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MANILA BULLETIN:

Suarez incensed as DA exec admits importing firms don't get checked amid rice monopoly concerns

BY [ELLSON QUISMORIO](#)

Dec 10, 2024 07:16 PM

AT A GLANCE

- A serious omission by the Department of Agriculture's (DA) Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) caused House Deputy Speaker Quezon 2nd district Rep. David "Jay-jay" Suarez to blow his top during the quinta-committee's (quinta-comm) hearing Tuesday, Dec. 10.



Quezon 2nd district Rep. David "Jay-jay" Suarez (Ellson Quismorio/ MANILA BULLETIN)

A serious omission by the Department of Agriculture's (DA) Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) caused House Deputy Speaker Quezon 2nd district Rep. David "Jay-jay" Suarez to blow his top during the quinta-committee's (quinta-comm) hearing Tuesday, Dec. 10.

Scolded by Suarez was BPI Director Gerald Glenn Panganiban, who admitted during the hearing that the bureau failed exercised due diligence in issuing permits to rice importing companies.

It appeared that the two top rice importers in the country had the same owner--something that pointed to a possible monopoly on the commodity considered as Filipinos' staple food.

"Ito ba lahat binibigyan ng permit ng BPI, lahat ba ito dumadaan sa iyo? (Does BPI check all the companies that it gives permits to?)" Suarez asked Panganiban, who answered in the affirmative.

The high-ranking solon then sought clarification from Panganiban regarding the overlap in the ownership of the two top rice importers.

“Hindi mo ba napansin kung sino yung mga nabanggit na kumpanya ni Cong. [Nicanor] Briones eh base sa mga listahan ng mga pagmamay-ari eh iisa lang ‘yung dalawang top rice importer natin?” Suarez asked.

(Didn't you notice in the list of companies read by Cong. Nicanor Briones that our two top rice importers have the same owner?)

Like a pupil caught in school without his homework, Panganiban admitted that the BPI had not verified the ownership structures of these companies. “Hindi po, hindi namin napa-checked (No, we didnt have it checked),” he nervously said.

In a raised voice, Suarez replied: “Bakit hindi niyo na tsinek? Hindi pwedeng ngayon i-review iyan eh tapos na ang nangyari tapos ngayon niyo gagawin ang trabaho niyo. Dapat nung nag-a-apply pa lang sila tsinek, niyo na kaagad.”

(Why didn't you have it checked? You can't conduct a review now because it's already done. What happened is, it's already done and it's only now that you want to do your job. You should have checked while they were still applying for permits.)

Suarez--the roadshow manager of the House "Young Guns" bloc--underscored the importance of due diligence as he raised concerns about the potential for market manipulation if only a few individuals control multiple rice importing firms.

“Malay niyo, iyang top five na yan tatatlo lang pala ang may-ari then sasabihin niyo sa amin ngayon niyo lang gagawin yung trabaho. Hindi pwede iyon,” said the irate Quezon solon.

(What if the top five importers were owned by only three people, then you'll tell us that you'll do your job only now)

Also known as the Murang Pagkain Super-committee, the quinta-comm discussed on Tuesday the reasons why rice prices remained costly despite President Marcos' issuance of Executive Order (EO) No. 62, which cut the import tariff rate on the staple from 35 percent to just 15 percent effective last July.

It was these high prices of rice--ranging anywhere from P40 per kilo to over P50 per kilo--that caused solons like Suarez to have a short fuse, since they knew that it was struggle for many to have even one square meal a day.

Panganiban attempted to qualify his answer to Suarez: “Since corporation po ito sir, we are checking po kung sino nga yung mga may-ari (Since this is a corporation sir, we are checking on who are the owners).”

However, Suarez dismissed the BPI official's explanation, and insisted that such action should have been conducted before permits were issued.

The discovery has raised broader questions about the transparency and accountability of the rice importation process.

Tax payments to provide clue on profiteering

In response to alleged profiteering, Albay 2nd district Rep. Joey Salceda, overall chairman of the quad-committee, asked the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) to look into the filings and tax payments of top rice importers.

"Congress cannot request tax filings. They are protected by Section 270 of the Tax Code. But the BIR can verify their own assessments and records. These top importers are importing in the billions. So, their tax payments should reflect that," Salceda said.

He adds that a charge of tax evasion would then allow the Anti Money Laundering Council to look into top importers' transactions, "as tax evasion is a predicate offense that would allow AMLC to look deeper".

The Bicolano noted during the hearing that "around the time of the President's rice price ceiling, the gap between landed import price and domestic retail price was just P3 per kilo. Now it has swelled to P20 per kilo, even as farmgate price also went down."

"This is just short of being supernatural. There is clearly pricing abuse— we just need to pinpoint at which stage," an exasperated Salceda said.

What's next?

For the next public hearing, the quinta-comm overall chairman said they will be calling in the big retailers and big retailers wholesalers. "Much of the profiteering seems to be in that sector, as well," he said.

Salceda also pointed out that there seems to be signs of hoarding in the market.

"Rice inventory is up 24 percent year on year. We have consistently breached all import projections of the USDA. And some importers are delaying withdrawal of imports from our ports.

"These are signs of both speculation and possibly hoarding. They could be speculating that the lower import tariffs will be reverted to previous levels," he said.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/12/10/suarez-incensed-as-da-exec-admits-importing-firms-don-t-get-checked>

MANILA BULLETIN:

DA blacklists 10 firms over ‘smuggling, illegal trade’ activities

BY [JEL SANTOS](#)

Dec 10, 2024 03:22 PM



DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. (JEL SANTOS/MANILA BULLETIN)

In what it calls its most aggressive action to date, the Department of Agriculture (DA) has blacklisted 10 companies in the past six months for allegedly engaging in smuggling and illegal trade.

The DA said it blacklisted several companies, including LVM Grains Enterprises, Kysse Lishh Consumer Goods Trading, JRA and Pearl Enterprises Inc., Betron Consumer Goods Trading, RCNN Non-Specialized Wholesale Trading, and Golden Rays Consumer Goods Trading, for allegedly importing food products without required sanitary and phytosanitary clearances.

The Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) also identified companies involved in “anti-competitive practices,” such as price manipulation and collusion. These firms include La Reina Fresh Vegetables Young Indoor Plants Inc., Vegefru Producing Store, and Yom Trading Corp.

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Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. noted that the number of companies blacklisted in the past six months exceeds the total from the last six years combined.

“This should serve as a clear warning to those who attempt to challenge our resolve in going after smugglers and unscrupulous traders whose illegal activities harm our farmers, fisherfolk, and consumers,” he said in a statement released Tuesday, Dec. 10.

Such action, according to the DA, is part of its intensified campaign to combat agricultural smuggling, profiteering, hoarding, and cartel operations that destabilize the market and raise food prices.

The DA chief credited the recent passage of the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act for bolstering the government's capacity to take action against violators.

