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MANILA BULLETIN:

Farmers' groups blast PSA, economic team for 'misleading claims' on rice price reduction

BY JEL SANTOS

Sep 7, 2024 06:20 PM



(MB FILE PHOTO)

Farmers' groups Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) and Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) have criticized the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) and the government's economic team, accusing them of misleading the public regarding the recent rice inflation slowdown.

On Sept. 5, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said the rice inflation slowed in August, attributing the decrease to a combination of base effects and lower tariffs on imported rice. The PSA chief and National Statistician Claire Dennis Mapa said rice inflation clocked in at 14.7 percent last month from 20.9 percent in July.

SINAG Chairperson Rosendo So said that the reduction in rice inflation does not equate to lower rice prices, contrary to what the PSA and the economic team suggest.

"Rice prices remain high; in some areas, they have even increased," said So.

SINAG and FFF have questioned the economic team's narrative, demanding clarity on why the government insists on a drop in prices when, in reality, consumers continue to feel the burden of rising costs.

The SINAG chairperson pointed out that regular-milled rice is scarce in most outlets.

He also raised concerns over unfulfilled promises from key officials, including National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Secretary Arsenio Balisacan, who had assured the public of a P29 per kilo price for rice.

“Nasaan ang pangakong P29 per kilo ni Secretary Arsenio Balisacan? Nasaan ang pangako ng mga importers na bababa ang presyo ng bigas ng P6 to P8 per kilo nung nakaraang buwan pa dapat (Where is Secretary Balisacan’s promised P29 per kilo rice? Where are the promises of importers who claimed rice prices would drop by P6 to P8 per kilo last month)? So asked.

Jayson Cainglet, the executive director of SINAG, said the NEDA chief should advise President Marcos to revoke or rescind EO 62.

Despite commending the efforts of the Department of Agriculture (DA), particularly Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., to curb rice prices, So maintained that tariff reduction under Executive Order (EO) 62 has not led to cheaper rice.

“It’s been two months since EO 62 took effect, but we don’t see rice getting cheaper,” he said.

So argued that rice exporters, particularly from Vietnam, have only increased their prices, with Vietnamese rice now costing more than Thailand's.

“Vietnam is now charging \$15 more per ton for 5 percent broken rice and \$28 more per ton for 25 percent broken rice than Thailand,” he said in Filipino.

As such, So noted that the global demand for rice has increased while domestic production in many rice-producing countries has declined, further driving up prices.

He warned that rice exporters, particularly from Vietnam, stand to profit from the surge in demand, while the local market bears the brunt of the price hike.

Vietnam is projected to earn at least \$5 billion from rice exports this year, So said.

"Strategic government intervention in production, post-production, and marketing can lower rice prices without the need for tariff cuts," So stated.

As of Sept. 6, the DA’s price monitoring indicated that the cheapest rice available in Metro Manila was P47 per kilo, while the most expensive sold for P65.

https://mb.com.ph/2024/9/7/farmers-groups-blast-psa-economic-team-for-misleading-claims-on-rice-price-reduction#google_vignette

MANILA BULLETIN:

'Crime of the highest order': Romualdez warns agricultural cartel players of dire consequences

BY ELLSON QUISMORIO

Sep 6, 2024 08:26 PM

AT A GLANCE

- House Speaker Martin Romualdez said that not only massive fines but also tough jail terms await individuals who will get convicted of economic sabotage by way of involvement in agricultural cartels that smuggle and manipulate prices of basic goods.



House Speaker Martin Romualdez (Speaker's office)

House Speaker Martin Romualdez said that not only massive fines but also tough jail terms await individuals who will get convicted of economic sabotage by way of involvement in agricultural cartels that smuggle and manipulate prices of basic goods.

"Economic sabotage is a crime of the highest order. The law demands life imprisonment for large-scale agricultural smuggling, and we will make sure those responsible face the full force of justice. These cartels are not just committing fraud; they are endangering our food security and destroying the livelihoods of our farmers," Romualdez declared on Friday, Sept. 6.

The warning comes after the recent identification of 12 key members of an onion cartel in the Philippines, which are facing a staggering P2.4 billion in fines as an offshoot of a House of Representatives investigation initiated by the last year Speaker.

According to the Enforcement Office of the Philippine Competition Commission (PCC), it had filed charges and recommended penalties amounting to P2.42 billion against 12 onion traders and importers for allegedly operating as a cartel since 2019.

Named as respondents by PCC were Philippine Vieva Group of Companies Inc., Tian Long Corp., La Reina Fresh Vegetables and Young Indoor Plants Inc., Yom Trading Corp., Vegetable Importers, Exporters and Vendors Association of the Philippines, and Golden Shine International Freight Forwarders Corp.

Romualdez, Leyte's 1st district representative, made it clear that hefty fines are only the start, as criminal charges and long-term imprisonment were also guaranteed for these offenders.

"The imposition of P2.4 billion in fines is just the opening salvo. Smugglers and price manipulators will face not just financial repercussions, but serious jail time. We will not tolerate the sabotage of our economy and the exploitation of Filipino families," he said.

The leader of the 300-plus strong legislative chamber pointed to Republic Act (RA) No.10845, or the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016, which classifies large-scale smuggling as economic sabotage—a non-bailable offense carrying life imprisonment, alongside asset forfeitures and hefty fines.

The Speaker assured the public that the investigation would lead not only to fines but also to full prosecution.

"The P2.4 billion in fines is just the start. The law is clear—those who manipulate agricultural prices will face long prison terms. Smuggling, hoarding, and price manipulation will receive the toughest penalties," he stressed.

Romualdez assured the public that the House will maintain its aggressive stance against agricultural cartels, in close collaboration with agencies like the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Bureau of Customs (BOC), to prevent a recurrence of these illegal activities.

"We are fully committed to wiping out these cartels," the Speaker pointed out. "This is not just about onions—this is about safeguarding our food supply and ensuring that every Filipino has access to affordable agricultural products. Today, we struck a blow against one cartel, but this is only the beginning."

The House chief also pushed for stronger legislative reforms to ensure that the penalties for agricultural smuggling are even more severe.

"We will strengthen the laws, ensuring that those who sabotage our economy with price manipulation and smuggling face longer jail terms and harsher penalties. The days of leniency are over," he declared.

The crackdown on the onion cartel comes after months of soaring prices caused by artificial scarcity through

hoarding

and

manipulation.

The P2.4 billion fine levied on the cartel members is a significant step in the government's broader campaign against agricultural smuggling, but Speaker Romualdez made it clear that the consequences for those responsible would extend beyond financial penalties.

“The House will not stop until these cartels are dismantled and those responsible for hurting our farmers and consumers are behind bars. This is a fight we will win—for the farmers, for the consumers, and for the entire Filipino nation,” the Speaker concluded.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/9/6/crime-of-the-highest-order-romualdez-warns-agricultural-cartel-players-of-dire-consequences>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Pesticides, heavy metals detected in smuggled vegetables from Navotas — DA

BY JEL SANTOS

Sep 6, 2024 04:05 PM



(DA PHOTO)

The smuggled vegetables seized from a Navotas City warehouse were found to contain pesticide residues, heavy metals, and microbiological contaminants, the Department of Agriculture (DA) revealed on Friday, Sept. 6.

