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**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Apple-growing venture sprouts in Apo's foothills

By: [Bong S. Sarmiento](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 05:02 AM September 01, 2024



FROM ONE TO 500 From one seed that sprouted in 2013 and survived to bear fruit, Benzene Sepe's apple-growing venture now involves at least 500 trees in the foothills of Mt. Apo, shown here looming large over Davao City, earning for him a little fortune. —Photos by Bong Sarmiento

DIGOS CITY, DAVAO DEL SUR, Philippines — Apples, which do not normally thrive in the tropical region, are growing at the foothills of Mt. Apo, thanks to the persistence of an entrepreneur who used to abhor farming.

“When I was growing up, I really hated farming because I saw how my family was barely getting by from my parents' income from cultivating vegetables. We had a difficult life,” recalled Benzene Kennedy Sepe, 32, the second of three siblings.

But in 2013, his curiosity was tickled about whether the fruit that traditionally grows in the temperate region can be cultivated in their highland community at Sitio Marawer in Barangay Kapatagan here amid its cool environment as it is located in the embrace of the country's highest peak.

From an imported apple that he bought at the local market, Sepe sowed three seeds at the back of their house. Neighbors and other longtime farmers in the touristy village poked fun at his experiment, telling him to use the rest of his family's 500-square-meter property to more productive pursuits, instead.

According to Sepe, he just shrugged off the insults and discouragements. His initial success was when one of three sown seeds sprouted and blossomed into a tree.

Sepe and his family treated this apple tree, which they fondly named "Benzone," as "our goose that laid the golden eggs," lavishing it with extra care.

### **Learning in Korea**

While waiting for this lone surviving plant to bear fruit, Sepe was chosen for a religious exchange among members of the Foursquare Church, an international evangelical Pentecostal Christian denomination. This brought him to South Korea in 2015.

There, he saw how apples are grown in abundance, fueling his eagerness to propagate the crop in their village in Kapatagan.

"I need to replicate these apple orchards back home," he recalled telling himself back then.

Three years after he returned from South Korea and five years after he planted the seeds, Sepe made his first harvest in 2018, earning the distinction of being the first successful apple grower in Mindanao, or perhaps, the entire country.

This motivated Sepe to do more research on how to propagate in scale the temperate fruit in a tropical setting.

Today, he has grown at least 500 trees in various plots in Kapatagan, accounting for some 3 hectares in all, intercropped with vegetables and other fruit-bearing trees such as durian, mulberry, langka (jackfruit), persimmon and blueberry, among others.

The apple trees are in different stages of cultivation, with many of them already bearing fruits, Sepe added.

Sepe attributed his successful apple farming to the acclimatization of the varieties he propagated, including Fuji apple, to the weather condition in Kapatagan.

In other countries, he said apples survive in temperatures between 7 and 12 degrees Celsius. His apple farms in Kapatagan thrive in a temperature of between 18 and 26°C, with a recorded low of 16°C, hence the need for acclimatizing the crop for it to survive and become productive.

Seeing Sepe's success, there's a growing number of agriculture entrepreneurs who are investing in apple farming, seeking saplings from his farm given the rare availability of such supply in the country.

### **Selling saplings**

Hence, sales from apple saplings constitute the bulk of Sepe's income, instead of from harvested fruits. A grafted apple sapling sells for P3,500 each. Buyers come from different parts of Mindanao and other areas in the country—from the Luzon provinces of Nueva Ecija, Abra, Cagayan, Laguna and Bulacan, including Metro Manila.

From his first successful apple tree, he grafts from it those grown from seeds bought from fresh imported apples flooding the local market. Sepe said that a grafted apple plant can bear fruits within three to five years, and can live for a century if properly nourished.

From the single apple seed that sprouted, Sepe was able to build family-owned enterprises like the Kapatagan Apple Orchard, Rare Fruit Farm and Nurseries Diversified Farm.

### **Recognition**

His achievement was recognized in December 2020 when the Agricultural Training Institute of the Department of Agriculture considered his farm as an apple-growing learning site, the first in the country. Also, the Davao del Sur provincial tourism office has included the Kapatagan Apple Orchard as part of the province's tourism circuit, helping promote Sepe's farm.

"I was able to graduate from college because of my apple venture," he said.

With the good fortune that apple farming showered him, with a shiny car parked in the garage of a modest new home, Sepe now pins his hope on agriculture in turning around his village's economic lot.