Meanwhile, BPI Director Gerald Glenn Panganiban confirmed that the licenses of the implicated firms have been revoked, while non-licensed importers were banned due to derogatory findings.

The DA assured the public that it would continue to take decisive action against violators to protect the livelihoods of Filipino farmers and safeguard consumer welfare.

Laurel has vowed to continue to hold violators accountable and take further measures to ensure the integrity of the



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<https://mb.com.ph/2024/12/10/da-blacklists-10-firms-over-smuggling-illegal-trade-activities>

MANILA BULLETIN:

'Kailangang kumilos na': Romualdez asks DA to craft Agricultural Tariffication Act's IRR in 30 days

BY [ELLSON QUISMORIO](#)

Dec 10, 2024 02:29 PM

AT A GLANCE

- House Speaker Martin Romualdez has underscored the need for the immediate creation of the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of the newly-signed Agricultural Tariffication Act (ATA).



House Speaker Martin Romualdez (Speaker's office)

House Speaker Martin Romualdez has underscored the need for the immediate creation of the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of the newly-signed Agricultural Tariffication Act (ATA).

"I call on the Department of Agriculture (DA) and its attached agencies to prioritize the drafting of the IRR and ensure that it is completed within 30 days," Speaker Romualdez said in a statement Tuesday, Dec. 10.

"The swift implementation of this law is non-negotiable. Our people, especially ordinary Filipinos, need to feel its benefits as soon as possible," he noted.

According to the Speaker, the drafting of the IRR, is crucial for the immediate enforcement of the law's provisions to stabilize rice prices, combat hoarding, and support Filipino farmers.

Romualdez--also known as "Mr. Rice"--explained that the IRR serves as the roadmap for implementing the law, outlining specific actions, responsibilities, and timelines to operationalize its key provisions.

“Without the IRR, the law cannot be enforced effectively, delaying much-needed relief for consumers and support for farmers,” the House leader pointed out.

The Leyte 1st district congressman said the ATA was enacted as a way to respond to the needs of Filipinos, especially those who struggle to afford rice.

“Pero walang mangyayari kung hindi agad maipapatupad nang maayos. Kailangang kumilos na ngayon,” added Romualdez.

(But nothing will happen if we can't implement the law quickly and properly. We must act now.)

The Speaker said that the IRR will enable government agencies to act swiftly in stabilizing rice prices and combating manipulative practices in the market.

“With the IRR in place, the [DA] can immediately enforce provisions to regulate warehouse operations, prevent hoarding, and ensure that the National Food Authority (NFA) maintains optimal rice buffer stocks sourced from local farmers. This will protect consumers from sudden price spikes and guarantee a stable rice supply,” he said.

For Filipino farmers, the IRR will ensure timely implementation of programs funded under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), which has been extended until 2031.

Romualdez also underscored the importance of transparency and accountability in drafting and implementing the IRR.

“The IRR must not only be efficient but also inclusive, reflecting the inputs of farmers, consumers, and other stakeholders. Transparency in the process will ensure that this law truly serves the people it was designed to protect,” he said.

Romualdez assured the public that the House of Representatives will closely monitor the progress of the IRR's formulation and implementation to ensure that the objectives of the law are achieved.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/12/10/Romualdez-asks-da-to-craft-agricultural-tariffication-act>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

‘Cartels to blame for high rice prices’

[Jose Rodel Clapano](#) - The Philippine Star

December 11, 2024 | 12:00am



Under questioning by Iloilo Rep. Janette Garin at the continuation of the hearing by the quinta committee, Department of Finance director Jolly La Rosa said that in a “perfect competition,” prices of rice in the country should have gone down since the implementation in July of Executive Order No. 62 reducing tariff on rice from 35 percent to 15 percent.

Michael Varcas / File

MANILA, Philippines — Despite lower tariff, rice prices have remained high due to price manipulation by cartels and unscrupulous businessmen, a finance official said yesterday at a legislative hearing on alleged anomalies in the supply and distribution of the commodity.

Under questioning by Iloilo Rep. Janette Garin at the continuation of the hearing by the quinta committee, Department of Finance director Jolly La Rosa said that in a “perfect competition,” prices of rice in the country should have gone down since the implementation in July of Executive Order No. 62 reducing tariff on rice from 35 percent to 15 percent.

“There is a big possibility (of rice price cut). That could be a possibility. That is the only thing that I can think of,” La Rosa said.

“If we will turn a blind eye on this, Mr. Chair, the Philippines will go nowhere,” Garin said in reaction, referring to La Rosa’s statement. “Every household must have food on the table.”

Garin said that in July, no less than Finance Secretary Ralph Recto had expressed optimism that the tariff cut would result in a 10-percent reduction in retail prices of rice for the rest of the year.

The quinta panel comprises the committees on ways and means, trade and industry, agriculture and food, social services and the special committee on food security. Its overall chair is Albay Rep. Joey Salceda.

The committee is investigating possible collusion among rice importers and traders in manipulating the prices of the staple.

“The committee focused on top importers because there were clear signs of speculation in the rice import market, such as swelling commercial inventories, delays in withdrawals by importers and imports surpassing USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) projections,” Salceda said at the hearing. The top 10 rice importers control 36 percent of total inbound shipment.

They were identified as Bly Agri Venture Trading, Atara Marketing Inc., Orison Free Enterprise Inc., Macman Rice and Corn Trading, King B Company, Sodatrade Corp., Lucky Buy and Sell, Vitram Marketing Inc., Nan Stu Agri Traders and RBS Universal Grains Traders Corp.

Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) records revealed interlocking directorships between RBS Universal Grains Trader Corp. and Sodatrade Corp., which could have made possible coordinated business strategies and anti-competitive practices.

Bly Agri Venture Trading, Macman Rice and Corn Trading, King B Company, Nan Stu Agri Traders and Lucky Buy and Sell turned out to be not registered with the SEC and may be operating as sole proprietorships registered with the Department of Trade and Industry.

While the landed price of imported rice dropped by P11 per kilo year-on-year, domestic prices rose from P51 to P55.30.

Additionally, the gap between landed and domestic prices widened drastically, from P3 per kilo in 2023 to P20 in 2024, indicating potential manipulation or inefficiencies in the supply chain.

Evidence of speculative activities emerged following reports by the Philippine Ports Authority of 800 containers of rice imports lying idle in September 2024, which may have indicated hoarding.

The country had also anticipated importation of up to five million metric tons of rice, as traders took advantage of low tariffs ahead of a potential return to higher rates.

High inventory

As of Nov. 1, the country’s total rice stock inventory was estimated at 2.5 million metric tons, a 25 percent increase from the previous year.

A significant portion of this stock was held by private commercial traders, nearing thresholds that could qualify as large-scale hoarding under the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act.