In a report to Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., Director Gerald Glenn Panganiban of the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) stated that onions, tomatoes, and carrots seized from a Navotas cold storage were contaminated with harmful pesticides like organophosphates, organochlorines, and pyrethroids, as well as the heavy metals cadmium and lead.

Tests also uncovered microbiological threats, such as *E. coli*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, and *Salmonella* spp, he added.

“The food safety analysis confirms that the allegedly smuggled agricultural crops contain pesticide residues, heavy metals, and microbiological contaminants that do not comply with our food safety regulations,” Panganiban said.

The contaminated vegetables, according to the DA chief, will be disposed of, as they cannot be sold or donated due to BPI's test results.

“We cannot risk the health of Filipino consumers,” said Laurel.

He said the agency's legal team "will determine legal actions that can be taken against these unscrupulous traders who not only evaded tariffs but also endangered consumer health."

On Aug. 15, a team composed of members of the DA-Inspectorate and Enforcement Office, the Bureau of Customs (BOC), and other law enforcement units raided a storage facility located in Navotas City and seized over 300 tons of smuggled vegetables.

Citing the initial report of the raiding team, the agriculture department bared that 132.75 tons of white onions valued at ₱21.2 million were found in one of the two cold storage facilities.

Meanwhile, another storage facility contained 89.89 tons of imported carrots estimated to be worth around P13.48 million.

The DA also reported that the team found 360 kilos of tomatoes, 10 kilos of enoki mushrooms, and a 40-footer container van loaded with 92.25 tons of imported white onions.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/9/6/pesticides-heavy-metals-detected-in-smuggled-vegetables-from-navotas-da>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Hope from Pampanga startup: Linking farmers and consumers for fresh produce

FarmYields

BY GABRIELL CHRISTEL GALANG

Sep 6, 2024 09:59 AM

As households across the Philippines face the brunt of skyrocketing food prices—particularly in fruits and vegetables—an inspiring wave of innovation is sweeping through the agribusiness sector.

Recent data from the Philippine Statistics Authority reveals a troubling 9.4 percent inflation rate for fruits and nuts, while vegetables and staples have seen a 4.3 percent hike.

Amid these challenges, FarmYields, a Pampanga-based agribusiness startup, stands out as a beacon of hope.

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FarmYields is not just about providing fresh, affordable produce; it's a hub of creativity and collaboration that connects farmers directly with consumers and the food and hospitality industry. Their mission? To make food not only accessible but also enticing and sustainable.

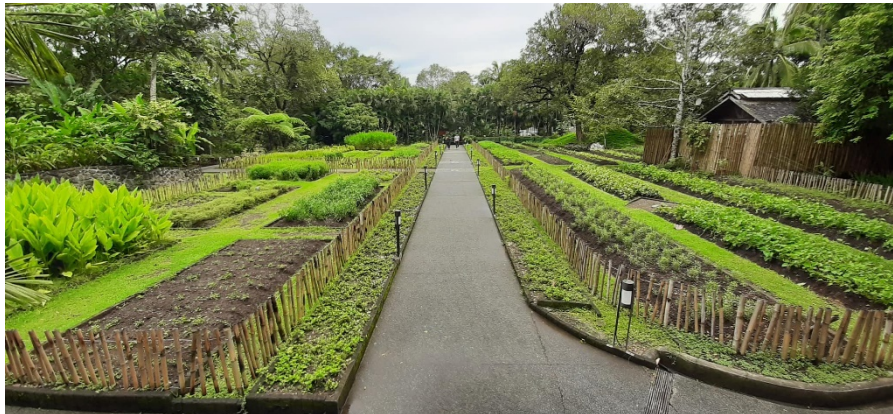


Carlomagno happily harvests fresh vegetables in his garden.

Co-founder and head consultant Carlomagno Aguilar explains that their goal is to make food “available, fresh, and affordable.”

“If food is accessible, you can achieve all three of these,” Aguilar shared,

This philosophy is at the heart of FarmYields’ operations, where they prioritize quality and transparency, ensuring that every product is sourced from local farmers who practice sustainable agriculture.



Lush gardens at The Farm at San Benito, part of the FarmYields projects.

Planting the seeds of success

To meet the growing demand for convenient produce and effective gardening management, FarmYields has structured its agribusiness into three distinct departments: Fresherb, which empowers customers to grow their own food; FarmYields Consulting, which assists clients in building and managing local farms; and the FarmYields app, an e-platform that connects growers and farmers with buyers such as restaurant owners, chefs, and hotels.

This expansion is a testament to the company's humble beginnings. In an interview with *Manila Bulletin*, Aguilar shared that the business originated from a chef's request to grow herbs in 2015. As word spread, more clients approached him for guidance.

Three years later, the International School for Culinary Arts and Hotel Management (ISCAHM) Pampanga sought Aguilar's expertise to replicate Fresherb's garden on their campus.

“This is how consultations were born, and we used to call it organic growth,” he said. His consulting services have since contributed to the development of gardens at The Farm in San Benito, Batangas, and Isla in Coron, Palawan.



Aguilar’s virtual meetings for online farm consultation, featuring participants connecting from different locations.

FarmYields also experienced significant growth during the pandemic as more people turned to gardening for both sustenance and therapeutic benefits.

Fruits of labor

In addition to helping clients develop their farms and promote home gardening, Aguilar emphasized their commitment to supporting local farmers and logistics partners.

“Farmers always say that they don’t have a market... They don’t have an avenue where they can sell their produce,” he explained. “We’re hoping that our apps can be their avenue.”

According to FarmYields’ data, around 111 trained farmers are currently collaborating with the company.

“We want to bring more attention to our e-platform because we cannot do everything by ourselves.”

The FarmYields app is a business-to-business platform for growers, chefs, and aspiring gardeners.

“This approach also promotes crop requests and logistics,” Aguilar added.

FarmYields typically utilizes on-demand delivery services for nearby areas while clients or buyers manage large-scale orders.

“In the future, we can build a network of logistics... This is a large factor [in business],” he said, expressing hopes for expanding distribution partnerships.

Weeding out minor hurdles

Even agricultural ventures encounter setbacks, with climate change being one of the challenges. Aguilar stated, “For the past years, we saw challenges beyond the prices, but also the quality and the weather.”

Despite the challenges posed by typhoon season, FarmYields has able to produce around 5,000 kilos of lettuce per month for one of the country’s largest malls.

“The direction is greenhouse farming,” he revealed, although he acknowledged that this approach doesn’t fully shield against severe weather events.

Aguilar also recommended sustainable practices such as drip irrigation, regenerative farming, and grafted seedlings to address weather-related challenges in food production.

Sowing seeds of change

As an established agribusiness in Pampanga, the FarmYields’ chief aims to inspire a new generation of young entrepreneurs to enter the agribusiness sector.



Carlomagno joins a group of young farmers, inspiring the future of agribusiness.

“Some people give up on agribusiness because they don’t know how [to market]. If they know how to do business, like financial, marketing, operations, and legal, there are tons of opportunities.”

He emphasized the importance of groundwork, advising aspiring entrepreneurs to collaborate with experts. “Work with someone who knows the soil, or work with an accountant who knows how to cost because outputs like vegetables tend to have different costings.”

Guidance is crucial for nurturing the next wave of agricultural entrepreneurs. Although he noted a decline in farm careers, Aguilar highlighted that most of his employees are aged 21 to 38.