"I'm glad I did not succumb to other people's negativity that were thrown against me [in the past]. But I've proven them wrong. Now, I want Kapatagan to be known in apple farming," he said.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1978537/apple-growing-venture-sprouts-in-apos-foothills>

**BUSINESS WORLD:**

# Retailers see share of GDP growing despite lack of tax on online sellers

September 1, 2024 | 7:51 pm



PHILIPPINE STAR/MICHAEL VARCAS

THE Philippine Retailers Association (PRA) said it expects the retail industry's contribution to the economy to grow by at least one percentage point this year even in the absence of a tax regime for its online competitors.

PRA President Roberto S. Claudio told reporters on the sidelines of the National Retail Conference and Expo that the retail industry accounted for 18.6% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2022.

"It will keep growing. The GDP contribution of retail has been going up at least 1-2 percentage points a year. So we feel that by the end of 2024, that should move up to about 20%," Mr. Claudio said.

Citing data from between 2017 and 2022, he said that taxes paid by retailers in the Philippines averaged P750 billion over the five-year period.

"These are a mix of value-added tax (VAT), income tax, municipal tax, excise tax, and whatever taxes that are being paid," he said.

However, he said that the government's revenue from retailers could decrease over time if it does not create a level playing field with online merchants.

“Since online transactions are not charged VAT and duties, we feel that what is happening is business is being taken away from brick-and-mortar stores because (and) moving online,” he added.

He said that the government is missing out on the opportunity to benefit from the growth of online e-commerce, on which no taxes and duties are imposed.

“We cannot compete with the prices online because the online sellers are not paying VAT and duties,” he said.

“We pay 12% for VAT, and other products even have 5% duties, so easily (online is) 17% cheaper,” he added.

A measure that seeks to impose a 12% VAT on foreign digital service providers was approved by the bicameral conference committee on June 27 and is now awaiting the signature of President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.

Mr. Claudio said the measure could result in a pushback from consumers, though the government must address the revenue it has been forgoing.

“It deprives the government of the revenue. And, because the traditional retailers are losing out to online, over time, our sales will fall. And, when our sales fall, our tax declarations will also go down,” he said.

“Our appeal is for leveling the playing field. It’s up to the government whether they want to earn revenue or not. Because you can just imagine how much revenue the government is losing out on simply because it cannot impose VAT on foreign merchants,” he added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/09/01/617363/retailers-see-share-of-gdp-growing-despite-lack-of-tax-on-online-sellers/>

**BUSINESS WORLD:**

# Rice imports hit 2.72 MMT in late Aug. as global prices rise

September 1, 2024 | 7:52 pm



BW FILE PHOTO

PHILIPPINE rice imports amounted to 2.72 million metric tons (MMT) as of late August, according to the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI).

The BPI reported that rice shipments in August, as of Aug. 22, totaled 208,949 MT, behind the year-earlier pace of 332,892 MT.

University of Asia and the Pacific Center for Food and Agribusiness Executive Director Marie Annette Galvez-Dacul said high global rice prices during the first half may have slowed orders for foreign rice.

“Higher world prices (may have caused) importers to see not much gain even with the lower Philippine import tariffs,” Ms. Dacul said via Viber.

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

“The lower 15% tariff was intended to bring in rice and lower retail prices. However, it is not happening. Thus, bringing it back to 35% will just slow down shipments more,” she said.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. said last week that the Department of Agriculture does not plan to recommend raising tariffs at the upcoming review, as retail prices have not dropped in the face of slower import shipments.

“It seems that the tariff cut has not worked. In the meantime, we are losing tariff revenue,” Federation of Free Farmers National Manager Raul Q. Montemayor said via Viber.

The BPI said Vietnam remained the top supplier of rice as of late June, accounting for 76.8% of all imports in the year to date. Shipments totaled 2.09 MMT.

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

“Reports indicate that Vietnam has raised its prices, which means they have been the beneficiaries of the tariff cuts, not our consumers,” Mr. Montemayor added.

Thailand supplied 368,530 MT during the period, or 13.5% of the total, followed by Pakistan with 5.7% or 156,121 MT.

Rounding out the top five were Myanmar and India which shipped 66,910 MT and 21,890 MT of rice, respectively.