Also at yesterday's hearing, Marikina City Rep. Stella Quimbo and AGAP party-list Rep. Nicanor Briones bared what they called a pattern of hoarding, profiteering and shared ownership among top importers.

"There is an excess of supply," Quimbo said, reacting to a presentation by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) on rice supply and demand. "When there is an excess of supply, the prices should go down. By why isn't it going down?"

"We saw the presentation of the PSA. The collusion is very clear," Quimbo, senior vice chairperson of the committee on appropriations, said.

She said importers and traders collectively earned a staggering P13 billion after rice import tariffs were slashed from 35 percent to 15 percent under EO 62.

Instead of passing on the savings to consumers, she said, the group hoarded stocks to artificially drive up rice prices.

"It is in the hands of the importers and traders who got rich by P13 billion because of the low tariff on rice. But they are withholding the rice stocks now," Quimbo said.

She argued that prices should stabilize at around P35 per kilo, even with reasonable profit margins.

"It should be somewhere in P35. But now, the abuse is very clear," she pointed out. "Release the rice stocks, so that the prices will go down. Have pity on the Filipino people."

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/12/11/2406475/cartels-blame-high-rice-prices>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

‘Speed up IRR for Agricultural Tariffication Act amendments’

[Jose Rodel Clapano](#) - The Philippine Star

December 11, 2024 | 12:00am



President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos officially signs the Amendments to the Agricultural Tariffication Act (RA 12078), the Value-Added Tax Refund for Non-Resident Tourists (RA 12079), and the Basic Mental Health and Well-Being Promotion Act (RA 12080) during a ceremony at Malacañang Palace on December 9, 2024.

STAR / Noel Pabalate

MANILA, Philippines — Speaker Martin Romualdez urged the Department of Agriculture (DA) and other relevant agencies yesterday to expedite the drafting of the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) for the amendments to the Agricultural Tariffication Act, which was signed into law by President Marcos last Monday.

“The swift implementation of this law is non-negotiable. Our people, especially ordinary Filipinos, need to feel its benefits as soon as possible. I call on the Department of Agriculture and its attached agencies to prioritize the drafting of the IRR and ensure that it is completed within 30 days,” he said.

“Without the IRR, the law cannot be enforced effectively, delaying much-needed relief for consumers and support for farmers,” the House leader pointed out.

“This law was created to address the needs of each Filipino, especially the poor ones who have difficulties buying affordable rice. Nothing will happen if this law is not implemented fully. We need to act now,” he emphasized.

The Speaker stressed that the IRR will enable government agencies to act swiftly on stabilizing rice prices and combating manipulative practices in the market.

“With the IRR in place, the Department of Agriculture can immediately enforce provisions to regulate warehouse operations, prevent hoarding and ensure that the National Food Authority (NFA) maintains optimal rice buffer stocks sourced from local farmers. This will protect consumers from sudden price spikes and guarantee a stable rice supply,” he said.

The IRR will also ensure the timely implementation of programs funded under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund for Filipino farmers, which has been extended until 2031.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/12/11/2406479/speed-irr-agricultural-tariffication-act-amendments>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Now they have time



COMMONSENSE - Marichu A. Villanueva - The Philippine Star

December 11, 2024 | 12:00am

It was bountiful harvest, metaphorically speaking, with three landmark laws recently produced by the 19th Congress. Last Monday at Malacañang Palace, President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. (PBBM) signed them into law one after the other. Naturally, the key leaders and members from both chambers, including the respective authors and sponsors of the three laws, stood witness to the ceremonial signing rites at the Palace.

Signed into law were: Republic Act (RA) 12078, or the Amendments to the Agricultural Tariffication Act; RA 12079, or the Value-Added Tax (VAT) Refund Mechanism for Non-Resident Tourists Act and RA 12080, or the Basic Education Mental Health and Well-Being Promotion Act.

Cabinet members of PBBM led by his economic team were also in full force as their respective departments were among the implementing agencies for the three new laws.

As the principal author and sponsor of RA 12078, Sen. Cynthia Villar best described its enactment as an early Christmas gift to Filipino farmers and agricultural cooperatives all over the country. As chairman of the Senate committee on agriculture and food, Sen. Villar counts upon RA 12078 to effectively put out of business rice cartels.

This law authorizes the agriculture secretary to designate importing entities, except for the National Food Authority (NFA), to import rice to supplement the supply of rice and steady prices. RA 12078 now allows the NFA to sell rice buffer stocks to the public through Kadiwa ng Pangulo centers in areas experiencing rice supply shortages or extraordinary price increases.

Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. profusely thanked PBBM and Congress for amending the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) under RA 12078. The new law extends

the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) up to year 2031 and increased annual allocation to P30 billion from P10 billion. RCEF is composed of duties collected from imported rice. The DA chief vowed to use RCEF to bolster the country's agriculture modernization projects nationwide.

Department of Finance (DOF) Secretary Ralph Recto is optimistic about the Philippines' economic prospects in 2025 with the enactment of these two key laws aimed at boosting the tourism industry and local spending as well as strengthening food security in the country. Recto clarified that RA 12079 is a priority reform bill pushed by the DOF despite it resulting in some revenue loss by allowing non-resident tourists to claim VAT refunds on locally purchased goods.

In fact, Recto claimed it was the DOF that introduced Section 112-A in the National Internal Revenue Code (NIRC) of the Philippines that now included this new provision. For now, the value of goods purchased should be equivalent to at least P3,000 per transaction. "With increased tourism spending, we will have higher revenues to collect and we can create more jobs, raise incomes and accelerate economic growth," Recto pointed out.

Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia-Frasco likewise extolled RA12079 as it is seen to significantly boost tourism-related spending in the Philippines. Frasco called the VAT Refund Law for tourists a "game-changer" that strengthens the country's' position as a top global destination.

Albay Rep. Joey Salceda, chairman of the House committee on ways and means who shepherded approval in Congress of RA 12079, calculated the VAT refund mechanism will boost tourist spending by 29.8 percent. According to the DOT, shopping accounted for P137.4 billion in inbound tourism expenditure in 2023. Data from the DOF show that savings from the refund fully channeled into additional tourism spending may boost economic output by P2.8 billion to P4.0 billion annually.

The only non-revenue measure enacted, the school-based mental health law under RA 12080, targets to address the needs of our children to cope with the stress of school work, peer pressure, bullying and other stressors affecting the wellness of their young minds.

Sen. Win Gatchalian hailed the signing of RA 12080 as something that would increase learners' access to mental health services. As the principal author and sponsor of this law, Gatchalian cited this new law mandated every public school to have a care center to provide school-based mental health services. "By ensuring the accessibility of mental health services, we can instill resilience in our learners, prevent suicides and make our schools safer," the chairman of the Senate committee on basic education pointed out.

Education Secretary Sonny Angara agreed the new law could help students deal with the "unprecedented changes" in their environment that could be affecting their mental health. Data from DepEd showed that around 254 cases of suicide among grade school students were recorded during school year 2023-2024.