“There are a lot of job opportunities [in agriculture] for the youth as long as there are proper systems in place.”

As a passionate agribusiness advocate, Aguilar also uses social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube to promote farming and inspire young people to embrace this vocation.

On Instagram, [@CarloTheFarmer](#) shares snapshots of farm life that resonate with his audience. His posts blend educational content with personal anecdotes, highlighting both the joys and challenges of farming.

Aguilar's [YouTube channel](#), "Carlo The Farmer," serves as a resource for aspiring farmers, covering essential topics from sustainable practices to technology integration in agriculture.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/9/6/linking-farmers-and-consumers-for-fresh-produce>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Start them young with Slow Food Youth

FOOD FOR THOUGHT - **Chit U. Juan** - The Philippine Star

September 7, 2024 | 12:00am

We had a young assistant chef named Jam Melchor when we started the first “farm to table” restaurant in the country in 2011. He was a quiet worker and I never really bothered him with his work in the kitchen. However, after that stint, he started more entrepreneurial ventures such as delivery of cooked meals for special diets, for those counting calories or for those who needed more protein, less fat, etc. During Christmas he makes his family recipe of Chicken Galantina, a special fiesta food from his hometown, Angeles, Pampanga. As we all know, Pampanga has a whole list of renowned chefs but Chef Jam, who is now in his mid 30s, is carving his own niche, so to speak.

Not even 30 then, he went around Southeast Asia promoting Filipino food in various locations of a global hotel chain as he did local buffets along with the Department of Agriculture, promoting Filipino culture and traditions. I was a proud Mama following him in his activities internationally.

In 2016, we went to Terra Madre event together in Turin, Italy as he was the assigned chef for the Philippine stand at the famous event held every other year. He made adobo, pancit and champorado to the delight of the Slow Food visitors, some of whom have never heard of the Philippines, much less our cuisine. It was here where he encountered young Slow Food enthusiasts, too. As soon as we came home or on or about April 2017, he started the Slow Food Youth Network (SFYN) in the country, gathering all these students and young chefs like him to hold meaningful activities like the World Disco Soup day every April 28.

It is a network appealing to the young who are afraid to commit to membership in our older group called Convivium (yes, we used a Latin word for group). He toured schools and asked them to host “youth-oriented” group events. We older ones were the Slow Food Manila convivium while he led the Slow Food Youth Network.

I cannot forget Chef Jam’s other career milestones as I saw his framed photo at the Cafeteria in Pollenzo, Italy at the University of Gastronomic Sciences. Apparently, he had been invited to cook Filipino food for a week in 2017 at the famous academy. Being invited among the world’s best chefs is truly an honor and he tells me more in our podcast (airing soon) for other young chefs to emulate.

In 2016, he also worked with a few friends to push for the celebration of Filipino Food Month, now Presidential Proclamation 469 to preserve Filipino food and culture every April. He organized the Philippine Culinary Heritage Movement with like-minded friends to shepherd this idea into law.

Lately, I was following him on Instagram as he went on an ASEAN Heritage Train Cultural Exchange Program which took him and other young chefs around Asia, visiting Laos, Malaysia and Thailand for immersion, one week in each city, in UNESCO Creative Cities for Gastronomy. For someone so young to have this culture bug biting him all the time, he cannot help but work with National Commission for Culture and the Arts for Filipino Food Month. And that celebration is now in the law.

See, young people can help make laws. It's not just for lawyers and politicians, it is also an area where advocacies cause policy change which become law. So I advise young people of today to help create laws in this manner instead of just rallying in the streets.

Oh, and Chef Jam started teaching, too. Young professional chefs can teach the youth good manners and right conduct for the hospitality industry, as many of those enrolled in culinary schools want to be chefs and cooks. We need to remind them though that cooking or 'cheffing' is not about themselves but about moving an industry in the right direction. And that is exactly what Chef Jam has been doing, with great results.

During the pandemic, Chef Jam and I also collaborated to do a Food Map for Pampanga and Bulacan with the request of Department of Tourism Region 3. While we worked remotely, we still were able to gather food historians, academe and tourism officers and we finished this project despite the times.

I have the greatest respect for young people who have advocacies and career interests that intertwine – just like Chef Jam. No wonder he is always invited to international events and food camps like the one he attended in France some years ago. The only requirement is a young age plus passion for cooking and love for culture. And he started at the tender age of 24.

How does one start an advocacy at a young age? It just is a recipe of exposure to other young people such as the global community of Slow Food Youth Network, the background in culinary skills and culture and the passion to make a difference. It also helps to have supportive parents who respect one's dreams to be a chef and not think of it as a lowly profession.

Slow Food Youth Network is a good place to have your children start learning how to combine culture, community and good values. And we are only so glad that no less than a dean of the Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management of Far Eastern

University, Dean Harold Bernardo Bueno, has taken the baton to lead this network to greater heights. But Chef Jam is ever at his side to guide him and inspire more youth to join the group.

Encourage your food-loving children to join SFYN so they can be with like-minded youth so we can create more Jams and Harolds. And make them express their culture and passion towards interesting careers. Read more about Slow Food Youth Network on Facebook and Instagram: SFYN Philippines.

<https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2024/09/07/2383412/start-them-young-slow-food-youth>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Stronger penalties urged for agricultural smuggling

[Sheila Crisostomo](#) - The Philippine Star

September 7, 2024 | 12:00am



During a visit to the Southern Philippines Medical Center in Davao City the other day, Speaker Martin Romualdez went to see the pediatric cancer ward, where he distributed toys and Jollibee kiddie meals to young patients. He earlier announced that SPMC would receive P50 million in medical assistance for indigent patients so that all patients admitted, including outpatients, on Sept. 5 to 6, 2024, would enjoy zero billing.

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MANILA, Philippines — Speaker Martin Romualdez is pushing for “more severe” punishment for agricultural smugglers and price manipulators, saying these acts are considered “economic sabotage” and “stronger legislative reforms” are needed to deter such unlawful activities.

“We will strengthen the laws, ensuring that those who sabotage our economy with price manipulation and smuggling face longer jail terms and harsher penalties. The days of leniency are over,” Romualdez said.

He made the statement yesterday in reaction to the recent identification of 12 key members of an onion cartel in the Philippines who are now facing a staggering P2.4 billion in fines as an offshoot of the House probe that the Speaker initiated.

According to the Enforcement Office of the Philippine Competition Commission, it had filed charges and recommended penalties amounting to P2.42 billion against 12 onion traders and importers for allegedly operating as a cartel since 2019.

“Economic sabotage is a crime of the highest order. The law demands life imprisonment for large-scale agricultural smuggling, and we will make sure those responsible face the full force of justice,” he added.

The cartels, Romualdez said, “are not just committing fraud; they are endangering our food security and destroying the livelihoods of our farmers.”

He said the P2.4-billion fine levied on the cartel members is a significant step in the government’s broader campaign against agricultural smuggling.

‘DA, BPI also liable in onion cartel’

Farmers’ group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) yesterday said that along with the 12 traders allegedly involved in the onion cartel, charges should also be filed against officials of the Department of Agriculture (DA) and Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI).

At a press conference, SINAG executive director Jayson Cainglet noted that as early as 2013, Sen. Cynthia Villar, chair of the Senate committee on agriculture and food, has recommended the filing of cases against the 12 traders.