The Philippines imports about 20% of its rice requirement amid inadequate domestic production, but also to tame high rice prices. — **Adrian H. Halili**

[https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/09/01/617364/rice-imports-hit-2-72-mmt-in-late-aug-as-global-prices-rise/#google\\_vignette](https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/09/01/617364/rice-imports-hit-2-72-mmt-in-late-aug-as-global-prices-rise/#google_vignette)



**BUSINESS WORLD:**

# Philippines lifts import ban on California, South Dakota poultry products

August 31, 2024 | 11:18 pm



STOCK PHOTO | Image by [-Rita-](#) [und](#) [mit](#) from [Pixabay](#)

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MANILA – The Philippines has lifted its ban on importing domesticated and wild birds, including poultry products, from California and South Dakota, Manila's farm ministry said on Saturday.

**The two US states have not reported any new outbreaks of bird flu since early June, the ministry said in a statement.**

The Philippines imposed the temporary ban on California in January and on South Dakota in November last year after confirmed outbreaks of H5N1 subtype of the highly pathogenic avian influenza, which has killed millions of infected birds and poultry.  
– **Reuters**

**REMATE:**

## **Import ban sa poultry products mula California, South Dakota inalis na**

September 1, 2024 15:49



MANILA, Philippines – Inalis na ng Department of Agriculture (DA) ang importation ban sa wild at domestic birds, at iba pang poultry products mula California at South Dakota sa Estados Unidos.

Ayon sa memorandum order no. 37 na pirmado ni Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. nitong Martes, Agosto 27, pinapayagan na ng DA ang pag-aangkat ng domestic at wild birds, at mga produkto kabilang ang poultry meat, day-old chicks, mga itlog at semen mula sa dalawang U.S. states.

Sa naturang memorandum, sinabi ng DA na inalis na ang ban matapos wala nang maitalang outbreak sa California matapos ang Hunyo 14, 2024, habang wala na ring iniulat na outbreaks sa South Dakota matapos ang Mayo 29, 2024.

Noong Enero, matatandaan na nagpataw ang kagawaran ng importation ban sa domestic at wild birds, at poultry products mula California dahil sa mga outbreak ng avian influenza.

Samantala, inisyu ang ban sa mga kaparehong produkto para sa South Dakota noong Nobyembre 2023 dahil sa mga kaso ng bird flu.

Sa naturang memorandum, sinasabi na ang importation ban sa poultry products ay maaaring ipataw sa oras na tatlo o higit pang counties ang maapektuhan ng influenza. *RNT/JGC*

<https://remate.ph/import-ban-sa-poultry-products-mula-california-south-dakota-inalis-na/>

**REMATE:**

## **15,212 ASF hog deaths naitala sa Lobo, Batangas**

September 1, 2024 11:15



MANILA, Philippines – Naitala ng Batangas provincial government ang 15,212 hog deaths dahil sa African swine fever (ASF) sa Lobo, Batangas.

Sa 26 barangay sa naturang bayan, 21 ang may kaso ng ASF na karamihan sa mga apektado ay pawang mga backyard farms.

“Around 15,212 na po yung mortalities. Ito po yung may recorded kami na namatay na po, na depopulate, nabaon. Hindi pa po kasama dito yung mga hindi na po na report sa amin na nag kanya-kanya na po pagbabaon yung mga farmers natin,” pahayag ni Angelique Romero, Public Information Officer ng Lobo.

Samantala, gumagawa na ng hakbang ang Department of Agriculture laban sa ASF.

Bukod sa vaccinations, nagpapatuloy din ang repopulation ng mga baboy sa iba't ibang bahagi ng bansa.

Lumilikha rin ang ahensya ng bagong polisiya sa pagbibiyaha at pagbebenta ng ASF-free hogs mula sa mga red zone at iba pang lugar.

“Hinihintay lang natin yung pag-issue nitong nasabing guidelines para masigurado natin na yung mga ASF-free na baboy ay makarating sa mga pamilihan, sa slaughterhouse at hindi hintayin na maapektuhan ng ASF sa mga red zone,” ayon kay DA Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa. *RNT/JGC*

<https://remate.ph/15212-asf-hog-deaths-naitala-sa-lobo-batangas/>

# Research: Bioplastic films from Bandalabaca's nanocellulose

BusinessMirror  
September 1, 2024



**THE Backcross Abaca with Native and Desirable Accessions to Lift Up the Abaca Industry (Bandalabaca) abaca hybrid**

A new research initiative aims to produce eco-friendly bioplastic films reinforced with nanocellulose derived from the Backcross Abaca with Native and Desirable Accessions to Lift Up the Abaca Industry (Bandalabaca) abaca hybrid.