Nearly 1,500 students attempted suicide during the same period, about 1,078 of whom were in junior high school, 321 in senior high school and 93 in grade school. This is really a frightening trend of schoolchildren driven to suicide mode.

Through this new law, DepEd hopes to hire more than the current 4,000 guidance counselors in public schools to care for the mental wellness of over 23 million students nationwide.

So thank you, Congress, for these three new laws. Undertaking so many public hearings left and right, doing “inquiry in aid of legislation” took so much time of their lawmaking job. Our legislators became seemingly preoccupied with their investigations on the same controversies and scandals involving no less than Vice President Sara Duterte and her father, former president Rodrigo Duterte.

As it turned out, our senators and congressmen and congresswomen were working after all.

With the ink barely dry on these three new laws, PBBM convened at the Palace the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC) with Senate President Chiz Escudero and Speaker Martin Romualdez, along with other key leaders of Congress and members of the Cabinet.

Wonder if the impeachment of Vice President Sara Duterte was even mentioned in passing? Just thinking aloud. A number of senators and House members earlier declared they simply have no more time for impeachment.

With many of the priority bills more or less done and the 2025 budget bill up for approval by PBBM, Congress may now have time for the impeachment of VP Duterte.

<https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2024/12/11/2406496/now-they-have-time>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Food innovations



SKETCHES - Ana Marie Pamintuan - The Philippine Star

December 11, 2024 | 12:00am

In this season of feasting, it's noteworthy that the government has announced that it would be rolling out a noodle that is OK for diabetics.

I'm interested to find out what the noodle is made of. Aside from being a cooking enthusiast, I also have to plan the meals that will suit the health condition of members of my household. One is borderline diabetic; another suffers from gout; still another has had a mild stroke and must avoid cholesterol-laden food.

I've taught them to shift to low-glycemic brown rice, so now they don't feel deprived of the country's staple. For arroz caldo, we use millet or "yellow rice," whose consistency when cooked is similar to broken rice.

After a lot of trial and error, I also managed to produce a 100-percent whole wheat bread with zero added sugar in any form (no honey or molasses), which doesn't taste like darak or rice bran for animal feed and doesn't harden like a rock after only a few hours. The borderline diabetic and I genuinely like the bread.

I also managed to come up with a 100 percent whole wheat homemade fresh pasta that was actually edible. I was tweaking the preparation process when I came across a new product in a Korean grocery: glass noodles made of 100 percent sweet potato flour.

Hallelujah! I've since set aside my handheld pasta shaper. The diabetic tried the noodle and was ecstatic to learn, after a lab test, that her now much lowered blood sugar level remained stable.

Glass noodles in the market are made of one or a combination of starches made of pea, mung bean and potato. The one with gout reacts to pea starch, and the glycemic index of potato is similar to

that of refined wheat. So the compromise noodle for all in the household is the one made of low-glycemic sweet potato.

Hurray for the Koreans. I wondered why, with the Philippines producing a lot of sweet potato or camote, we didn't come up with the 100 percent sweet potato glass noodle. An insipid local camote variety – the cheapest in the market – can be used to produce sweet potato flour, for use in baking, as a thickener and yes, for pasta making.

Our agriculture and food industry needs a lot of R&D support (provided free to small-scale farmers) plus shepherding in packaging and marketing. The Department of Science and Technology's Food and Nutrition Research Institute is doing this – it has developed squash noodles, for example, although the product contains wheat flour – but the scale of its work is limited by resources.

* * *

Bicol's pili nut, for example, could have the global popularity of almonds. The taste is hands down superior to almond. It's oily, but the oil can be extracted and refined into a pricey specialty oil, like walnut oil. What's left can be processed into pili meal, to compete with expensive almond meal, which is used for making fondant and macarons.

I've used raw pili for baking meringue cakes, and I've processed small amounts of raw pili into meal at home, with excellent results. But it's hard to get hold of good quality raw shelled pili even online, and supply is seasonal. Off-season, it's so expensive.

This can be solved by cold storage, which the country acutely lacks. Most nuts are oily and go rancid quickly, but the shelf life is considerably extended if stored frozen; walnuts can last up to a year without acquiring an off taste.

Bicolanos also cite the difficulty of shelling freshly harvested pili. But walnuts also have a hard shell and are quite oily. If humans can go on excursions to the moon, surely someone can invent a top-quality pili shelling machine, both industrial grade and portable. If pili grew in Korea or Taiwan, their innovators would have invented that machine decades ago.

If our native water buffalo or carabao thrived in Hokkaido, the Japanese would have propagated the breed extensively to make it produce more milk. The breed produces one of the best quality milk in the world, which can be processed into top-grade mozzarella and luscious burrata.

It took us a long time to can and export coconut cream, milk and juice; we did so only after we saw how the Thais had cornered the global market for these products. The Thais have also been exporting canned mangosteen for many years now.

In our case, our farmers plant, hope for good weather, harvest the crops, sell these by the roadside or transport them on a kuliglig or improvised hand tractor to the public market. If there's a glut, they can't keep the crops in cold storage. When prices fall, they are forced to simply dump the crops.

* * *

When tomato prices fall, why don't we make ketchup? Why can't our farmers be taught how to make (and effectively market) candied ginger or powdered ginger tea when there's a glut?

Cold storage can help stabilize supply and prices during lean seasons for particular products. But lacking the facilities, we depend on imports, which often continue to flood the market even during harvest season, to the detriment of local producers.

We depend on imports even for our most basic needs, including salt and milk – a necessity for child nutrition. A 1.2-kilo baby or pre-school formula from a mid-priced reliable brand costs around P750. Many mothers dilute the milk to make it last two weeks. You can see why millions of Filipinos are physically and mentally stunted from undernourishment.

Timely importation is fine for supply and price stabilization, but this must be complemented by efforts to boost domestic production if the crop is suitable for local propagation.

Our farmers did this for Chinese sweet potato, succeeding in propagating the variety that is so sweet and bringing the steep price down. Even sweeter (and more expensive, but worth it) is the Japanese variety, currently available mainly in the Mitsukoshi supermarket, in Manila's Chinatown and occasionally in Korean-Japanese grocery stores.

Maybe our farmers will manage to propagate the Japanese variety. But we don't need to wait for this to happen before producing 100 percent sweet potato flour noodles. Our local varieties are good enough.

What's needed is the know-how and machines to process the noodles. We shouldn't need foreigners to do this for us.

<https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2024/12/11/2406501/food-innovations>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

DA blacklists 10 firms for illegal trade acts

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

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 05:15 AM December 11, 2024



Agriculture Sec. Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

MANILA, Philippines — Some 10 companies have ended up being blacklisted by authorities in the last six months for their involvement in illegal trade acts or other unlawful agricultural practices, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

“We have blacklisted more companies in the past six months than in the past six years combined,” Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said on Tuesday.

