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MANILA BULLETIN:

SM Group brings small farmers to the big stage

BY [JAMES A. LOYOLA](#)

Aug 5, 2024 06:37 AM

The SM Group is providing the opportunity for local farmers and entrepreneurs to step onto a bigger stage through its SM Weekend Market.

Developed as a collaborative effort between SM Foundation and SM Supermalls, this initiative is not just about commerce; it's a strategic move to integrate local producers into the retail ecosystem while bolstering economic resilience and community development.



Local farmers from SM Calamba proudly display their fresh produce at the SM Weekend Market

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) form the backbone of economies worldwide, and in the Philippines, they play a pivotal role in driving growth and fostering community stability. Recognizing this, SM Investments Corporation has championed the SM Weekend Market to empower these enterprises, particularly local farmers.

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“Our goal is to transfer modern, science-based agri-technology skillsets to our farmers. Once equipped with these advanced skills and knowledge, we link them to the available market,” said SM Foundation Assistant Vice President Cristie Angeles

SM Supermalls President Steven Tan pointed out that, "The SM Weekend Market provides MSMEs the strategic venues or marketplaces to showcase their products and engage directly with consumers."



Local farmers, actively involved in the SM Weekend Market, attribute their improved profitability to the market's support and opportunities.

Since its inception, the market has welcomed more than 100 local farmers, offering them a platform to connect with diverse customers, from weekend shoppers to mall employees and tenants.

This exposure has not only expanded their market reach but also significantly boosted their profitability. The daily sales among local enterprises vary significantly, reflecting a broad spectrum from modest to substantial earnings.

At the heart of the SM Weekend Market's success lies SM Foundation's *Kabalikat sa Kabuhayan – Sustainable Livelihood Program (KSK-SLP)*. This program spans 14 weeks, equipping participants with essential skills in agriculture, business management, and market readiness.

Through rigorous training in sustainable farming techniques and mentorship on effective product presentation and pricing strategies, KSK-SLP ensures that aspiring entrepreneurs are well-prepared to thrive in competitive markets.

One such success story is Francisco “Ka Iko” Vispo, a 62-year-old farmer from Laguna, whose journey exemplifies the transformative power of the program.

Since completing KSK-SLP in 2018, Ka Iko has not only increased his farm's productivity but also expanded his market presence through the SM Weekend Market at SM Calamba.

His additional income has enabled him to make significant investments, such as acquiring a second-hand tricycle for efficient product delivery, thereby improving his business operations.

Ka Iko's dedication extends beyond personal gain; he actively shares his agricultural knowledge within his community, promoting sustainable farming practices and backyard gardening. His initiatives, including a community garden supporting a feeding program for school children, highlight his commitment to community upliftment and sustainable agriculture.

The success of the SM Weekend Market and KSK-SLP is amplified by collaborative partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organizations. These include SM Supermalls, TESDA, Department of Agriculture, DSWD, DOST, DTI, Local Government Units, and partner farm schools. Such partnerships are instrumental in scaling the impact of these programs and ensuring their long-term sustainability.

By leveraging the expertise and resources of each partner, the SM group not only enhances program delivery but also fosters innovation and resilience within local economies.

Through initiatives like the SM Weekend Market and KSK-SLP, the SM group is paving the way for inclusive growth and prosperity across the Philippines.

By providing market access, skills training, and fostering collaborative partnerships, SM empowers Filipino farmers and MSMEs to thrive economically while contributing to community resilience and sustainable development.

As SM continues to expand its footprint with the SM Weekend Market currently operating in 18 malls nationwide, the impact on local economies and the lives of participating entrepreneurs continues to grow.

These efforts underscore SM's commitment to creating sustainable pathways out of poverty and building a brighter future for local producers and entrepreneurs.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/8/5/article-2580>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Carina, monsoon damage to agriculture climbs to P3.04 billion

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

August 5, 2024 | 12:00am



Residents rescue other stranded residents as flood waters continue to rise at Barangay Bagong Silangan in Quezon City due to torrential rain brought by #CarinaPH and southwest monsoon on July 24, 2024.

STAR / Miguel De Guzman

MANILA, Philippines — The amount of damage caused by Typhoon Carina and the southwest monsoon to farm produce in 12 regions has ballooned to P3.04 billion, according to the Department of Agriculture.

Latest data from the DA showed that up to 30,644 tons of crops covering 56,839 hectares of farmlands were destroyed due to heavy rains and floodwaters in the Cordilleras, Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon), Mimaropa (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan), Bicol, Western and Eastern Visayas, Zamboanga peninsula, Soccsksargen (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and General Santos) and Caraga.

The bad weather displaced up to 93,156 farmers and fisherfolk.

Losses in rice production were estimated at P816.53 million followed by fishery with P577.53 million; corn, P154 million; high-value crops, P118 million, and livestock, P17.09 million.

The DA said damage to irrigation systems was estimated at P1.36 billion.

“The Department of Agriculture, through its regional field offices and in collaboration with concerned government units, is validating and assessing the impact of the combined effects of the southwest monsoon and Carina to the agriculture and fishery sectors,” the DA said.

It said the government would distribute at least P301.7 million worth of rice and corn seeds as well as P17.6 million worth of vegetable seeds to affected farmers nationwide.

<https://www.philstar.com/nation/2024/08/05/2375424/carina-monsoon-damage-agriculture-climbs-p304-billion>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Palace asks Supreme Court: Junk petition vs rice tariff cut

[Daphne Galvez](#) - The Philippine Star

August 5, 2024 | 12:00am



In a 62-page comment dated July 29, Malacañang – through the Office of the Solicitor General – said the petition, filed by several farmer and other cooperative groups, violated the doctrine of hierarchy of courts by going to the SC.

Philstar.com / Jovannie Lambayan

MANILA, Philippines — Malacañang has asked the Supreme Court (SC) to dismiss the petition seeking to declare as unconstitutional Executive Order 62, which reduced the tariffs of imported rice and other agricultural products from 35 percent to 15 percent.

In a 62-page comment dated July 29, Malacañang – through the Office of the Solicitor General – said the petition, filed by several farmer and other cooperative groups, violated the doctrine of hierarchy of courts by going to the SC.

Malacañang said the issues raised by petitions against EO 62 are factual issues which must first be settled before the lower courts. “This Honorable Court is not a trier of facts and cannot resolve these factual issues at first instance,” it said.

The Palace also argued that petitioners cannot anchor their case on alleged violations of broad constitutional policies, nor bring before the SC the resolution of political questions.

It said the courts are mandated to settle actual issues or controversies, not to rule whether the executive branch was correct in lowering tariff duties on rice imports in the context of socioeconomic policy.

“Mere disagreement with the government’s position is not sufficient ground to bring EO 62 before this Honorable Court, let alone for this Court to strike down the same,” it said.