Named in the Statement of Objection are Philippine Vieva Group of Companies (Phil. Vieva Group), Tian Long Corp., La Reina Fresh Vegetables & Young Indoor Plants, Yom Trading Corp., Vegetable Importers, Exporters & Vendors Association of the Philippines (VIEVA Phils.) and Golden Shine International Freight Forwarders.

Also named as individual respondents are Lilia Cruz as vice president of Phil. Vieva Group, chair and president of Golden Shine and chair of VIEVA Phils.; Eric Pabilona as board member of Phil. Vieva Group, corporate executive officer of Golden Shine and corporate secretary of Tian Long; Renato Francisco Jr. as board member of Phil. Vieva Group, president of La Reina and chairman and president of Yom Trading; Letty Baculando, board member of Phil. Vieva Group and incorporator of Golden Shine; Mark Castro Ocampo, sole proprietor of Vegefru Producing Store and Nancy Callanta Rosal, sole proprietor of Rosal Fruit and Vegetable Trading.

“The PCC should also look into the possible liabilities of regulatory agencies. Why were these traders allowed to continue to import, despite that they were already suspected (of being) part of the cartel?” Cainglet said.

He added that the BPI should not have allowed the issuance of import permits to the unscrupulous traders.

SINAG chairman Rosendo So said it was the DA that allowed the procurement of onions in 2022, despite being overpriced at P720 per kilo.

“That time, the wholesale price of onions increased by P180, but the retail price went up to P720 per kilo. So, the government should really address the disconnection. It was the government who bought the onions at P720 per kilo,” So said. —
Bella Cariaso

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/09/07/2383423/stronger-penalties-urged-agricultural-smuggling>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

President Marcos urges LGUs: Address special concerns of Enteng victims

[Helen Flores](#) - The Philippine Star

September 7, 2024 | 12:00am



President Ferdinand Marcos Jr

Bongbong Marcos / Facebook Page

MANILA, Philippines — President Marcos yesterday ordered national agencies and local government units (LGUs) to immediately address special concerns of those who were affected by Tropical Storm Enteng.

The President made the statement at a situation briefing in Antipolo, Rizal as some areas or barangays may not have received any aid from the government yet.

Enteng left 16 people dead and affected 8,036 families in Rizal.

The storm also damaged the Rizal Provincial Hospital system, pegged at P533,700.

Marcos ordered the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) to carry on its distribution of relief goods to affected residents.

He also directed the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to closely coordinate with the Department of Public Works and Highways for clearing operations.

According to Rizal Gov. Nina Ynares, Enteng dumped one month's rain in Rizal in just four days and "the damage is quite big."

Ynares said the damage to infrastructure and agriculture in the province was estimated at more than P300 million and P30 million, respectively.

The President also renewed his call to study the building of weirs in waterways to mitigate flooding in Rizal and nearby areas.

Marcos said weirs are not like dams but they are capable of controlling the flow of the river.

"It's just that I see them in other places and it's really effective," he said.

The DSWD is also preparing food packs for possible weather disturbances that could still develop in the country.

According to DSWD Assistant Secretary Irene Dumlao, the agency has "enough resources" for Enteng relief operations and future weather disturbances.

Dumlao said they have adequate supply of family food packs amounting to 1.7 million packs and other relief items for augmentation to LGUs.

The DSWD is making the preparation amid reports from the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration that several tropical cyclones could develop within the Philippine area of responsibility in the next two weeks.

The agency is also in close coordination with other government agencies as part of the preparation for the possible effects of the forecast tropical cyclones. — **Sheila Crisostomo**

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/09/07/2383433/president-marcos-urges-lgus-address-special-concerns-enteng-victims>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Agriculture damage due to Enteng rises to P659 million

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

September 7, 2024 | 12:00am



Several houses in Barangay Lias and Barangay Saog are submerged in floodwaters following the heavy rain brought by Severe Tropical Storm #EntengPH in Marilao, Bulacan on September 4, 2024.

STAR / Michael Varcas

MANILA, Philippines — The damage of Tropical Storm Enteng to the agriculture sector in five regions has risen to P659.01 million, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Based on the latest report of the DA's Operations Center as of 8 a.m. yesterday, Enteng has affected 22,309 hectares of agricultural land in Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Bicol Region, Western and Eastern Visayas.

The DA said the volume of production losses was pegged at 28,788 metric tons (MT) covering rice, corn, high-value crops, cassava and livestock affecting at least 27,598 farmers.

According to the DA, 95 percent or P624.06 million of the damage came from rice covering 20,096 hectares of palay plantations and a production loss of 26,736 MT.

Meanwhile, the damage to corn plantations reached P22.75 million covering 2,065 hectares and production losses of 1,430 MT.

The damage to high-value crops increased to P10.41 million covering 132 hectares and volume losses of 533 MT.

On the other hand, damage to cassava reached P1.77 million affecting 16 hectares and losses of 89 MT.

The DA is currently carrying out assistance and interventions for the affected farmers and fisherfolk through its regional field offices and local government units.

Some P202.86 million worth of assistance was given by DA regional field offices.

The DA added that affected farmers can avail themselves of the P25,000 loan under the Survival and Recovery Loan Program from the Agricultural Credit Policy Council.

Available funds from the Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. are also ready to indemnify insured affected farmers, it added.

16 dead, 17 missing

Meanwhile, Enteng's death toll rose to 16 yesterday as thousands of displaced families remain in temporary shelters across Luzon and the Visayas.

Latest reports from the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) show that eight of the casualties are from the Calabarzon region, three from the Bicol region and two each from Western, Central and Eastern Visayas region.

The agency added the number of persons reported missing has also ballooned to 17.

The NDRRMC said a total of 538,602 families or 2,061,726 persons were affected by Enteng's heavy rains, flooding and landslides in various provinces.

Of the number, some 9,089 families or 36,330 persons are still in at least 424 evacuation centers where their basic needs are being provided for.

In a separate report, at least 23,197 families or 65,599 persons were affected by flooding in Pampanga, according to their Provincial Social Welfare and Development Office.

PSWDO authorities said most of the affected families are from the City of San Fernando and the towns of Candaba, Macabebe and Masantol.

The flooding has left some 62 barangays in the province submerged, according to reports from various city and municipal disaster risk reduction and management offices.

A total of 83 barangays in eight towns and two cities of Bulacan are still inundated with floodwaters caused by Enteng and the high tide from Manila Bay.

Records as of 11 a.m. yesterday released by the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction Council of Bulacan showed that Calumpit town has 19 villages inundated with floodwater; Paombong and the City of Meycauayan have 14 barangays; City of Malolos 12; Hagonoy eight; Bocaue seven; Balagtas five; Bulakan two and one each for Marilao and Pandi.

These villages are flooded under a half foot to six feet of water, with the deepest monitored in Brgy. Santa Lucia in Calumpit town.

A total of 49 active evacuation centers in the towns of Calumpit, Hagonoy, Plaridel, San Ildefonso, San Rafael, Obando, Balagtas, Bocaue and in the cities of Baliwag, Malolos and Meycauayan still house 1,160 families or 4,252 individuals.

So far, the NDRRMC said the government has provided over P37.3 million worth of food and non-food assistance to at least 58,007 affected families in various affected provinces.