LVM Grains Enterprises, Kysse Lishh Consumer Goods Trading, JRA and Pearl Enterprises Inc., Betron Consumer Goods Trading, RCNN Non-Specialized Wholesale Trading, Golden Rays Consumer Goods Trading and Chastity Consumer Goods Trading were sanctioned for bringing in imported vegetables, fruits and other food products without the necessary sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances.

Kysse Lishh, RCNN, Chastity Consumer Goods Trading and Golden Rays are not even licensed importers, according to the DA.

Three other companies with import licenses—La Reina Fresh Vegetables Young Indoor Plants Inc., Vegefru Producing Store and Yom Trading Corp.—were also sanctioned for their involvement in anticompetitive practices such as price manipulation and collusion.

Clear warning

Bureau of Plant Industry Director Gerald Glenn Panganiban said that based on their findings, the licenses of the blacklisted firms were revoked. Those without licenses, on the other hand, were banned.

“This should serve as a clear warning to those who attempt to challenge our resolve in going after smugglers and unscrupulous traders whose illegal activities harm our farmers, fisherfolk and consumers,” Tiu Laurel said.

The punitive actions are in line with the DA’s intensified efforts to end smuggling, profiteering, hoarding, cartels and other related activities that push up food prices and destabilize the local market.

Tiu Laurel said the government was “prepared to take more decisive actions” against smugglers, especially with the recent enactment of the Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act.

Under the law, smuggling, hoarding, and cartel operations involving agricultural products are classified as economic sabotage.

Rice, corn, beef and other ruminants, pork, poultry, garlic, onions, carrots, other vegetables, fruit, fish, salt and other aquatic products in their raw state are covered under the law.

The smuggling and hoarding of agricultural products is also considered economic sabotage when the value of the goods exceeds P10 million.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2014404/da-blacklists-10-firms-for-illegal-trade-acts>

BUSINESS WORLD:

SRA backs probe into sugar millgate price drop

December 10, 2024 | 9:07 pm



VICTORIAS MILLING COMPANY, INC. FACEBOOK PAGE

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said on Tuesday that it supports an investigation after sugar producers reported that millers are offering them lower prices for their cane.

SRA Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona said sugar farmers are being offered millgate prices of as little as P2,400 per 50 kilograms. “So that amounts to about less than P50 per kilo.”

“If you look at the numbers, our wholesale price is constant, our retail price is constant. Only the farmgate price has fallen,” he said.

On Monday, a legislator urged the House of Representatives to investigate the drop in sugar millgate prices.

“Despite the low supply and the steady demand for sugar, the industry faces low and declining sugar millgate prices,” Negros Occidental Rep. Emilio Bernardino L. Yulo said in his privilege speech late Monday.

“This defies any logical explanation and contradicts the fundamental principle of supply and demand,” he added.

Mr. Yulo also raised the potential of price manipulation.

“Let us investigate the factors behind this price instability and hold accountable those who are tasked to protect the sugar farmers and those who take advantage of the situation for an unimaginable profit,” he said.

According to Mr. Azcona, at the current millgate price farmers are breaking even or cannot recover their cost of production.

“We have to remember 85% to 90% of our farmers are small farmers of one to two hectares. Most of them, if not all, are land reform beneficiaries,” he said.

He added that the ideal range for millgate price should be between P2,650 to P2,728. “Then at least farmers could break even.”

He added that the cost of production is “very high for this year” mainly due to the effects of El Niño and La Niña.

On the other hand, the yield per hectare of sugarcane has also fallen.

The yield for sugarcane declined 16% to an average of 1.47 LKGTC (50-kg bag raw sugar per ton of cane) from 1.75 LKGTC a year earlier.

Mr. Azcona said that millgate prices have remained low despite drop in supply and the expected increased demand for sugar.

According to the SRA, as of Dec. 1, the raw sugar inventory was 171,736 metric tons (MT), while refined sugar stocks totaled 308,554 MT. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/12/10/640712/sra-backs-probe-into-sugar-millgate-price-drop/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Clark food hub private partner to be selected by end of 2025

December 10, 2024 | 9:14 pm



BFCT BAGSAKAN FACEBOOK PAGE

By **Justine Irish D. Tabile**, *Reporter*

THE Clark International Airport Corp. (CIAC) said it hopes to award the National Food Hub project to a private partner by the end of 2025, keeping it on track for first-phase completion before the Marcos administration steps down.

CIAC President Joseph P. Alcazar said that the feasibility study being conducted by the Asian Development Bank is due for completion by March.

“After we get that, then we will steam ahead with the development and invite investors. The feasibility study is important for us to be able to do a proper tender for the food hub,” Mr. Alcazar told reporters on Tuesday.

“After the feasibility study we will be entertaining public-private partnership proposals,” he added.

He said the project has received inquiries from foreign firms with local partners.

“Nothing is official... there are no letters of intent yet. But there are two or three groups trying to explore what needs to be done,” he said.

“There are foreign firms, and most of the foreign firms have local partners. I think with the amount of investment that is needed, there will definitely be foreign components,” he added.

He said studying the proposals takes around three to six months, including the Swiss challenges.

“Hopefully before 2025 ends, we have a partner already. That’s our timeline,” he said.

“The ultimate objective is to be able to launch at least a phase of it within the term of the President. But of course, we will push for as much infrastructure to be built. But at least the first phase should be there by that time,” he added.

He said that the food hub needs infrastructure like roads and access.

He said the CIAC is also batting for the passage of the Clark National Food Hub Act to establish a comprehensive program for the management and operation of the food hub and its strategic nationwide trading network.

“Part of (the bill) is the allocation of budget for the National Food Hub and the additional incentives over and above CREATE MORE for the investors and the locators of the food hub,” he added.

Signed into law by President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., CREATE MORE, or the Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises to Maximize Opportunities for Reinvigorating the Economy Act, aims to attract more investment by lowering the corporate income tax to 20%, among others.

Written by Representatives Rufus B. Rodriguez, Maria Angela S. Garcia, and Anna Victoria Veloso-Tuazon, the food hub act, or House Bill 10678, is currently with the House Committee on Trade and Industry.

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/12/10/640716/clark-food-hub-private-partner-to-be-selected-by-end-of-2025/>

REMATE:

Ilang probisyon ng Amendments to Agricultural Tarrification Act, vineto ng Pangulo

December 10, 2024 10:15



MANILA, Philippines – BINETO (veto) ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ang ilang probisyon ng Amendments to Agricultural Tariffication Act.

Ang katuwiran ng Pangulo, makapagdadala ito ng hindi kanais-nais na mga resulta kaysa sa kanilang mga nakikitang benepisyo.

