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THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

DA: P42 per kilo rice program to be strictly implemented

[Romina Cabrera](#) - The Philippine Star

December 1, 2024 | 12:00am



Individuals line up for affordable rice sold at P29 per kilo at the Kadiwa store inside the National Irrigation Administration Office in Quezon City on July 5, 2024.

The STAR / Michael Varcas

MANILA, Philippines — The Department of Agriculture (DA) will strictly implement the P42 per kilo rice program in select public markets in Metro Manila to compete with the recent high prices of rice in the markets.

DA spokesman Arnel de Mesa said they are hurrying the implementation of the lower priced rice program in the National Capital Region before it is rolled out to other provinces.

Despite lower prices of palay, rice prices in the markets are still high because of the additional charges from retailers and traders, De Mesa said.

He assured the public of the sustainability of the Rice for All Program, as the government has allotted P5 billion for its implementation.

He added that the Food Terminal Inc. will handle the logistics needed for the program to keep prices low and ensure sustainability.

Meanwhile, the quinta committee of the House of Representatives, also known as the ‘Murang Pagkain’ supercommittee, aims to bring the price of rice as close as possible to President Marcos’ “aspiration of P20 per kilo,” House ways and means chairman Joey Salceda said yesterday.

“We will try to push the envelope as close to that as possible. What I can tell you is that it looks like there is a path to P30 per kilo,” Salceda said.

He said the supercommittee aims to bring down the prices of rice, which account for as much as 22 percent of total expenditures of poor households, and food in general, which takes up as much as 54 percent of the total spending of low-income families.

“A big part of that is cutting down excessive middleman and cartel profits. Landed price of imports – including movements in world prices and the tariff reduction implemented last July – has declined by around 24.9 percent year-on-year,” Salceda said.

“But consumer retail price are up 9.0 percent over the same period. It’s puzzling and an unmistakable sign of shenanigans in the rice trade sector,” he added.

Salceda said this is reason why the supecommittee is looking into rice price manipulation over the past 10 years, starting with the rice price increase in 2012 to 2013 and the price manipulation in 2016 to 2018.

He said the supercommittee wants to learn from what happened and see whether the same network of smugglers and cartels are still in the game.

“The question is, where did the benefits of the decrease in tariff go? And how can we cut those excessive profits,” he said.

Salceda said the supercommittee is eyeing to have an initial recommendation to Marcos by Christmas. — **Jose Rodel Clapano**

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/12/01/2404147/da-p42-kilo-rice-program-be-strictly-implemented>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Ponzi scams and celebrity endorsers



EYES WIDE OPEN - Iris Gonzales - The Philippine Star

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The surprise arrest of actress Neri Naig has once again put the spotlight on the prevalence of get-rich-quick schemes in the Philippines.

Proponents of these fraudulent investment activities have been luring innocent people to invest their hard-earned money with them.

As it turns out, part of their scheme is to use celebrity endorsers to make their products or offerings more attractive and popular.

This, according to Neri's husband Chito Miranda, was what happened to Neri, who was merely an endorser of Dermacare-Beyond Skin Care, the company at the center of the controversy.

This is not the first time that a celebrity endorser got embroiled in such a scandal. There was also Ricardo Cepeda who spent 11 months in jail because of a syndicated estafa charge lodged against him for being a brand ambassador of a company that turned out to be fraudulent. Luis Manzano was also dragged into something similar but managed to clear his name.

My sources said Neri herself went to the Securities and Exchange Commission last year when there were already complaints about Dermacare to explain that indeed, she was just an endorser.

The SEC had warned her then that the company she was endorsing was engaged in the illegal sale of securities.

Against this backdrop, it is unfortunate that endorsers like Neri are behind bars while the main proponents of these investment scams are still out there.

The SEC must work double time to bring the masterminds to justice. This would send a message to others engaging in similar activities that they could end up in jail.

Greed

At the core of all this is greed for easy money. Both proponents and victims want easy money.

But our regulators have repeatedly said that if it's too good to be true, then it must be a scam.

No Ponzi-like scheme has ever succeeded because it needs to keep on taking money from other people to pay those who invested earlier. Investors must be aware of this and not be lured by such easy money schemes.

The SEC, for its part, must be vigilant because investors continue to skirt around regulators.

There must be more big fish convictions like Rosario Baladjay, the so-called pyramid scam queen.

Baladjay, who founded Multitel, was sentenced some years back to a total of 455 years for violation of the Securities Regulation Code and syndicated estafa.

And then there's Joel Apolinario, a self-anointed pastor, who founded the Kapa Community Ministry International Inc. (KAPA), touted as the largest investment scam in Philippine history.

The SEC estimates that some five million people may have been duped by KAPA. They were enticed to share their "blessings" by donating P10,000 to the organization, for a 30 percent return every month.

An estimated P50 billion may have flowed into KAPA, the SEC said.

Last year, the courts found Apolinario guilty of syndicated estafa.

But as I said, we need more convictions if only to show scammers that defrauding people of their hard-earned money has its consequences.

They need to know that the long arm of the law will eventually catch up to them.

Celebrity endorsers must also be careful with the products and services they lend their name to.

In a country that is fast becoming a scam capital, we all must be vigilant against fraudsters. As authorities have warned, we must be wary if it's too good to be true.