On the question whether tariffs will serve public interest if they benefit consumers while impacting local producers, Malacañang said this is for the legislative and executive branches of government to decide, not the judiciary.

“It is clear that petitioners’ case has no leg to stand on. Outside of the allegation regarding the lack of prior consultation, petitioners build their case on matters which are not cognizable by this Honorable Court. It is not for this Honorable Court to replace the policy judgments of the Executive with its own, especially in matters involving economic, not legal consideration,” it said.

Malacañang also said President Marcos was improperly impleaded in the petition, considering that he enjoys immunity while he sits as the country’s top official.

It also refuted the petitioners’ claim that their right to due process was violated, saying the government had complied with all the necessary notice and hearing requirements under the Flexible Clause of Republic Act 10863 or the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act (CMTA).

It said a petition from an interested party is not the only means by which a tariff modification can occur under the Flexible Clause. The Tariff Commission is likewise not required to conduct independent and separate public hearings for each product subject to tariff subjects.

Malacañang also asserted that the Tariff Commission conducted public hearings, contrary to the claims of the petitioners, and argued that no undue delegation of legislative powers were involved in the case, saying the petitioners did not assail the constitutionality nor completeness of the CMTA nor of any other law.

“Such an allegation is required for any claim premised on ‘undue delegation.’ Undue delegation necessarily implies a law that either fails to express a complete policy or does not lay down specific standards to limit the exercise of the power it grants,” it said.

It added that EO 62 did not go beyond the powers delegated by the CMTA to the executive.

In their petition, farmer groups and other cooperative groups sought a temporary restraining order against the EO while the high tribunal deliberates on the matter.

Respondents named in the petition were Marcos, Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin, National Economic and Development Authority Secretary Arsenio Balisacan, and Tariff Commission Chairperson Marilou Mendoza.

The SC told the respondents to file their comment within 10 days from receipt of the resolution.

The petitioners claimed EO 62 would make the country dependent on importation, saying this is contrary to the policy of self-reliance and independent economy provided under the Constitution.

The EO will also prohibit farmers from being “more competitive” as it threatens them, along with the fishers, and the entire economy.

“Instead of protecting and supporting our farmers, EO 62 exposes our very own food producers to unfair foreign competition. The danger of reduced tariffs for the next four years does not in any way make our country self-reliant; rather it makes us dependent on foreign produce,” the petitioners said.

The petitioners also argued that EO 62 violates the conditions set in the Flexible Clause of RA 10863, which makes its issuance invalid and is tantamount to undue delegation of powers.

They also claimed the order violates the state policy to develop a self-reliant and independent national economy controlled by Filipinos, as well as violate the constitutional mandate to protect farmers from unfair competition and trade practices.

“This is clearly detrimental to the farmers, who may struggle to compete with the lower prices of imported products. As a result, their livelihoods and the agricultural sector in general may suffer, exacerbating rural poverty and economic disparity,” the petition read.

The Department of Agriculture earlier claimed the EO could help bring down the price of rice by P6 to P7 per kilo.

Rice prices still up

Watchdog Bantay Bigas yesterday said that EO 62 failed to bring down the retail prices of rice, despite almost a month of the implementation of lower tariff on the imported staple after it became effective on July 7.

In an interview over dzBB, Bantay Bigas spokesperson Cathy Estavillo noted that the retail price of the grains remains high despite the reduction of tariff on imported rice from 35 percent to 15 percent.

“Despite EO 62... consumers have yet to see lower prices of rice as promised,” Estavillo said.

In a separate interview, Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel De Mesa confirmed that at least 101,000 metric tons of imported rice arrived as of the third week of July under EO 62 of the 15 percent tariff.

“Hopefully, this will lead to the big possibility of bringing down the retail price (of rice) amid the big cut in the tariff (on imported rice),” De Mesa said.

Meanwhile, Estavillo said that the P45 per kilo of rice should not be called the Rice-For-All program, saying it is only available in four Kadiwa outlets.

“You cannot see P45 (per kilo of rice) in the markets. According to the consumers, it should not be called Rice-For-All since it is only available in four Kadiwa outlets. Many are looking for lower prices of rice,” she said.

Estavillo noted that P45 per kilo is still high, compared to the P20 per kilo promised by Marcos during his election campaign.

“The P45 per kilo is still high for ordinary people, as they are still waiting for the P20 per kilo that was promised for three years now. The P45 per kilo should be brought to the markets as the ordinary consumers buy there,” she said.

De Mesa has announced that the Department of Agriculture (DA)’s P45 per kilo rice is now available at four Kadiwa outlets in Metro Manila as part of the Rice-for-All program of the government.

He added that the rice is sold at the Food Terminal Inc. Kadiwa in Taguig; Caloocan; Potrero, Malabon and the Bureau of Plant Industry main office in Manila on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Each buyer will be limited to 25 kilos a day to prevent abuse. — **Bella Cariaso**

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/08/05/2375490/palace-asks-supreme-court-junk-petition-vs-rice-tariff-cut>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

House starts deliberations on P6.352 trillion budget

[Sheila Crisostomo](#) - The Philippine Star

August 5, 2024 | 12:00am



The Batasang Pambansa Complex is placed on a lockdown on July 20, 2023 as part of the security measures for the State of the Nation Address (SONA) of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on July 24, 2023.

STAR / Michael Varcas

MANILA, Philippines — The House of Representatives starts today the deliberations on the proposed P6.352-trillion national expenditure program (NEP) for 2025 of the Marcos administration.

First to face the House committee on appropriations will be the economic team, which comprises the Development Budget Coordination Committee (DBCC) – the Department of Budget and Management, National Economic and Development Authority, Department of Finance and Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas.

According to Marikina City Rep. Stella Luz Quimbo, committee vice chair, they will begin with the presentation of the DBCC to “determine the macroeconomic

assumptions used in formulating the budget presented to Congress, the sources of funds, and priority expenditures.”

“This will be the basis of the Committee on Appropriations in filing the General Appropriations Bill that will be approved at the plenary,” Quimbo said, referring to the GAB that contains the NEP.

Speaker Martin Romualdez said the House would like to know from the economic managers “how the country could sustain its economic growth and how such growth could benefit our people.”

“Our economic expansion, projected by multilateral financial institutions at between 5.9 to 6.2 percent next year, should be felt by our people, especially the poor, in terms of more job and income opportunities, more affordable food on their table and lower consumer prices,” Romualdez said.

He noted that many of the poor complain that the economic boom is benefitting only the rich, the big companies and the stock and financial market investors.

“They say they cannot eat economic growth. If majority of our people do not feel our economic expansion, they should at least see it in terms of the proper use of the national budget for social services, education, health, infrastructure and direct financial assistance to the poor and other vulnerable sectors,” Romualdez added.