Ipinalabas ng Malakanyang ang veto message ng Pangulo, ilang sandali pa matapos lagdaan ni Pangulong Marcos upang ganap na maging batas ang Amendments to Agricultural Tariffication Act, na kanyang pinuri bilang isang hakbang tungo sa “improving the capacity of the government to respond to food security issues concerning the rice staple.”

Sa naging mensahe ng Pangulo na ipinadala kina House Speaker Martin Romualdez at Senate President Francis “Chiz” Escudero, mariing inayawan at tinanggihan ng Pangulo ang probisyon na magbubukod o magtatabi sa P5 billion mula sa kasalukuyang hindi

nagamit na bahagi ng annual budget ng Department of Agriculture (DA) na Ike-credit o idaragdag sa rice buffer fund.

Winika ng Pangulo na ang probisyon ay salungat sa direktiba ng Seksyon 44 ng Executive Order No. 292, na nagsasaad na “that all accruing income of agencies shall be deposited in the National Treasury and shall be part of the unappropriated surplus of the General Fund of the Government.” Bineto rin ng Pangulo ang probisyon na magbibigay mandato na ang anumang excess o sobra sa annual tariff collection mula sa importasyon ng bigas na ‘not exceeding P2 Billion’ ay Ike-credit sa buffer fund, sa halip na ibalik sa National Treasury, dahil ito’y “also proves to be inconsistent with the general principles of National Government Budgeting.”

Bineto rin ng Pangulo ang probisyon na magbibigay mandato sa Bureau of Customs na direktang i-remit ang pondo na gagamitin para sa financial assistance para sa mga rice farmers na nagbubungkal o nag-aararo ng hanggang 2 ektarya ng lupain sa Department of Agriculture.

“The line veto of the bill’s provisions is in adherence to the Government’s ‘one fund’ policy, where the creation of special funds is discouraged to prevent the reduction of national revenue, and in upholding fiscal discipline and proper resource allocation,” ang sinabi ni Pangulong Marcos.

Ang pagpapababa sa presyo ng bigas sa P20 kada kilo ay campaign promise ni Pangulong Marcos.

Tinapyasan naman ng Pilipinas ang rice import tariffs mula 35% at naging 15% noong Hulyo, inaasahan na ito’y mauuwi sa P5 na pagbabawas sa presyo.

Ang rice inflation ay pumalo na sa 5.1% noong Nobyembre kumpara sa 9.6% noong Oktubre. **Kris Jose**

<https://remate.ph/ilang-probisyon-ng-amendments-to-agricultural-tarrification-act-vineto-ng-pangulo/>

REMATE:

Rice imports na may mababang taripa posibleng payagan sa bagong agri law

December 10, 2024 09:49



MANILA, Philippines – MALAKI ang posibilidad na payagan ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr., ang pag-angat ng bigas sa mas mababang in-apply na tariff rate sa panahon ng anumang nalalapit o hinuhulaang kakapusan o anumang situwasyon na nangangailangan ng interbensyon ng gobyerno.

Ito ang nakapaloob sa Republic Act No. 120278 o Amendments to Agricultural Tariffication Act.

Ayon sa Seksyon 9 ng bagong batas, nagsasaad ng kapangyarihan ng Pangulo, ipinahihiwatig na sa bawat kaso ng pambihirang pagbagsak sa local rice prices, maaaring suspendihin ng Pangulo ang rice imports para sa limitadong panahon at/ o dami hanggang ang suplay ng bigas at presyo ay maging matatag.

”Such order shall take effect immediately and can only be issued when Congress is not in session,” ang nakasaad sa batas.

Sinasabing, pinalawak ng bagong batas ang buhay ng Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) hanggang 2031. Ang pondo ay huhugutin mula sa taripa na makokolekta mula sa rice importation.

Idagdag pa, ang pagtaas sa annual allocation sa RCEF ay magsisimula mula sa kasalukuyang P10 billion hanggang P30 billion hanggang sa 2031.

Sinabi pa ng Pangulo na sa pamamagitan ng RCEF, nagawa ng bansa na mag-invest sa 'high-quality seeds, mechanization, at pagsasanay ng mga lokal na magsasaka, isang hakbang na magga-garantiya na may taglay ang mga ito ng tamang kasanayan at gamit para itaas ang productivity.

"With the expiration of the original six-year plan for RCEF fast approaching, it became clear that we needed to extend and strengthen the program. And this is where this law comes in, extending the program to 2031, and significantly increasing its funding from the original P10 billion to P30 billion annually," ang sinabi ni Pangulong Marcos sa kanyang naging talumpati sa ceremonial signing.

Samantala, palalakasin din ng bagong batas ang regulatory functions ng Department of Agriculture (DA) sa pamamagitan ng paglikha at pagpapanatili ng database para i-monitor ang rice reserves ng bansa. *Kris Jose*

<https://remate.ph/rice-imports-na-may-mababang-taripa-posibleng-payagan-sa-bagong-agri-law/>

REMATE:

Top 10 rice importers ginisa sa price at cartel manipulation

December 10, 2024 18:36



MANILA, Philippines- Ginisa ng House Quinta Committee o mas kilala sa Murang Pagkain Super Committee ng Kamara ang ilang importers na inaakusahan na sangkot sa price manipulation.

Sa pagpapatuloy ng imbestigasyon ng komite, sinabi ni House Quinta Committee Chairman at Albay Rep. Joey Salceda na mas tinutukan nila ang importers dahil dito nakita ang posibleng sabwatan kaya nagkaroon ng pagtaas ng retail prices.

“The committee focused on top importers because there were clear signs of speculation in the rice import market, such as swelling commercial inventories, delays in withdrawals by importers, and imports surpassing USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) projections,” paliwanag ni Salceda.

Ang quinta-panel ay binubuo ng Committees on Ways and Means, Trade and Industry, Agriculture and Food, Social Services at Special Committee on Food Security.

Kabilang sa top rice importers na ginisa ng Kamara ay ang Bly Agri Venture Trading, Atara Marketing Inc., Orison Free Enterprise Inc., Macman Rice and Corn Trading, King B Company, Sodatrade Corp., Lucky Buy and Sell, Vitram Marketing Inc., Nan Stu Agri Traders at RBS Universal Grains Traders Corp.

Ang imbestigasyon ng Kamara ay resulta ng hindi pa rin pagbaba ng presyo ng bigas sa merkado sa kabila ng pagbaba ng rice tariffs mula 35% patungo sa 15% sa ilalim ng Executive Order 62 na ipinalabas ni Pangulong Bongbong Marcos noong June 2024.

“While the landed price of imported rice dropped by P11 per kilo year-on-year, domestic prices rose from P51 to P55.30, highlighting market inefficiencies. The gap between landed and domestic prices widened drastically, from P3 per kilo in 2023 to P20 in 2024, signaling potential manipulation or inefficiencies in the supply chain” paliwanag ni Salceda.

Tiniyak ni Salceda na kanilang lalaliman pa ang imbestigasyon.