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) meantime reported that FBCA ZShan, a fishing boat carrying 15 crew and their captain, is still missing after three days of searching off Quezon province.

The PCG, military and local authorities are currently conducting search and rescue operations for the missing crew along the shores of the province.

The PCG is also currently verifying reports that the missing boat was seen off Palanan, Isabela on Thursday.

The coast guard has also rescued three fishermen from Bolinao, Pangasinan at the height of Enteng's onslaught at the Ilocos region yesterday.

Meanwhile, the Department of Public Works and Highways reported yesterday that the effects of Enteng have left an estimated P139.56 million worth of damage to infrastructure in five affected regions of Luzon and the Visayas.

Public Works Secretary Manuel Bonoan said the partial cost of damage to infrastructure is broken down into P84.39 million for damage to roads, P12.420 million for bridges and P42.75 million for flood control structures.

By region, Bonoan said the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) reported P49.43 million of damage to infrastructure; Region 2 with P9.85 million; Region 5 with P34.85 million; Region 6 with P25.78 million and Region 8 with P23.65 million. — **Michael Punongbayan, Jose Rodel Clapano, Ed Amoroso, Ramon Efren Lazaro, Jun Elias**

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/09/07/2383445/agriculture-damage-due-enteng-rises-p659-million>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

DA: P30 million smuggled veggies seized in Navotas contaminated

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

September 7, 2024 | 12:00am



Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) director Gerald Glenn Panganiban said the tests conducted on onions, tomatoes and carrots from the makeshift cold storage facility showed the presence of pesticides that are harmful to humans: organophosphates, organochlorines and pyrethroids.

STAR / File

MANILA, Philippines — At least P30 million worth of smuggled vegetables seized at a warehouse in Navotas tested positive for pesticide residues, metals and microbiological contaminants, the Department of Agriculture (DA) announced yesterday.

Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) director Gerald Glenn Panganiban said the tests conducted on onions, tomatoes and carrots from the makeshift cold storage facility showed the presence of pesticides that are harmful to humans: organophosphates, organochlorines and pyrethroids.

The vegetables also contained cadmium and lead, which pose health risks.

Panganiban said the agricultural products also contained microbiological contaminants such as *E. coli*, *Listeria monocytogenes* and *Salmonella* spp.

“The analysis confirms that the allegedly smuggled agricultural crops contained pesticide residues, heavy metals and microbiological contaminants that do not comply with our food safety regulations,” Panganiban said in his report to Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

Last month, members of the DA Inspectorate and Enforcement Office and the Bureau of Customs confiscated over 300 tons of white onions, carrots, tomatoes and other products that were imported without the sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances from the BPI.

Tiu Laurel said the contaminated vegetables would be destroyed, adding the government could not “risk the health of consumers.”

The DA legal team will determine the legal actions that can be taken against the unscrupulous traders who evaded payment of tariffs, Tiu Laurel said.

<https://www.philstar.com/nation/2024/09/07/2383340/da-p30-million-smuggled-veggies-seized-navotas-contaminated>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Sandiganbayan junks ex-DA official's quashal

By: [Kathleen de Villa](#) - Reporter / [@kdevillaNO](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 05:12 AM September 07, 2024



INQUIRER PHOTO / NINO JESUS ORBETA

MANILA, Philippines — The Sandiganbayan Special Fifth Division has rejected the motion of former Agriculture Assistant Secretary Kristine Evangelista to quash the graft and falsification charges and suspend the issuance arrest warrant against her over the purchase of P133 million worth of onions for the government's Kadiwa project. In a resolution on Aug. 30, the antigraft court called “unmeritorious” her arguments in challenging the validity of the information of the two criminal charges filed against her.

The court also denied Evangelista's motion to hold in abeyance the issuance of a warrant for her arrest for being moot.

Evangelista is accused of conspiring with three executives of Food Terminal Inc., a government-owned and controlled corporation; and 14 members of the Bonena Multipurpose Cooperative tapped as supplier in the procurement from December 2023 to January this year of 8,845 bags of onions.

The order for thousands of onions was part of the Department of Agriculture's Food Mobilization project that would allow the government to buy directly from farmers and producers and sell the agricultural commodities at marked down prices at Kadiwa stores.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1980826/sandigan-junks-ex-da-officials-quashal>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Romualdez: Cheaper rice at Kadiwa stores helped slow August inflation

By: [Gabriel Pabico Lalu](#) - Reporter / [@GabrielLaluINQ](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 08:39 PM September 06, 2024

MANILA, Philippines — Inflation figures for August 2024 slowed down because of the government’s decision to sell cheaper rice at Kadiwa stores, House of Representatives Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez said on Friday. Romualdez in a statement was referring to Program 29, a program of the Department of Agriculture (DA) where rice is sold at P29 per kilogram in select Kadiwa sites every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. According to the Speaker, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.’s decision to [cut down the tariff on imported rice](#) also contributed to this. “We will help the President by approving pieces of legislation and exercising our oversight power to keep prices down, untangle bottlenecks in the distribution chain that push prices up and to expose abusive practices like hoarding and price manipulation,” Romualdez said.

“It was meant to be. It was not a fluke,” he said.

On Thursday, the Philippine Statistics Authority said that headline inflation rates for August 2024 eased to 3.3 percent, the slowest rate in seven months due to a slower rise in food and transport costs.

This is lower than the 4.4 percent rise in the prices of goods and services recorded in July, and the 5.3 percent in August 2023.

Romualdez believes coordination between the executive and legislative branches will be crucial to decreasing inflation rates further.

“Managing inflation is a see-saw battle. The challenge for us is to keep it falling, or at least steady. And with the executive and legislative branches and of course, the private sector working together, I hope we succeed for the benefit of our people,” he noted.

Better days ahead

Albay 2nd District Rep. Joey Salceda, meanwhile, believes that indicators point towards a downward inflation trend since prices of food products have decreased.

“Today’s inflation report was much needed breathing room. The inflation rate was largely driven by rice and corn prices, which were higher year-on-year, due to base effects. But if you look at month-on-month figures, rice and corn are actually cheaper now than they were last month. So, the trend is actually even better for consumers in that perspective,” Salceda said.

“As a result of that slightly favorable trend, month-on-month inflation for meat has also been negative, while the impact of feed prices on year-on-year meat prices has been muted. In fact, looking at the month-on-month price movements, nothing really sticks out. Even sugar is cheaper both on a month-on-month and year-on-year basis,” he added.

According to Salceda, an economist, these numbers would boost consumer confidence, which would eventually help industries earn more.

Still, the lawmaker advised the government to monitor prices of rice and corn, as these two products can easily ramp up inflation numbers.

“We need these numbers moving forward for consumer confidence, especially as the biggest consumer spending event of the year – the Christmas season – dawns. This is often the only chance many firms get to ramp up sales, so it will be very crucial to see whether consumers get some extra legroom for discretionary spending due to lower consumer prices,” Salceda said.

“Moving forward, we need to continue keeping track of momentum for rice and corn prices. Corn remains a very strong sticking point because the transmission to meat prices, especially poultry, can be very quick. If we want to prevent an upward spiral in food prices, we really need to focus on corn,” he noted.

Fuel prices, Salceda said, should also need to be kept in check.