The project, “Application of Cellulose Nanocrystals Extracted from Bandala Fiber as Reinforcement Material in Starch-Based Bioplastic Film,” is implemented by the Forest Products Research and Development Institute of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST-FPRDI) with funding support of DOST-Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCAARRD).

Bandala is an abaca hybrid developed by the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) that has resistance to the abaca bunchy top virus.

The project will explore its potential use for bioplastic film production as a value-adding product from Bandala fibers.

Led by Dr. Anniver Ryan P. Lapuz, the project team will assess the effect of pulping and bleaching to the cellulose pulp from Bandala fibers, characterize the properties of the extracted cellulose nanocrystals (CNC), test different CNC amounts in starch-based bioplastic films, and determine the production costs of CNC and CNC-reinforced starch-based bioplastic films.

According to Lapuz, the bioplastic film that will be developed by the project could serve as an alternative to synthetic or petroleum-based plastic films, which can help reduce plastic waste and greenhouse gas emissions.

The project will be implemented for two years. It is expected to benefit abaca and cassava farmers, abaca traders, researchers, and the pulp, paper, and plastic industries.

The project kicked off during an inception meeting organized by DOST-PCAARRD, led by Deputy Executive Director Melvin B. Carlos, for Administration, Resource Management and Support Services, along with Director Leilani D. Pelegrina, of Crops Research Division in UPLB, Los Baños, Laguna.

Image credits: [CRD, DOST-PCAARRD PHOTO](#)

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/09/01/research-bioplastic-films-from-bandala-abacas-nanocellulose/>

# Cocoa deficit to be deeper than prior estimates, ICCO says

[Bloomberg News](#)  
[September 1, 2024](#)



A farmer watches as cacao pods are harvested at a farm in Eunapolis, Bahia state, Brazil, on Friday, April 5, 2024.

**Cocoa's shortage is set to deepen further this season amid persistent production challenges from poor weather and disease.**

**Demand will exceed production by 462,000 metric tons, the International Cocoa Organization said in its third estimate for the current year that started in October. That figure is 5.2 percent more than the organization's May forecast of a 439,000-ton deficit, which itself was a larger shortfall than its original outlook in February.**

**Global supply remains low as a result of "adverse weather conditions, aged trees, pests and diseases that affected production in major cocoa areas during the season under review," the ICCO said in a Friday report.**

**Production for the season is seen at 4.33 million tons, 2.9 percent below ICCO's earlier estimate, while grindings are expected to be 2.1 percent lower at 4.75 million tons.**



**New York futures are up around 80 percent this year as poor harvests in West Africa curbed supplies, though prices have pared back from record highs. The region's cocoa industry is still grappling with lasting issues like crop disease, and new trees take at least three years to reach fruit-bearing maturity. That's constraining how quickly production can ramp up to ease the shortage.**

## **Rebound**

Meanwhile, futures of soybeans and corn extended a rebound from recent lows amid signs that prices may have bottomed out.

Most-active soybean contracts settled at the key level of \$10 per bushel for the first time in three weeks. Corn futures rose just above \$4 per bushel, capping the first monthly gain since April.

Prices have shown signs of bottoming out after plunging to the lowest levels since 2020 earlier this month. US export sales for the upcoming crop have picked up after a slow start as cheaper supplies lured buyers. What's more, dryness across the Midwest has eroded crop conditions, potentially curbing the size of the harvest.

But it is still not clear that recent prices are low enough to create sufficient demand to absorb the supply surplus, according to Arlan Suderman, chief commodities economist at StoneX Group Inc.

“We are far from confirming that to be the case,” Suderman said Friday in a note to clients, warning of renewed price pressure coming from the US harvest over the next 60 to 90 days.

Meanwhile, traders will also be more closely watching the weather in South America over the next few weeks, with top soybean producer Brazil facing the worst drought in decades ahead of the planting season.

Image credits: [Dado Galdieri/Bloomberg](#)

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/09/01/cocoa-deficit-to-be-deeper-than-prior-estimates-icco-says/>