Inatasan nito ang Bureau of Internal Revenue(BIR) na tignan ang tax payments ng mga rice importers.

“Congress cannot request tax filings. They are protected by Section 270 of the Tax Code. But the BIR can verify their own assessments and records. These top importers are importing in the billions. So, their tax payments should reflect that,” ani Salceda.

Nagbanta si Salceda na maaaring kasuhan ng tax evasion ang importers.

“This would then allow the Anti Money Laundering Council to look into top importers’ transactions as tax evasion is a predicate offense that would allow AMLC to look deeper,” dagdag pa nito.

Matapos ang mga importers sunod na ipatatawag ng komite ang mga malalaking retailers at malalaking wholesalers.

Nakatakda ding magsagawa ng executive session ang komite sa Department of Agriculture bukas para talakayin ang ginagawang hakbang ng ahensya laban sa price manipulation. **Gail Mendoza**

<https://remate.ph/top-10-rice-importers-ginisa-sa-price-at-cartel-manipulation/>

REMATE:

DA mag-aalok ng ‘sulit, nutri’ rice sa halagang P36-P38/kilo

December 10, 2024 14:44



MANILA, Philippines- Sinabi ng Department of Agriculture (DA) na nagpaplano itong maglabas ng mga bagong uri ng palay na tinatawag na “sulit rice” at “nutri rice” na ibebenta sa mas mababang presyo bilang “New Year offering” sa mga Pilipino.

Sa Saturday News Forum sa Quezon City, sinabi ni Agriculture Assistant Secretary Genevieve Guevarra na ang sulit na bigas ay mabibili ng P36 kada kg., habang ang nutri rice ay mabibili sa P38 kada kg.

“Iyan po ‘yung balak naming New Year offering. Kumbaga bagong taon, meron tayong i-introduce na bagong varieties sa start of the year,” sabi ni Guevarra.

Inilarawan niya ang nutri rice bilang “brownish,” habang ang sulit na bigas ay puti ngunit “super broken.”

Ayon sa Department of Agriculture (DA), ang mga bagong uri ng palay, na magiging available simula 2025, ay dagdag sa P40 kada kilo presyo para sa pinaghalong lokal at imported na well-milled rice na kasalukuyang iniaalok sa mga tindahan ng Kadiwa.

Nang tanungin kung posible ang karagdagang pagbawas sa presyo ng bigas sa mga tindahan ng Kadiwa, sinabi ni Guevarra na “binabalanse” ng gobyerno ang sitwasyon, dahil ang naturang hakbang ay maaaring magkaroon ng “ripple effect” sa mga magsasaka.

“Nakakadismaya din po sa mga magsasaka kung masyadong bababaan din po ang presyo ng bigas” sabi pa nito.

Ang programa ng Kadiwa ng Pangulo (KNP) Rice for All ay nagbibigay ng mas murang bigas kaysa sa umiiral na mga presyo sa merkado.

Kaugnay nito, nagpapalano rin ang DA na magbukas ng mas maraming Kadiwa kiosk sa mga pangunahing pampublikong pamilihan sa buong bansa, gayundin sa mga istasyon ng Metro Rail Transit (MRT) at Light Rail Transit (LRT).

Ang mga kiosk ng KNP ay tumatakbo sa Kamuning Market, Malabon Central Market, New Las Piñas City Public Market, Pasay City Public Market, Guadalupe Market, MRT-North Avenue Station, at LRT-Monumento Station.

Isinasaalang-alang din ng DA ang mga bagong kiosk sa Balintawak (Cloverleaf) Market, Maypajo Public Market sa Quezon City, Cartimar Market sa Pasay City, Grace Market sa Pateros, at Paco Market ngayong buwan. **Santi Celario**

<https://remate.ph/da-mag-aalok-ng-sulit-nutri-rice-sa-halagang-p36-p38-kilo/>

REMATE:

Tubig-ulan target gamitin ng DA sa irrigation system

December 10, 2024 14:31



MANILA, Pihippines- Nagpatulong na si Department of Agriculture (DA) sa isang Vietnamese expert para magtayo ng irrigation systems sa apat na patag na lupaing sa Pilipinas.

Ayon sa DA, ang bagong pamamaraan ay inaasahan na magiging 50% na mas mura kaysa sa traditional irrigation projects sa Pilipinas.

Sinabi ni Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu-Laurel na nakita niya at ng mga opisyal ng DA ang teknolohiya habang tinitingnan kung paano ang Vietnam, kung saan ang 95% ng patag na lupain ay irigado (irrigated), ginagamit ang Mekong River at iba pang resources sa irrigation systems nito.

“We saw how they controlled the flood and harnessed the water. Instead na iniwan nila yung tubig diyang at baha... Gumawa sila ng canal system,” ang sinabi ni Laurel sa mga mamamahayag sa sidelines ng isang event sa Makati.

“Yung canal system nila, ginamit lang nila backhoe, wala man lang semento masyado, then may mga flood gates na nilagay... Yun na din yung transport system nila for rice. Instead na truck-truck, sila barko barkong rice yung lumalabas, sa loob ha, sa inland. It’s a novel idea na nagustuhan

namin,” aniya pa sabay sabing, “So far, less than 50 percent of farmlands in the Philippines are irrigated.”

“If we irrigated all our flatlands, technically may surplus pa tayo, puwede pang mag-export,” pahayag ni Tiu-Laurel.

Ang halaga aniya ng irrigation projects sa Pilipinas ay kadalasang P1 milyon sa bawat ektarya, subalit ang bagong pamamaraan mula sa Vietnam ay nagkakahalaga lamang ng “maybe half” ng nasabing halaga.

“I don’t think it will be expensive kasi puro backhoe lang ang gagamitin. It’s a design using the land and just moving earth,” ayon kay Tiu-Laurel.

“The flood gates na nakita ko is very simple and cheap to do, and some pumps,” patuloy ng opisyal. Sa kabilang dako, nakatakdang dumating sa Pilipinas sa susunod na linggo ang Vietnamese para iprisinta ang master plan para sa irigasyon sa paligid ng Candaba River Basin, Cagayan River Basin, Agusan River Basin at Liguasan Marsh.

Ang ideya aniya ay inilatag sa ibang Cabinet secretaries at nagustuhan naman aniya ng mga ito.

“We’re now working together with other government agencies to make it happen,” ayon kay Tiu-Laurel.