Priority sectors

Under the NEP, the education sector remains the top priority getting P977 billion in 2025, higher than the proposed P968 billion for 2024. The proposal will cover the budget for the Department of Education, state colleges and universities, Commission on Higher Education and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority.

Coming in close second is the Department of Public Works and Highways with P900 billion in 2025. The proposed budget is lower, though, when compared to the P997.9 billion in the 2024 NEP.

Health, including the budget for the Philippine Health Insurance Corp., is the third priority sector getting P297.6 billion, down from P308.3 billion in 2024 NEP.

The Department of the Interior and Local Government gets a share of P278.4 billion, which is higher than the P263-billion proposal in 2024.

Also getting an increase in allotment is the Department of National Defense with P256.1 billion, up from P240.6 billion in 2024.

The other priority sectors are the Department of Social Welfare and Development with P230.1 billion, Department of Agriculture and its attached corporations with P211.3 billion, Department of Transportation with P180.9 billion, judiciary with P63.6 billion and Department of Justice with P40.6 billion.

The P6.352-trillion NEP for 2025 is 10.1 percent higher than this year's national budget and is 22.1 percent of the country's gross domestic product.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/08/05/2375494/house-starts-deliberations-p6352-trillion-budget>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Avoidable deaths, unnecessary expense



CTALK - Cito Beltran - The Philippine Star

August 5, 2024 | 12:00am

Even though cases of dengue have been occurring nationwide, it seems that reporting or talking about them is not a priority concern of government or the DOH. I speculate that while cases are reportedly already several thousands in many places, the deaths have not reached “alarming” or catastrophic numbers, which is why it’s not a serious concern.

Perhaps if a relative of a congressman or senator were to die because of dengue, then maybe the problem would get the proper attention or action it deserves. As far as I am concerned, dengue had already infected my wife Karen before COVID, and at least two helpers in our small farm already got dengue that nearly killed one of them. So for me, dengue should get more mention than political squabbles.

Last Friday, I picked up a story in the Nation news section of The Philippine STAR that five persons were recently killed by the dengue virus in Benguet province. If that’s not serious enough, the report filed by Artemio Dumlao stated “that (in one week alone), from July 21 to 27, the local health department of Benguet province (which includes Baguio City) has recorded 230 cases. The figure brought to 3,396 the total dengue cases posted in Benguet so far this year.”

Imagine that – 3,396 recorded dengue cases in one province in the highlands that we now know of, only because a persistent reporter found it important to inform the public. The question is why is the Department of Health no longer reporting or updating the public on the weekly or monthly cases of dengue, considering we are in the rainy season, which is when dengue carrying mosquitoes breed like crazy.

Is it possible that the number of cases all over the country could total 50,000 or more over the last seven months? It’s hard to tell if the government itself has either stopped

recording cases or publishing or sharing the numbers to better inform and protect the public.

As usual, both local and national health officials “reiterated their appeal to residents of affected areas to help in fighting dengue by ridding their area of mosquito breeding sites.” In Metro Manila, the usual reaction is to declare fogging operations, etc. I picked up somewhere that DOH officials were also talking about a biological solution used in Singapore and Indonesia to breed sterile mosquitoes or predatory insects to wipe out dengue carriers.

I have watched several news features on the Singapore project but the whole thing is still in controlled environments inside a laboratory and not outdoors. With 7,000-plus islands that have lowland swamps to high mountains populated by highly mobile people, traders and transients, such proposals would be expensive, unsure and most likely ineffective in the Philippines.

All these ideas mean well and hope for the best, but when we recall all the mechanical and medical solutions that were tried out during the COVID pandemic, such as dewormers, respirators, Chinese herbal medicines, ionizers hung around the neck, UV lights, we eventually realized that the anti-COVID vaccines were the most effective in preventing the massive numbers of COVID-related deaths.

That solution in the form of an anti-dengue vaccine is still possible for the Philippines because research and development on vaccines of all kinds continue, including for dengue. Dengue vaccines are in use worldwide because dengue remains and has even shown up in continents and countries where it was never heard of before.

But in order to have such vaccines in the Philippines, government officials, policy makers, scientists, as well as the Executive department need to take out the disinformation, political over-sensitivity or paranoia and stigma out of vaccines of all types and judge them based on data, research and observable claims and efficacy.

In his latest State of the Nation Address, President Bongbong Marcos announced that a vaccine for the African swine fever has already been field tested in the Philippines and will soon be available, perhaps before the end of the year. This was a welcome announcement among hog raisers who have lost hundreds of millions of pesos due to ASF and reduction of operations due to possible reinfection of herds.

What’s important about PBBM’s announcement is that it proves that the Food and Drug Administration, the Department of Agriculture and the private sector can find solutions and get things done through established scientific processes when politics is not included in the concerns. One of the things that helped speed up the field testing of the ASF vaccine was the focus on determining what vaccine worked well and reducing the chatter and letting the scientists do their work.

During the COVID pandemic, the FDA managed to overcome obstacles and challenges by applying the “Compassionate Use” clause for vaccines and medicines for COVID treatment. Recently, Malacañang has reportedly followed private sector recommendations to reduce the screening process for medicines that would be included in the Philippine National Drug Formulary. The direction seems to be to fast track and streamline the work of screening food and drugs directly under the FDA.

Based on many interviews with DOH, FDA and medical associations in the past, that shift should be supported by more funding and a major increase in the human resource of the FDA, especially with scientists and technical experts as well as implied or expressed support for FDA determinations and decisions. The FDA has been continuously criticized for taking too long to do their work and that is because they do not have the needed manpower and resources.

Ultimately, the FDA must fulfill its most fundamental duty to roll out the needed vaccines and medicines to all Filipinos.

<https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2024/08/05/2375578/avoidable-deaths-unnecessary-expense>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Rice tariff collections fall by 27 percent

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

August 5, 2024 | 12:00am



Workers arrange sacks of National Food Authority (NFA) palay or unmilled rice inside their warehouse in Balagtas, Bulacan on May 22, 2024.

STAR / Miguel De Guzman

MANILA, Philippines — Rice tariff collections in July shrank by more than a quarter on an annual basis to less than P900 million after President Marcos' order lowering the tariff rate on the commodity to 15 percent took effect.

Preliminary Bureau of Customs (BOC) data analyzed by The STAR showed the agency collected P884.4 million in tariffs from almost 200,000 metric tons (MT) of imported rice last month.

The amount was 27.54 percent lower than the P1.22 billion collected in the same month last year.

Government officials and industry players have expected the drop in tariff collection after the 15 percent tariff rate on rice imports took effect last July 5 as part of Marcos' Executive Order 62.

Some industry stakeholders noted that rice import volume must more than double to generate the same amount of tariff collections under the previous 35 percent rate.

Nonetheless, rice import volume is anticipated to surge as traders are incentivized by the reduced tariff rate.