“I am also keeping track of movements in fuel prices, which moved considerably on a month-on-month and year-on-year basis. At 5.9 percent year-on-year inflation and 2.2 percent month-on-month, it’s something to watch out for. There will not be massive changes moving forward, in my view, given that OPEC plans to increase output by October, but this is canceled out by lower US output,” he said.

“All in all, these results are positive. I hope President Marcos and his agriculture and food security team, led by the Secretary of Agriculture, will remain hell-bent on ensuring that the price of rice and corn will continue to decline in the coming months – especially after harvest season next month for rice,” he added.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1980775/romualdez-cheaper-rice-at-kadiwa-stores-helped-slow-august-inflation>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

‘Enteng’ death toll hits 16; 17 still missing

By: [By the Inquirer Staff](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 05:38 AM September 07, 2024



LINGERING Although Tropical Storm “Enteng” has already left the country, floodwaters continued to linger in Marikina City on Thursday due to the southwest monsoon. —LYN RILLON

MANILA, Philippines — The death toll due to Tropical Storm Enteng (international name: Yagi) and the southwest monsoon has reached 16, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) said on Friday.

In its latest bulletin, the NDRRMC said eight of the fatalities were in Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon), three in the Bicol Region, two in Central Visayas, two in Eastern Visayas and one in Western Visayas.

It added that 17 people remained missing and 13 others were injured in various parts of the country.

According to the disaster agency, 2,061,726 people or 538,602 families were affected by Enteng and the southwest monsoon, locally known as “habagat,” in Metro Manila, Ilocos, Cagayan, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Bicol, Western Visayas, Central Visayas, Eastern Visayas and Cordillera regions.

The Bicol region had the most number of affected individuals at 1,119,382 while Metro Manila had 236,610.

It said 47,679 individuals have been displaced by the weather disturbances while 5,965 houses were destroyed, with 107 “totally damaged.”

The damage to infrastructure was at P223.6 million, according to the NDRRMC.

In the Bicol region, at least 739 classrooms were either damaged or destroyed by floods and heavy rains due to Enteng, partial reports from the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) in Bicol showed.

Initial reports only

Gremil Alexis Naz, spokesperson for the OCD, told the Inquirer on Friday that they were still expecting more reports from different divisions in the region.

Of the 739, at least 68 classrooms were destroyed, while 671 were damaged, according to the report.

According to the partial report, close to P11 million were requested for the repair of the classrooms and the building of temporary learning spaces (TLS).

Mayflor Jumamil, spokesperson for the Department of Education (DepEd), told the Inquirer that a total of 217 TLS were needed for the provinces of Albay (five), Camarines Sur (182), and Camarines Norte (10) and Naga City (20).

Jumamil said these TLS will be based on DepEd’s defined dimensions, but they are open to donations from local governments and nongovernmental organizations.

“It is very important [that these schools have TLS] because this ensures the learners’ continuity of learning, although there is a policy that if in-person classes are not possible, teaching modalities shift to alternative delivery modes,” Jumamil told the Inquirer.

The farm sector is also reeling from the devastating impact of Enteng, with losses climbing to more than P650 million.

In its latest bulletin, the Department of Agriculture reported that the typhoon’s damage to the sector reached P659.01 million as of Friday morning, rising by about 83 percent from the P360.18 million reported on Wednesday.

Tens of thousands

Enteng affected the livelihood of 27,598 farmers in the regions of Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Bicol, Western and Eastern Visayas.

The volume loss is projected at 28,788 metric tons (MT) covering 22,309 hectares (ha), mostly planted to rice.

The NDRRMC said P92,636,750 worth of assistance to the victims had been provided.

Rice still comprised more than 94 percent of overall losses, pegged at P624.06 million. Enteng wiped out 26,736 MT of produce spanning 20,096 ha.

Other affected crops include corn (P22.75 million), high-value crops (P10.41 million), cassava (P1.77 million) and livestock and poultry (P16,000). —*With reports from Nestor Corrales, Jordeene B. Lagare, Rey Anthony Ostria and Kathleen de Villa*

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1980830/enteng-death-toll-hits-16-17-still-missing>

REMATE:

Mapanganib na kemikal buking sa nasabat na gulay sa Navotas

September 7, 2024 13:56



MANILA, Philippines- Sinabi ng Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) nitong Biyernes na nagpositibo sa pesticides at heavy metals ang mga puslit na gulay na nasabat sa Navotas.

Mahigit 300 toneladang white onions, carrots, kamatis at enoki mushrooms ang nakumpiska mula sa makeshift cold storage facilities at 40-footer container van noong kalagitnaan ng Agosto dahil sa kawalan ng sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances (SPSIC) para sa pag-aangkat.

“The food safety analysis confirms that the allegedly smuggled crops contain pesticide residues, heavy metals, and microbiological contaminants that do not comply with our food safety regulations,” pahayag ni BPI Director Gerald Glenn Panganiban.

Inihayag ni Panganiban na partikular na nagpositibo ang mga ito sa iba't ibang pesticide residues na “harmful to humans,” kabilang ang organophosphates, organochlorines, at pyrethroids, maging heavy metals tulad ng cadmium at lead.

Natukoy din ang microbial contaminants kasama ang E. coli, Listeria monocytogenes, at Salmonella spp, dagdag niya.

“We cannot risk the health of Filipino consumers. The DA legal team will determine legal actions that can be taken against these unscrupulous traders who not only evaded tariffs but also endangered consumer health,” giit naman ni Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. **RNT/SA**

<https://remate.ph/mapanganib-na-kemikal-buking-sa-nasabat-na-gulay-sa-navotas/>

Enteng Agri losses hit P659M

By Janine Alexis Miguel

September 7, 2024

THE cost of agricultural damage from Severe Tropical Storm Enteng has reached P659.01 million as of Friday, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said.

As of September 6, the number of affected farmers from Bicol Region, Cagayan Valley, Western and Eastern Visayas, and Central Luzon has reached 27,598.

The number was expected to rise as reports from other regions were yet to be submitted or validated, said Agriculture Assistant Secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa.

Overall volume of production loss was estimated at 28,788 metric tons (MT), while 22,309 hectares of agricultural areas planted with rice, corn, cassava, and other high-value crops were damaged.

Most of the damage was recorded in the rice sector at 95 percent, accounting for 26,736 MT with an equivalent value of P624.06 million.

For corn, the loss was 1,430 MT (P22.75 million), for high-value crops with damaged crops at 89 MT (P1.77 million), and for high-value crops, 533 MT (P10.41 million).

From January to September, the combined effects of El Niño and other weather disturbances resulted in agricultural damage amounting to nearly P23 billion.

The DA said it has distributed various forms of assistance to affected sectors, including P202.8 million worth of seeds to mitigate the effects of calamities.

Loan programs under the Agricultural Credit Policy Council, the Quick Response Fund and funds from the Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. were available to indemnify affected farmers, it said.

De Mesa added that an average of 500,000 to 600,000 MT of palay were lost annually due to typhoons and other calamities.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/09/07/news/national/enteng-agri-losses-hit-p659m/1969635>

Analyst: Inflation likely to rise in Sept due to storm damage

By Niña Myka Pauline Arceo

September 7, 2024

INFLATION could rise this month in the wake of a typhoon after having slowed in August, an analyst said.

Consumer price growth slowed to 3.3 percent last month, returning to the 2.0- to 4.0-percent target after spiking to 4.4 percent in July.