Biofertilizer issues

University of the Philippines Los Baños chancellor Jose Camacho Jr. cleared the air on the issue surrounding biofertilizer BIO-N, which was developed at UPLB-BIOTECH.

The agreement granting Agrispecialist Inc. (ASI) exclusive rights to produce, market and distribute BIO-N, Camacho said, is the culmination of a careful and transparent decision-making process.

“It addresses critical shortcomings in the biofertilizer market, specifically in the availability of BIO-N, which UPLB had hoped to address through the establishment of BIO-N mixing plants all over the country in partnership with the Department of Agriculture from 2004 to 2022. However, as of 2022, only 20 percent of the DA’s 83 BIO-N mixing plants has remained operational,” he said.

This limited production capacity has hindered farmers’ access to BIO-N.

Thus, through the agreement, Camacho said ASI is now positioned to produce BIO-N at scale, ensuring its availability across the country.

“This empowers farmers to adopt sustainable farming practices while reducing reliance on expensive chemical inputs.”

He said the licensing arrangement underwent rigorous scrutiny by the Fairness Opinion Board, convened by the Department of Science and Technology.

“The FOB concluded that the terms of the agreement are fair, equitable and beneficial to the public,” he said.

Camacho made the clarification after the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) called on Congress and the executive branch to investigate the move of UPLB to grant an exclusive license to ASI to use, produce and sell BIO-N nationwide.

“ASI – a newcomer in the biofertilizer industry – has allegedly been telling existing and potential BIO-N clients, including farmers’ cooperatives, private enterprises and national and local government agencies, to stop making, marketing or using BIO-N without ASI’s permission,” the FFF said.

The group likewise claimed that the production and supply of BIO-N in various areas has reportedly dwindled because producers now need the permission of ASI. This is harming farmers, they said.

Fingers crossed this issue will soon be resolved to avoid a fertilizer crisis. I hope different interests will be aligned in a way that will be good for the country.

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<https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2024/12/01/2404172/ponzi-scams-and-celebrity-endorsers>

THE MANILA TIMES:

New initiative to advance salt industry in Ilocos

By The Manila Times

December 1, 2024

A PIVOTAL step toward advancing the salt industry in Ilocos Norte (Region 1) through the One in Accelerating Salt Innovations (OneASIN) initiative was achieved following the signing of a memorandum of understanding by stakeholders recently at Sola Hotel, Laoag City, Ilocos Norte.

The Department of Science and Technology Region 1 (DOST-1) will spearhead the program in collaboration with key stakeholders, including the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA), Provincial Government of Ilocos Norte, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, DOST-Industrial Technology Development Institute, Department of Trade and Industry, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University (DMMMSU) and Mariano Marcos State University.

The program aims to unify efforts to modernize the salt industry through innovative processes, advanced technologies, enhanced policies and sustainable marketing strategies embodied in OneASIN.



ONEASIN INITIATIVE Representatives from various stakeholders, together with Dr. Teresita Tabaog (fifth from left), who is behind the initiative, strike a pose following a program discussion and signing of a memorandum of agreement that seeks to accelerate the salt industry in Ilocos Norte recently at Sola Hotel in Laoag City. DOST PHOTO

This program is envisioned to transform salt production into a more efficient, competitive and community-empowering sector.

Dr. Teresita Tabaog, the visionary behind OneASIN, highlighted that the program aims to drive advancements in the salt industry by fostering unity in enhancing processes, equipment and policies.

She explained that the initiative empowers salt makers by providing innovative solutions to ensure a sustainable future for the industry.

DOST Secretary Renato Solidum lauded the OneASIN program with its people-centric approach. He noted its alignment with the national objective of reducing reliance on imported salt while maximizing local resources to uplift communities.

Ilocos Norte Gov. Matthew Marcos-Manotoc commended DOST's grassroots initiatives like the OneASIN's success in combining community empowerment with technological innovation to create a sustainable salt industry.

He also acknowledged the PCA's vital role in ensuring a steady market for locally produced salt.

Dexter Buted, PCA administrator, emphasized the synergy between the salt and coconut industries, noting salt's critical role in boosting coconut production. He pledged PCA's support by committing to procure salt from Ilocos Norte's producers, strengthening both community livelihoods and provincial sustainability.

The event also included the signing of additional agreements, notably a memorandum of agreement between DOST-1 and the municipalities of Burgos and Pasuquin. In Burgos, the agreement focuses on the establishment of SALT Hub: Sustainable Advancement in Local Salt Technology Hub which serves as Ilocos Norte Salt Products' Laboratory, which will then serve as a center for research, development and the production of value-added salt products.

In Pasuquin, the agreement supports the implementation of OneASIN through various initiatives, including technical training on food safety, current good manufacturing practices, packaging, labeling and the introduction of innovative salt-making equipment to modernize and empower the local salt-making community.

The event showcased insightful presentations by experts on innovations in salt production and maintaining quality standards. Andie John Tadeo of DMMMSU discussed the production of sea salt using high-density polyethylene-lined ponds and advanced filtration systems.

Brian Rasco of DOST-1 provided an overview of the collaboration and complementation of programs designed to strengthen Ilocos Norte's salt-making industry.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/12/01/regions/new-initiative-to-advance-salt-industry-in-ilocos/2013680>