For example, the United States Department of Agriculture is projecting that the Philippines would bring in 4.7 million MT of rice this year as a result of the reduction in tariffs.

But government officials including Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. do not see rice import volume hitting such a figure as a result of market competition.

Rice import volume in July rose by 22 percent year-on-year to 197,287 MT from 161,440 MT, based on BOC data. BOC data indicated that all of the rice imports last month was slapped with 15 percent tariff.

Despite the increase, the import volume was just half of the average monthly volume of rice brought in the country in the first half.

Local traders and importers have slowed down in their rice purchases abroad as they are still depleting their old stocks bought at higher tariff rates.

Nonetheless, the pace of rice import volume is seen to pick up starting this month, leading to the availability of more affordable rice in the market, pundits said.

Government officials earlier noted that the tariff reduction would cut retail rice prices by P6 to P7 per kilogram.

Latest BOC showed that the landed cost of imported rice stocks have declined on a monthly basis in July as a result of the tariff reduction.

The average landed cost of imported rice last month fell by 15 percent to P34.56 per kilogram from P40.96 per kilogram average cost in June.

Total rice tariff collections from January to July hit P24.078 billion, about 28 percent higher than the P18.823 billion recorded in the same period a year ago driven by bigger import volume and higher cost, based on BOC data.

Rice tariff collections have been critical in the past six years since it is being earmarked by the government to develop and modernize the country's rice industry through the rice competitiveness enhancement fund (RCEF) and its ancillary programs.

The government is poised to extend the RCEF, which is set to expire this year, with Congress deliberating on the matter.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/08/05/2375405/rice-tariff-collections-fall-27-percent>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Agri damage from El Niño balloons to P15B

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

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 02:07 AM August 05, 2024



Dry lands brought by El Niño in Barangay Gabawan, Daraga, Albay province. — MARK ALVIC ESPLANA

Despite ending almost two months ago, the El Niño phenomenon severely battered the Philippines and damaged P15.3 billion worth of livelihood in farming and fishing communities.

In its final bulletin posted on Friday following a thorough assessment of its regional field offices, the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Operations Center of the Department of Agriculture (DA) updated its estimate of agricultural damage from El Niño from the time the latest episode of this extreme dry spell had begun in June 2023. Farm losses ballooned by 54.7 percent from the P9.89 billion in damage reported by the agency on June 6.

The El Niño phenomenon—characterized by below-normal rainfall conditions—took a toll on the livelihood of 333,195 farmers and fishers in 15 regions.

Affected regions were Cordillera, Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol, Western Visayas, Central Visayas, Eastern Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Central Mindanao, Davao, Soccsksargen and Caraga.

The DA pegged the volume of production losses at 784,344 metric tons spanning 270,855 hectares (ha) of farming space.

Corn farmers suffered the biggest damage from El Niño worth P5.94 billion or 38.84 percent of total. Rice followed with P5.93 billion losses or 38.8 percent of overall losses.

Most of the losses in corn and rice farming are in the reproductive and maturity stages, according to the agency.

El Niño also wiped out high-value crops including vegetables, fruit trees, root crops, cacao and coffee amounting to P3.27 billion.

Cassava (P55.63 million), fisheries (P52.44 million), livestock and poultry (P37.97 million) and coconut (P9.8 million) took a hit as well.

Although the agriculture sector experienced significant losses, data from the DA showed that the latest El Niño episode was not as severe as those in the late 1990s to the 2010s. The sector suffered P17.44 billion worth of damage covering a much wider area of 555,102 hectares during the 2009 El Niño phenomenon, the biggest damage seen since the late 1990s.

But according to DA data, the 1997 episode was the worst of all the “strong and mature” El Niño as the phenomenon had affected 677,441 hectares, the largest area to succumb to the dry spell in history. Losses during that year reached P3.07 billion.

In 2015, another severe episode was recorded, when the dry spell caused P15.2 billion in losses across 556,721 ha of farming and fishing communities.

In May 2019, El Niño-induced drought damaged close to P8 billion worth of crops and fisheries, affecting 247,610 farmers and 227,889 ha across the country.

DA intervention

For its part, the DA has shelled out P14.54 billion to mitigate the adverse impact on farmers and fishers since the latest drought started in June last year.

Intervention included P8.59 billion in cash aid to 1.43 million farmers through the Rice Farmers Financial Assistance.

Another P4.72 billion worth of production support and financial assistance was given to farmers, fisherfolk, farmers cooperatives and associations.

It also distributed P659.17 million in production support to 40,263 farmers.

The Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. indemnified 56,112 farmers amounting to P452.56 million while the Agricultural Credit Policy Council extended P99.68 million worth of aid loans.

Furthermore, the DA distributed native animals valued at P18.08 million to 367 groups and 604 individual farmers. INQ

<https://business.inquirer.net/473011/agri-damage-from-el-nino-balloons-to-p15b>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Gov't lawyer defends tariff cuts

By: [Jane Bautista](#) - Reporter / [@janebautistaINQ](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 05:25 AM August 05, 2024



Agriculture Assistant Secretary and DA spokesperson Arnel de Mesa —Photo: official Facebook page of the Department of Agriculture Regional Field Office Calabarzon

MANILA, Philippines — The Office of the Solicitor General (OSG) asked the Supreme Court to dismiss the petition of farmer groups seeking a temporary restraining order (TRO) against Executive Order (EO) 62, arguing that it could cause “significant, if not irreparable, injury” to Filipino consumers.

In a 62-page comment dated July 29, the OSG cited Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa, who previously said that a TRO on President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.’s order reducing tariffs from 35 percent to 15 percent might cause “hesitation and delay” in incoming rice imports, potentially leading to a shortage.

“It behooves this Honorable Court to refrain from issuing a TRO or any other form of injunction, not only because petitioners do not stand to suffer any irreparable injury,

but also because the country might suffer that same injury should there be insufficient food supply at this crucial time,” the OSG argued.

On July 4, farmer and agriculture groups including Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura Inc., Federation of Free Farmers Inc., and United Broiler Raisers Association Inc. filed a petition for certiorari and prohibition before the Supreme Court, seeking to stop the government from implementing EO 62.

Named respondents in the case are Marcos, Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin, Secretary Arsenio Balisacan of the National Economic and Development Authority and Tariff Commission Chair Marilou Mendoza.

In their 27-page petition, the groups asked the high tribunal to declare EO 62 as null, void and unconstitutional, saying that it was “hastily issued” and violated the requirement of the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act to conduct an investigation and public hearings on the matter.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1969397/govt-lawyer-defends-tariff-cuts>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Agricultural output likely shrank in Q2 due to El Niño

August 5, 2024 | 12:33 am



Dry soil is seen on a field in San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, March 1, 2024. — PHILIPPINE STAR/EDD GUMBAN

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

THE PHILIPPINES' overall agricultural output may have declined in the second quarter after crop production likely bore the brunt of droughts caused by the El Niño weather phenomenon, analysts said.