HSBC Global Research economist Aris Dacanay said this could be a brief relief with risks for September leaning toward the upside.

"Typhoon Yagi just left the archipelago and damaged agricultural lands while claiming lives," he noted.

"Like July CPI (consumer price index), we might also see a sharp m-o-m (month-on-month) jump for the month of September as Typhoon Yagi takes a toll on food supply," he added.

The inflationary impact of the typhoon, Dacanay said, may build a "case of a temporary rate pause."

The Department of Agriculture has reported that farm damage from Yagi, called Enteng locally, has exceeded P600 million.

The loss in terms of volume has nearly doubled to 28,788 metric tons, valued at P659.01 million, from the 15,205 metric tons worth P360.18 million reported earlier this week.

Rice production was said to have suffered the most, with losses totaling P624.06 million, and possible price spikes due to supply issues could push rice inflation higher.

High rice prices due to the impact of the El Niño weather pattern on output were blamed as inflation surged earlier this year.

With supply having improved and the government ordering lower tariffs on imports of the grain, rice inflation slowed to 14.7 percent in August from 20.9 percent a month earlier.

National Statistician Claire Dennis Mapa expects this rate to further go down to a single digit in September.

Nomura economist Euben Paracuelles, meanwhile, raised his inflation forecast for this year to 3.1 percent from 2.8 percent, saying that the rice tariff cut had had no effect last month.

"Our revision mainly reflects the fact that the pass-through from the cut in rice import tariffs did not materialize in August, in contrast with our previous assumption," he said.

Inflation will go down by 2.0 percent in the fourth quarter of this year, Paracuelles continued, "as the impact of the rice tariff cuts become more evident from October, based on our revised assumption of the timing of the pass-through effects."

As inflation trends downward, the BSP is likely to continue cutting rates this year after starting its easing cycle in August.

Nomura expects the central bank to reduce rates by 25 basis points during its last two meetings of the year.

"The Fed's rate cuts, which our US team expects to begin in September, also support further easing by BSP," Paracuelles said.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/09/07/business/top-business/analyst-inflation-likely-to-rise-in-sept-due-to-storm-damage/1969615>

Global green coffee exports up 10.6%

By Reuters

September 7, 2024

NEW YORK — Global exports of green coffee increased 10.6 percent in the current 2023-2024 coffee season (October-September) according to data until the end of July to 103.08 million bags, the International Coffee Organization (ICO) said in a monthly report published on Thursday.

Importers continue to buy much more than they did in the last season, trying to replenish stocks as well as anticipate loadings, fearing the new European Union anti-deforestation regulation that enters into force next year may affect trade, the ICO has said.

Brazil and Colombia were responsible for most of the exports' increase, sharply boosting their shipments of Arabica coffee, the type preferred by high-end cafés such as Starbucks.

Vietnam's exports remain lackluster, falling 29 percent in July alone, which contributed to an overall smaller growth for global exports of the robusta coffee type, which is widely used to make instant coffee.

"Vietnam continues to struggle with tightness in their domestic supply having largely, according to various news outlets, depleted their stocks, while the country waits for the new crop to hit the market," the ICO said.

The tightness in the robusta market drove the price of that type of coffee to average \$2.1468 per pound in August, the highest in 47 years for the ICO Composite Indicator Price.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/09/07/business/foreign-business/global-green-coffee-exports-up-106/1969561>

Romualdez warns agri cartels: Jail terms for smugglers, price cheats

[BusinessMirror](#)

[September 6, 2024](#)

SPEAKER Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez on Friday issued a stern warning to agricultural cartels, vowing that those involved in price manipulation and the smuggling of essential goods—acts considered economic sabotage—will face not only massive fines but will also be thrown behind bars.

“Economic sabotage is a crime of the highest order. The law demands life imprisonment for large-scale agricultural smuggling, and we will make sure those responsible face the full force of justice. These cartels are not just committing fraud; they are endangering our food security and destroying the livelihoods of our farmers,” Speaker Romualdez declared.

This warning comes after the recent identification of 12 key members of an onion cartel in the Philippines, now facing a staggering P2.4 billion in fines as an offshoot of a House of Representatives investigation initiated by Speaker Romualdez.

According to the Enforcement Office of the Philippine Competition Commission (PCC), it had filed charges and recommended penalties amounting to P2.42 billion against 12 onion traders and importers for allegedly operating as a cartel since 2019.

Named respondents by PCC were Philippine Vieva Group of Companies Inc., Tian Long Corp., La Reina Fresh Vegetables and Young Indoor Plants Inc., Yom Trading Corp., Vegetable Importers, Exporters and Vendors Association of the Philippines, and Golden Shine International Freight Forwarders Corp.

PCC said the individual respondents are Vieva vice president and Golden Shine president Lilia Cruz; Vieva board member, Golden Shine corporate executive officer and Tian Long corporate secretary Eric Pabilona; Vieva board member, La Reina president and Yom Trading chair and president Renato Francisco Jr.

These cartel members were found to have orchestrated large-scale smuggling and hoarding operations, which artificially inflated onion prices to record highs, squeezing consumers and devastating local farmers.

Speaker Romualdez made it clear that hefty fines are only the start, with criminal charges and long-term imprisonment guaranteed for these offenders.

“The imposition of P2.4 billion in fines is just the opening salvo. Smugglers and price manipulators will face not just financial repercussions, but serious jail time. We will not tolerate the sabotage of our economy and the exploitation of Filipino families,” he declared.

The leader of the 300-plus-strong legislative chamber pointed to Republic Act No. 10845, or the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act of 2016, which classifies large-scale smuggling as economic sabotage—a non-bailable offense carrying life imprisonment, alongside asset forfeitures and hefty fines.

The Speaker assured that the investigation would lead not only to fines but also to full prosecution.

“The P2.4 billion in fines is just the start. The law is clear—those who manipulate agricultural prices will face long prison terms. Smuggling, hoarding, and price manipulation will receive the toughest penalties,” he stressed.

Speaker Romualdez assured the public that the House will maintain its aggressive stance against agricultural cartels, in close collaboration with agencies like the Department of Agriculture and the Bureau of Customs, to prevent a recurrence of these illegal activities.

“We are fully committed to wiping out these cartels,” the Speaker pointed out. “This is not just about onions—this is about safeguarding our food supply and ensuring that every Filipino has access to affordable agricultural products. Today, we struck a blow against one cartel, but this is only the beginning.”

The House chief also pushed for stronger legislative reforms to ensure that the penalties for agricultural smuggling are even more severe.

“We will strengthen the laws, ensuring that those who sabotage our economy with price manipulation and smuggling face longer jail terms and harsher penalties. The days of leniency are over,” he declared.

The crackdown on the onion cartel comes after months of soaring prices caused by artificial scarcity through hoarding and manipulation.

The P2.4 billion fine levied on the cartel members is a significant step in the government's broader campaign against agricultural smuggling, but Speaker Romualdez made it clear that the consequences for those responsible would extend beyond financial penalties.

