institutionalize the Young Farmers Challenge (YFC) program.

These proposals aim to empower and encourage the youth to pursue careers in agriculture, ensuring that they become active partners in the country’s agricultural development and modernization.

The bills were filed after President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. emphasized the critical importance of a robust agricultural sector. The Chief Executive also asserted that a strong economy cannot be built without a stable and secure food supply.

The initiative is particularly crucial in times of emergency and shocks to the global economy, like the Russian-Ukraine conflict, logistics clog and the lingering effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The measures proposed in Congress seek to address these challenges by encouraging the youth to participate in agriculture. The YFC program is designed to support and empower young farmers and fishermen, making them active partners in food security and agricultural development.

Specifically, the YFC program aims to: motivate young Filipinos to pursue careers or engage in activities related to agriculture; have a voice in agricultural policy debates and program implementation; and offer support for agribusiness and agri-entrepreneurship initiatives, enabling the youth to become agents of development.

The program also seeks to address the myriad challenges faced by young people in rural areas, such as limited access to knowledge, education, land, affordable credit, and green jobs.

The YCF program, launched last year by Senator Imee R. Marcos, gives financial grants of up to P300,000 to its winners. Marcos has said that she considers the program as “the only good news in agriculture.”

The senator has filed a bill to institutionalize the YFC program and which seeks to address poverty, inequality and a lack of social mobility among young farmers who are burdened by their lack of access to knowledge, information and education.

The bill also seeks to address the lack of affordable credit or available land to till, the scarcity of “green jobs” and the lack of venues where young people can participate in debates on and the formulation of policies in agriculture.

Pending the approval of Marcos’s bill and other related policies, the Philippines continues to grapple with whether young Filipinos will choose technology over traditional farming, or leverage technology to achieve the country’s goal of food security.

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Raw sugar climbs on dry weather in Brazil

Bloomberg News
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RAW sugar in a warehouse at a sugar refinery in Pasir Gudang, Malaysia.

Raw sugar futures climbed for a third day on reports of fire hitting sugar-cane areas and concerns about the impact of dry weather in Brazil's Center-South, the nation's top-producing region.

The most-active contract advanced as much as 3.3 percent, after dropping to the lowest in almost two years earlier in the week.

Brazil's top producer Raizen SA confirmed that a fire broke at a sugar-cane field near its Santa Elisa mill, at Sertaozinho, on Thursday. Flames were controlled in the same day, but hit some company equipment, and part of the mill's biomass stocks. In the nearby city of Ibitinga, local TV reported that as much as 5 hectares of sugar cane was damaged by a fire on Wednesday.

The fires add to concerns of potential damage to crops coming from persistent dry weather and above-average temperatures. While a strong pace of sugar production in Brazil previously stoked bearish sentiment, fears are mounting over output for the second half of the country's crop harvest.

“Lack of rains in the forecast raise risks that cane yields will suffer eventually,” said Kona Haque, head of research at ED&F Man Holdings.

Brazil’s sugar production for the year through July was running ahead of last year’s pace, but productivity declined in the second half of the month due to dry weather, according to a recent report from industry group Unica.

Soybean prices

Soybean prices rebounded from Thursday’s decline after the United States disclosed soy export sales for a fifth straight day and the greenback weakened.

The US Department of Agriculture announced Friday that 120,000 tons of soybeans were sold to unknown buyers. The US has sold 1.38 million tons of soybeans including sales to China this week, more than triple the amount reported in the prior week. A weaker dollar has helped commodities produced in US become more competitive against rivals.

Soybean futures were also fueled by concerns with forecasts of high temperatures and dry weather in US corn belt that could hurt soybean crops, even after data from the Pro Farmer Midwest Crop Tour showed soybean pod count in 3-by-3-foot square is above the three-year average in almost all regions visited.

“Pod counts did not directly equate to yield by any means, especially if you have a dry and warm finish to the year,” said Angie Setzer, cofounder of farm advisory Consus Ag Consulting LLC. “There is some worry that we could see the top end being taken off this bean crop and an increase in short-term demand here as well.”

The rise in soy oil futures also boosts soybean prices gains as the market weighs comments that Brazil’s buyers are considering sourcing the beans from Argentina, Setzer said.

Image credits: Bloomberg

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