University of Asia and the Pacific (UA&P) Center for Food and Agribusiness Executive Director Marie Annette Galvez-Dacul said in a Viber message that farm production likely fell by 1.5% to 2.5% in the April-to-June period due to El Niño.

If realized, this would be worse than the 1.3% decline in the value of production in agriculture and fisheries seen in the second quarter of 2023. It would also be a reversal of the 0.05% growth in the first quarter of 2024.

El Niño, which began in June 2023, brought below-normal rainfall conditions, dry spells and droughts that affected crop production.

In early June, the state weather bureau declared the end of the El Niño although dry spells persisted in some parts of the country.

"I am expecting a drop due to the lingering effects of El Niño during the second quarter. Some of the crops may have survived, but output and productivity would have been affected due to water stress," Federation of Free Farmers National Manager Raul Q. Montemayor said in a Viber message.

The Philippine Statistics Authority is set to release second-quarter data on farm output on Aug. 7 (Wednesday). The agriculture sector contributes about a tenth of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and provides around a quarter of all jobs.

UA&P's Ms. Dacul said she expected a decline in crops and fisheries output in the second quarter due to the unseasonably warm weather brought by El Niño.

The crop subsector contributes more than half to the country's overall agricultural production. As of the first quarter, rice contributed about 20% to the total, while corn accounted for 8%.

On the other hand, Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food, Inc. President Danilo V. Fausto said farm growth for the second quarter was likely flat.

“(El Niño) didn’t hit too hard but there was still an effect. So, whatever we are expecting to have an increase in yield, in output, it might be dampened because of the El Niño,” Mr. Fausto said in a phone call.

Farm damage due to El Niño totaled P15.3 billion, with rice and corn being the most affected crops, according to the Department of Agriculture’s (DA) final bulletin issued on Aug. 2.

The DA reported that total crop damage was at 784,344 metric tons covering 270,855 hectares of farmland, of which 68% or 184,182 hectares were deemed recoverable. It had affected 333,195 farmers and fisherfolks.

Ms. Dacul said that the poultry sector likely posted an increase in output in the second quarter, while livestock production may have been flat.

LA

NIÑA

This year, the DA is targeting 1-2% agricultural growth, accounting for the effects of the El Niño and La Niña weather events.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. said last month that the DA’s target would be achievable if no major typhoons hit the country during the second half of the year.

“For the second half, we are challenged because of La Niña. So, the agriculture sector really will be (impacted by it),” Mr. Fausto said.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration said that there is a 70% likelihood of La Niña occurring during the months of August, September, and October. It would increase the likelihood of tropical cyclone activity in the coming months.

Roehlano M. Briones, a senior research fellow at the Philippine Institute for Development Studies, said that agricultural growth would likely be at 1% for the full year if the livestock, poultry and aquaculture subsectors recovered.

“The start of rains in July would have helped farmers recover, but the recent typhoon shows how unpredictable the weather can be and how vulnerable agriculture is to natural calamities,” Mr. Montemayor said.

However, former Agriculture Undersecretary Fermin D. Adriano said in a Viber message that it is unlikely that the agricultural output would hit the DA’s target for the year.

“Now with incoming La Niña, further crop damage will be experienced. Assuming the optimistic projection is true, where will growth come from?” he asked.

<https://www.bworldonline.com/top-stories/2024/08/05/612062/agricultural-output-likely-shrank-in-q2-due-to-el-nino/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Rice imports hit 2.44 MMT in late July

August 5, 2024 | 12:04 am



REUTERS

THE PHILIPPINES imported 2.44 million metric tons (MMT) of rice by late July, according to the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI).

The BPI reported that rice shipments for the month as of July 25 totaled 101,013.48 MT, less than the 156,981.75 MT recorded a year earlier.

The government lowered the tariffs on imported rice to 15% from 35%, until 2028 through Executive Order No. 62. The order took effect last month.

The Department of Agriculture is expecting rice imports to pick up in the coming months, citing the approved volumes in import permits issued by the BPI.

For July, the BPI issued 686 sanitary and phytosanitary import certificates with approved applicants seeking to import 557,815 MT.

As of late July, the permits issued amounted to 5,133 with applicants seeking to ship in 5.62 MMT.

The BPI reported that Vietnam remained the top supplier of rice as of late July, accounting for 75% of all imports in the year to date, or 1.83 MMT.

Thailand supplied 358,727.74 MT during the period, or 14.7% of the total, followed by Pakistan with 154,523 MT, or 6.3%.

It added that Myanmar and India shipped 66,640 MT and 21,605 MT of rice, respectively.

The US Department of Agriculture projects Philippine rice imports to hit 4.7 MMT this year, upgrading its initial 4.6 MMT estimate due to the higher-than-expected volumes during the first semester.

Imports as of the first half amounted to 2.33 MMT, up 25.3% from a year earlier. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2024/08/05/612011/rice-imports-hit-2-44-mmt-in-late-july/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

China Vice Premier calls for action to secure autumn grain harvest

August 5, 2024 | 12:03 am



REUTERS

BEIJING — China’s Vice Premier has urged local authorities to minimize agricultural losses, and ensure a robust autumn grain harvest after heavy rains from Typhoon Gaemi lashed its largest wheat-growing Henan province.

Provinces such as central Henan have braced for severe rainstorm and floods recently after Typhoon Gaemi made a landfall in late July, which adversely impacted agricultural production.

During his visit to Henan, Liu Guozhong emphasized the critical need for disaster prevention and mitigation to protect the autumn grain crops and achieve a successful harvest, state news agency Xinhua reported on Thursday.

He also called for enhanced efforts to promote grain and oil crop yields to bolster national food security, according to Xinhua.

Henan, known as China’s “granary,” produces about one-third of the country’s wheat. A reduced wheat harvest could lead China, the world’s largest wheat consumer, to seek additional supplies overseas.

Although the summer wheat harvest in Henan is mostly complete, hot temperatures and rainy weather have raised concerns about the quality of stored wheat, prompting some farmers to sell their supplies.

China’s state grains stockpiler Sinograin said on Wednesday the firm and its subsidiaries will increase the scale of domestic wheat storage to support farmers. — **Reuters**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2024/08/05/612010/china-vice-premier-calls-for-action-to-secure-autumn-grain-harvest/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Crickets get crunchy as Singapore approves edible insects in bid to ensure food security

August 5, 2024 | 12:02 am



REUTERS

SINGAPORE — At Singapore’s House of Seafood restaurant, the fish-head curry comes with a side of crunchy crickets, the tofu has bugs crawling out of it and the patrons can’t get enough.

The seaside restaurant is the first eatery to put insects on the menu after the city state’s food authority this month approved for human consumption 16 species ranging from crickets to grasshoppers, grubs and mealworms after two years of deliberation.