“The House will not stop until these cartels are dismantled and those responsible for hurting our farmers and consumers are behind bars. This is a fight we will win—for the farmers, for the consumers, and for the entire Filipino nation,” the Speaker concluded.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/09/06/romualdez-warns-agri-cartels-jail-terms-for-smugglers-price-cheats>

Agri group Sinag: Slower August rice inflation did not mean lower prices

Ada Pelonia
September 7, 2024



Despite slower inflation, prices remain high with regular-milled rice hard to find in outlets. Nonie Reyes

THE slower rice inflation in August did not mean a reduction in rice prices, according to the broad agriculture sector coalition Sinag.

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) indicated a slower inflation rate of rice at 14.7 percent in August from the 20.9 percent recorded in the previous month.

“Ang pagbagal ng rice inflation ay hindi rice price reduction [...] Regular-milled rice, in fact, is hardly found in most rice outlets,” Sinag Chairman Rosendo So said in a statement.

So also noted that rice prices remain high following the implementation of Executive Order 62, which reduced rice tariffs to 15 percent from 35 percent until 2028.

“It’s been two months since the effectivity of EO 62, but we don’t see rice getting cheaper,” he said.

“With increased demand and lower domestic production in most rice-producing countries, kikita lalo ang mga rice exporters [...] dahil itataas lang nila ang presyo ng kanilang [rice exporters will only profit more, because they can increase the prices of their] rice for exports.”

The Sinag chair said Vietnam’s rice export prices are now higher than that of Thailand by \$15 per metric ton (MT) for 5 percent broken; and by \$28 per MT for 25 percent broken.

Meanwhile, the farmers’ group said it commends the Department of Agriculture’s (DA) effort to reduce rice prices.

“We support all efforts to lower rice prices, and these efforts validate our position that we do not need to reduce tariffs to decrease rice prices,” So said.

“Pwede naman bumaba ang presyo ng bigas if strategic ang government intervention sa [Rice prices can be brought down with strategic government intervention in] production, post-production and marketing.”

The DA has launched programs that allowed the vulnerable sectors and local consumers to purchase cheaper rice at Kadiwa sites, such as the P29 and Rice-for-All program which sold well-milled rice at P45 per kilo.

Finance Secretary Ralph G. Recto recently said that with the reduced rice tariffs lowering the rice prices and slowing down overall inflation in August 2024, consumers can expect rice prices to drop this month. (See: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/09/06/recto-sees-more-palpable-rice-price-decline-in-september/>)

“The lower rice tariffs are already showing results. Rice inflation is slowing down and rice imports grew by 77 percent in August, according to the latest data from the Bureau of Customs (BOC),” Recto said in a statement on Thursday.

The Finance chief expects rice prices to drop “more noticeably” this month as rice imported with lower tariffs in August reaches the local market.

Figures from the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) showed that the country’s rice arrivals have breached **2.8 million metric tons (MMT) as of August 29.**

Image credits: Nonie Reyes

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/09/07/agri-group-sinag-slower-august-rice-inflation-did-not-mean-lower-prices>

ABANTE TONITE

Nasabat na smuggled gulay, kontaminado ng mikrobyo

September 6, 2024

Iniulat ng Department of Agriculture (DA) na ang mga smuggled na gulay na nasamsam sa isang bodega sa Navotas City noong Agosto ay nagpositibo sa pesticide residues, heavy metals at microbiological contaminants.

Sinabi ni Bureau of Plant Industry Director Gerald Glenn Panganiban na ang mga pagsusuri na isinagawa sa mga sibuyas, kamatis at karot mula sa makeshift cold storage facility ay nagpakita ng pagkakaroon ng organophosphates, organochlorines at pyrethroids. Kargado rin umano ang mga ito ng cadmium at lead, na malaking panganib sa kalusugan.

Dagdag pa nito, natukoy rin sa mga pagsusuri ang mga microbiological contaminants tulad ng e coli, listeria monocytogenes at salmonella spp.

Sinabi naman ni Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel na itatapon na ang mga kontaminadong gulay dahil hindi na ito maibebenta pa o maipapamigay.

<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2024/09/06/nasabat-na-smuggled-gulay-kontaminado-ng-mikrobyo>

EDITORIAL - Sampolan mga ganid na traders ng sibuyas

September 7, 2024 | 12:00am



Magandang hakbang ang ginawa ng Philippine Competition Commission (PCC) nang maghain ng reklamo sa 12 traders at importers ng sibuyas bilang “cartel” dahilan para mamatay ang pinagkakakitaan ng mga lokal na magsasaka ng sibuyas sa bansa. Kinokontrol ng mga ganid na traders at importers ang presyo ng sibuyas dahilan para tumaas ang halaga nito. Hino-hoard din ng traders ang sibuyas kaya walang mabili ang consumers. Kapag nilabas ng hoarders, mataas na ang halaga na parang “ginto”.

Ayon sa PCC Enforcement office, nagsimulang pumasok ang traders sa “anti-competitive agreements” para sa suplay ng imported onions noong 2019 hanggang 2023. Nakipagsabwatan umano ang mga ito para makontrol ang presyo at limitahan ang kompetisyon na lubhang nakasasama sa mga konsyumer at higit sa lahat, sa ekonomiya ng bansa. Ito ang unang paghahain nila ng kaso laban sa cartel dahil sa paglabag sa Philippine Competition Act.

Ayon sa PCC ang anim na kompanyang kinasuhan nila ay ang Philippine Vivia Group of Companies Inc., Tian Long Corp., La Reina Fresh Vegetables and Young Indoor Plants Inc., Yom Trading Corporation, Vivia Phils Inc., Golden Shine International Freight Forwarders Corp. Samantala, ang anim na indibidwal na sinampahan nila ng

reklamo ay sina Mark Castro Ocampo, Nancy Callanta Rosal, Lilia Cruz, Eric Pabilona, Renato Francisco Jr. at Letty Baculando.

Magandang simula ang ginawa ng PCC na pagsasampa ng reklamo sa mga ganid na onion traders. Nararapat na may masampolan sa kanila. Hindi naman maaasahan ang mga mambabatas sapagkat pawang banta lang sila na kakasuhan ang mga nagmamanipula sa presyo ng sibuyas subalit walang nangyayari.

Ang pagsasampa ng kaso sa 12 onion traders ay babala na rin sa mga smugglers ng vegetable products na inaasahang magiging talamak ngayong “ber” months.

Noong nakaraang buwan, nakasamsam ang Department of Agriculture (DA) at Bureau of Customs (BOC) ng 300 tonelada ng smuggled na gulay nang salakayin ang dalawang bodega sa Navotas City. Ang isa sa mga bodega ay naglalaman ng 132.75 tonelada ng puting sibuyas na nagkakahalaga ng P21.2 milyon samantalang ang isa pang bodega ay may laman na 89.89 tonelada ng carrots na nagkakahalaga ng P13.48 milyon. Bukod sa sibuyas at carrots, nakakumpiska rin nang maraming kamatis at mushrooms.

Sa kabila na nagbabala si President Ferdinand Marcos na hahabulin at kakasuhan ang agricultural smugglers at hoarders, wala ring epekto. Patuloy ang smuggling ng gulay at walang ibang nasasalanta kundi ang kabuhayan ng mga maliliit na magsasaka ng gulay at ang pamahalaan sa kabuuan dahil hindi nagbabayad ng tax ang mga ganid at hidhid na traders.

<https://www.philstar.com/pilipino-star-ngayon/opinyon/2024/09/07/2383417/editorial-sampolan-mga-ganid-na-traders-ng-sibuyas>