Crickets and other insects have long been enjoyed as street food in Southeast Asia, but not in the wealthy financial hub, where food imports come with restrictions for safety and hygiene purposes.

Francis Ng, chief executive of House of Seafood, said customers love it when the dishes play up the insects, like that tofu dish he plated to look like bugs were crawling out of it, and a dish of glutinous rice balls studded with silkworms.

“It looks scarier so customers can film for their TikTok,” said Mr. Ng, adding that his phone has been ringing off the hook with customers eager to book a tasting.

The restaurant has drafted a menu with 30 dishes that feature insects, which they can sell to the general public once their importers are approved by the food authority.

For now, Mr. Ng is offering free samples. In 2019, Singapore declared it was aiming to produce 30% of its nutritional needs by 2030 instead of the current model where 90% of food is imports, and food security expert Paul Teng said insects could certainly help move towards this goal — if people got over “the yuck factor.”

“Most insects are almost all protein,” said Mr. Teng, who works at the Nanyang Technological University’s S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, adding that there needs to be local production to make this alternative protein source affordable.

“Getting people to accept insects in their diet is a challenge. But really, it’s a normal food item. Let’s do something about it to prepare the consumer for it,” he said. “Me personally, I have no problem eating insects.”

The United Nations has deemed bugs a sustainable source of protein to feed a global population estimated to swell to 9.7 billion by 2050 and global food security issues due to extreme weather and conflicts have also increased the interest in the high-quality, economical nutrition that bugs provide.

In Singapore, all insects approved for human consumption must be farmed in a controlled environment and not harvested from the wild, and cannot be fed contaminants like manure or rotten food, according to the food agency.

In tandem, the Food and Agriculture Organization has been promoting farming of insects for human consumption and animal feed, and there has been local interest to import insects, but cost remains a barrier for now: Mr. Ng said insects make up 10% of his costs at the House of Seafood, and they are all imported.

“The price is definitely higher than eggs,” he said.

It’s too early to tell if insects will become a feature of the Singapore diet or whether demand will fizzle out as it has for fake meat products.

But for now, some diners say they are happy to develop a taste for bugs.

“If they have a higher source of protein, why not? I’ll add it to my daily meal and daily food intake,” said Bregria Sim, a 23-year-old logistics executive, adding she would pay around S\$40 (\$30) for the novelty dishes. — **Reuters**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2024/08/05/612009/crickets-get-crunchy-as-singapore-approves-edible-insects-in-bid-to-ensure-food-security/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

‘Disastrous’ drought threatens to wipe out Sicilian goat breed

August 5, 2024 | 12:01 am



REUTERS

SAN CATALDO, Italy — A blazing sun shining on the arid hills of San Cataldo in Sicily signals only despair for goat breeder Luca Cammarata as he tries to find something for his herd to eat among the barren landscape.

“The grazing land is zero,” Mr. Cammarata told Reuters, looking sadly at his Girgentana goats, a local breed that he and his fellow herders have sought to protect and nurture but which is now threatened with extinction.

A water shortage is hitting central areas of Sicily such as San Cataldo, in the province of Caltanissetta, very hard, and reservoirs are running dry or operating at very low levels.

A prolonged drought last year led Sicilian authorities to ration water, even for domestic use in major cities.

Breeders, struggling to get their water, now fear they may soon be forced to send the animals, bred for centuries for dairy products including ricotta cheese, to slaughter.

“There is no other way, no other solution,” Mr. Cammarata said. “If every last drop of water falling from the sky is not collected, Sicily will become a desert.”

The cost of water consumption has doubled for Mr. Cammarata and he has to rely on the Carabinieri Forestry Department’s tanker truck that every 15 days reaches the province’s farms and livestock breeders.

“We are giving support to these farms struggling with this unprecedented drought,” said Alessandro Panzarella, a member of the Carabinieri Command for Forest, Environment and Agri-Food, who with his olive-green tanker truck drives along arid and dusty roads to help bring vital supplies.

“With only one tanker truck for the whole province, it becomes impossible to meet the needs of all the farmers,” he said. “We visit many farms throughout the province of Caltanissetta and the situation is disastrous.”

Agricultural production across Italy shrank last year as wine, fruit and olive oil output all took a hit from extreme weather events linked to climate change.

Sicily has suffered months of below-average rainfall, with the Italian government declaring a state of emergency. The island has suffered with climate change-related high temperatures, setting a European heat record in 2021 of 48.8 degrees Celsius. — **Reuters**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2024/08/05/612008/disastrous-drought-threatens-to-wipe-out-sicilian-goat-breed/>

MANILA STANDARD

Oil spill's damage to Cavite at P1b, smuggling angle probed



A fisherman points to the location where the Motor Tanker Terranova sunk in Barangay Lamao, Limay, Bataan. Coastal communities and fisherfolk await updates from authorities on whether they can sail to fish after Super Typhoon Carina impacted their area and now a potential oil spill that could impact their communities and livelihoods further. Despite the challenges, they use this time to repair their boats and enjoy the sea. These scenes highlight the impacts of our fossil fuel dependence on communities and the environment. Let's urge the government to make climate polluters pay.

By Rex Espiritu & Vito Barcelo
August 5, 2024, 12:30 am

Some 25,145 farmers and fisherfolk across several provinces are currently affected by the industrial fuel that spilled out of the capsized MTKR Terranova, according to the Office of Civil Defense's (OCD) latest report.

The ship sank off the coast of Bataan province but its effects are being felt in the shorelines of the Calabarzon region.

In Cavite, which is one of the five provinces of Calabarzon, official estimates put the amount of damage at P1 billion.

The oil spill has constrained authorities to declare the waters of Cavite a no-catch zone for fish and shellfish, and placed the province under a state of calamity.

The OCD also reported that fish stalls in the coastal town of Noveleta were closed due to the impact of the oil spill.

Seafood retailers lamented that even their sales of fishes grown in fresh water ponds have decline significantly.

“Even if we say that the bangus or tilapia that we are selling came from fishponds, they just don’t want to try eating them,” a fish seller said in Filipino.

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) said in a statement that it is still waiting for the results of the sample testing from the province.

In the interim, the agency has been distributing relief goods to affected fishermen.

As this developed, ACT-CIS Representative and Deputy Majority Floor Leader Erwin Tulfo is looking into the possibility that MTKR Terranova and two other oil tankers recently involved in mishaps were being used to facilitate oil smuggling.

The lawmaker said that the three oil tankers may have been involved in a modus operandi called “paihi,” when they were caught by harsh ocean conditions caused by the combined effects of Typhoon Carina and the southwest monsoon

The solon asked why the oil tankers did not drop anchor near an island to shield it from the typhoon?

“While they are anchored away from the watchful eyes of local authorities, some foreign oil tankers will offload their cargo of oil unto local oil tankers, such as the ones that recently sank,” Tulfo noted.

Earlier, Justice Secretary Crispin Remulla said his office is looking into the possibility that the three ill-fated ships were involved in illegal activities.

After meeting with Philippine Coast Guard officials, the DOJ chief said it is looking more likely that the ships were being used in illegal activities at the time they were met with misfortune.

It can be recalled that motor tankers MT Terranova and MT Jayson Bradley, sank in Limay and Mariveles, Bataan during the height of Habagat last July.

A few days later, the MV Mirola 1 ran aground in Mariveles, Bataan.

Editor's Note: This is an updated article. Originally posted with the headline: “25k farmers, fisherfolk in Calabarzon affected by Bataan oil spill—OCD”

<https://manilastandard.net/news/national/314480288/25k-farmers-fisherfolk-in-calabarzon-affected-by-bataan-oil-spill-ocd.html>

MANILA STANDARD

Empty-handed



By Manny Palmero

August 4, 2024, 10:50 pm

Taguig fishermen go home almost without any catch from Laguna de Bay due to the recent Super Typhoon 'Carina' and monsoon rains or habagat.

<https://manilastandard.net/gallery/news-in-photos/314480457/empty-handed.html>

El Niño damage to crops tops P15B

By Janine Alexis Miguel

August 5, 2024

EL NIÑO has damaged over P15 billion in crops, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said.

A bulletin released last Friday said the long dry spell damaged crops worth P15.3 billion in 15 regions and affected 333,195 farmers and fisherfolk.

Production loss for key crops and aquaculture was recorded at 784,344 metric tons (MT). This included 330,717 MT of rice (P5.93 billion); 327,310 MT of corn (P5.94 billion); 112,681 MT of high-value crops (P3.27 billion); 2,320 MT of cassava (P55.6 million); and 11,317 MT of aquaculture produce (P52.4 million), DA's report indicated.

Losses were also incurred in the coconut sector affecting 3,995 hectares valued at P9.8 million and P37.97 million of damages reported in livestock and poultry.

For rice, the affected area was 109,481 hectares or 5.12 percent of the total planted area, while the production loss was approximately 3.59 percent of the target output for the dry cropping season this year.

In response, the DA implemented several interventions worth P14.54 billion to support affected stakeholders. This includes P8.59 billion provided through the Rice Farmers Financial Assistance and P4.72 billion in production support.

Loans and other financial support were provided by the DA's regional field offices, the Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation, and the Agricultural Credit Policy Council.

Additional measures include cloud seeding operations, installation of 616 water pumps and rehabilitation of irrigation canals. The DA also promoted water-saving techniques such as the alternate wetting-and-drying method, covering 162,623 hectares, and quick turnaround strategies benefitting 3,875 hectares and 1,657 farmers.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/08/05/news/national/el-nio-damage-to-crops-tops-p15b/1961842>

Report: Farmers lose ₱15.3B due to El Niño

Ada Pelonia
August 5, 2024

Local farmers, fishers and livestock raisers lost P15.30 billion due to El Niño, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

In its final El Niño bulletin, the DA said the volume of production losses for agricultural and fishery areas across 15 regions was pegged at 784,344 metric tons (MT).

Palay and corn suffered the brunt of the weather phenomenon as it accounted for most of the damage at 330,717 MT and 327,310 MT, respectively.

El Niño also damaged 11,681 MT of high-value crops lost 112,681 MT, 2,320 MT of cassava and 11,317 MT of aquaculture produce.

According to the report, the production losses were equivalent to P5.93 billion for rice, P5.94 for corn, P3.27 billion for high-value crops, P55.63 million for cassava, P9.80 million for coconut, and P52.44 million for fisheries.

For livestock and poultry, the department said 25,547 chickens, cattle, carabao, ducks, goats, horses, sheep, and swine were affected by the dry spell. These were valued at P37.97 million.

The rice production loss of 330,717 MT is equivalent to around 3.59 percent of the target production of 9.22 million metric tons (MMT), both for dry cropping season this 2024. As for corn, the production loss of 327,310 MT is 7.28 percent of the target production of 4.49 MMT in the same cropping season.

The department said it provided P14.54 billion to affected farmers and fishers. Among the provisions given were P4.72 billion worth of production support and financial assistance, P99.68 million worth of Survival and Recovery Aid Loan from the Agricultural Credit Policy Council, and P452.56 million from the

Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. that indemnified 56,112 farmers in the Cordillera Administrative Region and Regions 1 to 12.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration declared the end of El Niño phenomenon in the country in June.

Last month, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said extreme weather events threaten the country's farm output targets.

“This year's targets [of expanding the agriculture and fisheries production between one and two percent would not be] easy,” Laurel said, partly in Filipino, during the post-State of the Nation Address (Sona) event in Pasay City. “We started with El Nino last January [...] and now we will have to deal with La Nina.”

However, the agriculture chief said the additional coverage of irrigated farmland mentioned in President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s Sona would “definitely” increase production.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/08/05/report-farmers-lose-%e2%82%b115-3b-due-to-el-nino/>

RCEF extension crucial to achieving food security–DA

Ada Pelonia
August 5, 2024

The life of the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) must be extended as the government needs more time to deliver the assistance required by rice farmers to become competitive, according to Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

“The extension of the RCEF [Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund] is very important. We need additional years to provide adequate support through mechanization and increased seed production,” Laurel said during the Senate Committee on Agricultural and Fisheries Modernization hearing last Thursday.

He proposed the use of RCEF for other projects, such as solar irrigation, water impounding, soil testing, and pest control.

Laurel also suggested empowering the Department of Agriculture (DA) under the revised Rice Tarrification Law (RTL) to intervene in the market to stabilize rice prices, as the National Food Authority (NFA) has lost its trading authority.

He said extending RTL and RCEF is “crucial” for improving rice farmers’ livelihoods. The RCEF is set to expire in early 2025.

Meanwhile, Laurel allayed concerns over the impact of the reduction of rice tariffs on the RCEF, which is currently channeled to farm machinery distribution, provision of quality seeds, training, and financial aid to farmers.

He cited a provision in Executive Order (EO) 62, which allows for a review of the rice tariff every four months, enabling adjustments if significant price movements occur.

Senator Cynthia Villar also noted that the Department of Finance (DOF) has committed to providing funds for the RCEF, even if tariff collection declines.

Villar revealed plans to triple RCEF to P30 billion from P10 billion, based on recent tariff collection data.

The Congressional Oversight Committee on Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization backed the proposed extension of RCEF, particularly the plan to triple the rice fund.

“The revisions to the rice tariffication law put us on the right and fast track to achieve President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr.’s vision of a food-secure Philippines, where farmers benefit from their hard work and consumers have access to affordably-priced food,” Laurel said.

Last month, Finance Secretary Ralph G. Recto made an assurance that the government will shoulder the shortfall in rice tariff collections. The reduction of rice tariff to 15 percent from the current 35 percent is expected to result in revenue losses of P9.2 billion.

The agriculture sector’s budget for 2024 rose by 27.7 percent to P221.7 billion to install more irrigation systems, construct farm-to-market roads, procure farm machinery and equipment and prioritize research and development.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/08/05/rcef-extension-crucial-to-achieving-food-security-da/>

Food commodity prices unchanged in July—FAO

BusinessMirror
August 5, 2024

The benchmark for world food commodity prices was broadly unchanged in July for the second month in a row, as increases in international quotations of vegetable oils, meat products and sugar offset an ongoing decrease in those for cereals, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) reported Friday.

The FAO Food Price Index, which tracks monthly changes in the international prices of a set of globally traded food commodities, averaged 120.8 points in July, marginally below its revised 121.0 figure for June. The index is now 3.1 percent lower than its corresponding value one year earlier.

The FAO Cereal Price Index declined by 3.8 percent from June as the global export prices of all major cereals decreased for the second consecutive month.

“Wheat quotations dipped on increasing seasonal availability from ongoing winter harvests in the northern hemisphere and generally favorable conditions in Canada and the United State of America supporting expectations for large spring wheat harvests later in the year.”

FAO said maize export prices also declined as harvests in Argentina and Brazil progressed ahead of last year’s pace and crop conditions in the US remained robust. Meanwhile, average rice prices fell by 2.4 percent from June amid “generally quiet trading activities” for both Indica and Japonica varieties.

The FAO Vegetable Oil Price Index, by contrast, rose 2.4 percent from June to reach a one-and-a-half-year high. “Global quotations for palm, soy, sunflower and rapeseed oils all rose, lifted by robust demand for soy oil from the biofuel sector and deteriorating crop prospects for sunflower and rapeseed oils in several major producing countries.”

Meat prices were also higher in July amid robust import demand for ovine, bovine and poultry meat, even as pig meat prices declined marginally due to an oversupply situation in Western Europe.

The FAO Sugar Price Index rose by 0.7 percent from June as lower-than-expected production in Brazil outweighed the impact of improved monsoon rainfall in India and conducive weather conditions in Thailand.

“The FAO Dairy Price Index was unchanged in July, as decreases in the quotations for milk powders offset increases in those for butter and cheese.”

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/08/05/food-commodity-prices-unchanged-in-july-fao/>

Agricultural innovation grants open to Filipinos, Southeast Asians

BusinessMirror
August 4, 2024

Agricultural innovators and researchers in Southeast Asia now have a chance to submit proposals for their research projects.

The Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca) is accepting proposals for its Grants for Research towards Agricultural Innovative Solutions (GRAINS) until August 9.

Searca GRAINS offers substantial funding to support research projects addressing critical agricultural challenges.

They include developing sustainable farming practices, building climate-resilient agriculture, advancing agricultural biotechnology, strengthening value chains, ensuring food security, and creating effective agricultural policies.

Dr. Glenn Gregorio, Searca Center Director, said: “Through GRAINS, we aim to empower researchers and innovators to develop solutions that will lead to a more sustainable and resilient agricultural sector in Southeast Asia.”

Innovators and researchers from the academe, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector across Southeast Asia are encouraged to apply.

Successful applicants will receive funding to conduct research for up to one year.

The Searca GRAINS grant covers various research expenses, including personnel costs, equipment, fieldwork, and knowledge dissemination activities.

Proposals must demonstrate a clear focus on innovative agricultural solutions with the potential to significantly impact the region.

Searca prioritizes proposals that are aligned with its mission of Accelerating Transformation Through Agricultural Innovation.

Gregorio affirms that “Innovation is at the heart of Searca’s mission. Searca is looking for projects that not only push the boundaries of agricultural research but also have the potential to create meaningful change for farmers and communities across Southeast Asia.”

Applications must be submitted electronically through the GRAINS Information System at <https://grains.searcaapps.org/>

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/08/04/agricultural-innovation-grants-open-to-filipinos-southeast-asians/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

Govt to SC: Junk farmers' suit vs EO on tariff cuts

- Ada Pelonia
- August 5, 2024

THE government has asked the Supreme Court to dismiss the petition filed by farmer groups against the alleged unconstitutionality of Executive Order (EO) 62, which reduced tariffs on key agricultural commodities.

In a 62-page comment, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin, National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) Secretary Arsenio Balisacan and Tariff Commission chairperson Marilou Mendoza, through the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG), said the petition should be denied for lack of merit.

“There is no basis for issuing a writ of certiorari and prohibition to nullify E.O. No. 62 (2024), as Respondents have not committed any grave abuse of discretion nor violation of the Constitution,” the comment read.

“Respondents acted within their jurisdiction in conducting a comprehensive review of the country’s MFN tariff structure pursuant to Sections 1611 and 1608 of the CMTA,” it added.

The petition questioning the legality of EO 62 and praying for the issuance of a temporary restraining order (TRO) was earlier filed by petitioners led by Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag) Inc. before the Supreme Court. (See: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/07/04/farmer-groups-ask-sc-to-strike-down-eo-62-reducing-tariffs-on-rice-farm-products/>)

Aside from Sinag, other petitioners in the case are Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) Inc., United Broiler Raisers Assn. Inc., Sorosoro Ibaba Development Cooperative (SIDC), and Magsasaka Partylist representative Atty. Argel Cabatbat.

The EO 62, according to the groups, violates the provisions of RA 10863 or the Flexible Clause of Customs Modernization and Tariff Act which require proper

consultation, investigation, hearings and reports prior to the issuance of an order by the President involving tariff reduction.

“Petitioners’ claim of violation of due process is unfounded. Records show that in March 2023, five public hearings were held wherein comments on tariffs on all products, including rice, were invited,” the comment read.

“Petitioners were notified but failed to attend, and their oversight cannot justify nullifying E.O. No. 62 (2024), to the detriment of national economic policies.”

The OSG, which serves as the chief government counsel, also argued that Marcos was “improperly impleaded” in the petition following the doctrine of presidential immunity and asked the court to drop him as a respondent in the case.

It added that the petitioners “violated” the doctrine of hierarchy of courts by directly resorting to the high court. It noted that the petitioners raised factual issues that must be first settled before the lower courts.

Solicitor General Menardo Guevarra earlier said EO 62 will continue to be implemented unless a TRO is issued by the high court.

“We do not know whether the SC will issue a TRO or not in the days to come. I suppose the SC justices are also presently evaluating whether any injunctive relief is necessary as far as the government is concerned; however, the EO will be implemented unless temporarily restrained by the SC,” Guevarra said.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/08/05/govt-to-sc-junk-farmers-suit-vs-eo-on-tariff-cuts/>