Samantala, inaasahan naman ng DA na handa na ang blueprint sa susunod na taon upang ang pagpopondo sa proyekto ay maaaring isama sa 2026 budget proposal ng departamento. **Kris Jose**

<https://remate.ph/tubig-ulan-target-gamitin-ng-da-sa-irrigation-system/>

MANILA STANDARD:

Solons to DA: Focus on post-harvest plans

By Maricel Cruz

December 10, 2024, 11:10 pm

The House of Representatives Committee on Aquaculture and Fisheries Resources urged the Department of Agriculture (DA) to put equal focus on developing modern post-harvest facilities in the country's eastern seaboard to boost fish production and help offset the dwindling catch in the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

The committee, chaired by Rep. Brian Raymund Yamsuan of Bicol Saro party-list group, joined House Minority Leader and 4PS Party-list Rep. Marcelino Libanan in calling on the DA, through the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA), to construct more fish ports and cold storage facilities in Samar, Leyte and other Visayas provinces in the country's eastern seaboard.

During the hearing, Yamsuan also urged the PFDA to advance the timeline of its fishport construction in the municipality of Oras, Eastern Samar to either 2025 or 2026, instead of its original schedule of 2028.

Both Yamsuan and Libanan pointed out that the 2028 schedule for constructing the Oras fishport highlighted the apparent low priority that the PFDA has given to the development of the fishing industry in the eastern seaboard.

Yamsuan said he would talk to DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. about the possibility of moving up the scheduled construction of the Oras fishport as well as the other infrastructure development programs in the eastern seaboard.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) has reported that for the first half of 2024, fish catch in the WPS went down by 6.78 percent to 101,039.54 metric tons (MT) from 108,392.48 MT for the same period in 2023.

<https://manilastandard.net/news/314534551/solons-to-da-focus-on-post-harvest-plans.html>

MANILA STANDARD:

NEDA puzzled: Lower tariff failed to reduce rice prices

By [Manila Standard](#)

December 11, 2024, 12:35 am

The lowered tariff on imported rice from 35 percent to 15 percent did not lead to a reduction in rice prices, the National Economic and Development Authority disclosed yesterday.

“This is a puzzle also for us,” NEDA Director Nieva Natural told members of the House “Murang Pagkain” super committee.

“Perhaps this deserves a more nuanced analysis,” she added.

Natural said the tariff reduction, contained in President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.’s Executive Order 62, should have resulted in higher supply with increased rice imports, thus lowering retail prices.

Instead of the expected outcome, Natural said major market players were pricing goods above competitive levels.

The lower tariffs saw a 62 percent hike in imported rice demand.

Customs Commissioner Bienvenido Rubio said while the tariff cut reduced the landed cost of imported rice to P33.93 per kilo, retail prices remained high.

For his part, House Ways and Means chairperson Joey Salceda asked the Bureau of Internal Revenue to audit tax payments by major rice importers.

Salceda said these companies may have profited significantly from the tariff reduction.

“This is just short of supernatural. There is clearly pricing abuse—we just need to pinpoint at which stage,” Salceda said.

<https://manilastandard.net/news/314534575/neda-puzzled-lower-tariff-failed-to-reduce-rice-prices.html>

THE MANILA TIMES:

'Manipulated' sugar prices denounced

By [Giselle P. Jordan](#)
December 11, 2024

NEGROS Occidental 5th District Rep. Emilio Bernardino Yulo has expressed alarm over sugar millgate prices falling below production cost while sugar retail prices continue to rise.

The lawmaker at the same time cautioned the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) which he said "falls short of its mandate of stabilizing sugar prices, as the current sugar pricing is not profitable for farmers nor fair to consumers."

In his privilege speech, Yulo shared that at the start of the milling season, millgate prices would average at P2,850 per 50 kilograms, giving a decent return to the sugar farmers.

However, the mill gate price saw a P250 drop in two months, declining to P2,750 in October and P2,600 in November. It also fell by almost P400 from its initial price last Thursday, recording a mill gate price of P2,470 per 50 kilograms.

According to the lawmaker, this millgate price falls below the production cost.

Yulo said that this year is especially hard for farmers who had doubled the expenses from replanting, refertilization and recultivation as the country went through its longest dry season from December to May.

The La Niña that came after also caused damage to crops, which also resulted to additional spending. On top of this are the low sugar millgate prices that further aggravate the situation for the farmers.

Yulo also cited the country's sugar buffer stocks that fell short.

While the required sugar buffer stock for the country is around 200,000 metric tons (MT) which translates to 60 days of supply, the country only has 150,000 MT of buffer stocks or a 45-day supply as of Nov. 15, 2024.

Despite low supply and a consistent and expected surge in demand for the holiday season, sugar millgate prices are declining. He said that the current situation in sugar mill gate pricing is strange, as prices are expected to rise with high demand and low supply.

Meanwhile, the retail price of sugar has remained fairly consistent throughout the year.

Yulo suspects that there is an artificial manipulation in the prices of sugar.

This being the case, Yulo has called for immediate action to stabilize sugar prices and urged Congress to conduct an investigation into the sugar price instability.

He said that those who are tasked to protect sugar farmers and those who take advantage of the price instability for profit should be held accountable.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/12/11/regions/manipulated-sugar-prices-denounced/2019262>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

Neda: Lower rice tariffs led to decline in farm-gate price

Cai U. Ordinario
December 10, 2024

THE National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) disclosed that while the lower rice tariffs reduced the landed cost of imports of the staple, this also caused a double-digit decline in farm-gate prices.

In the Murang Pagkain Supercommittee hearing at the House of Representatives on Tuesday, Neda Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Environment Staff (ANRES) Director Nieva T. Natural said lower rice tariffs reduced farm-gate prices by 16.8 percent between June to October 2024.

The Neda report, shared by Natural on Tuesday, also showed the lower rice tariffs had a more limited impact on retail prices as there was only a reduction of 1.7 percent in the prices of the commodity.

“The significant decrease in landed costs [-17.8 percent per kilogram of Vietnam rice] exhibits a minimal passthrough in retail prices [-1.7 percent per kilogram of regular milled rice] but a significant transmission in farmgate prices [-16.8 percent] between June and October 2024,” Natural read from the report.

Based on the PSA, farm-gate price by region per commodity is computed as the arithmetic mean of the average prices of the provinces. This is the price set by farmers for their produce, in this case, rice. Landed cost, meanwhile, is the cost of imported goods when they arrive in the Philippines while retail prices are the price of goods when these are finally sold to the general public.

Given the larger impact on farmgate prices, which could be disadvantageous to the country’s farmers, Natural said a more nuanced analysis may be required to explain what happened to the prices.

Nonetheless, the Neda said in its report that it is possible that a lack of competition in the rice market may have prevented a greater reduction in retail prices compared to farm-gate prices.

“In a highly competitive market, a decrease in tariff rates would be expected to increase the quantity of imports. This would increase the quality of rice supplied in the market and lower retail prices,” Natural read from the report.

“Subsequently, because of lower demand for locally produced rice, the derived demand for local palay falls, and farmgate prices would be expected to fall. Therefore, if markets were sufficiently competitive, the data should show that the reduction of the tariffs would cascade in both retail and farm-gate markets,” the report also said. The Neda report also went on to state that if markets were insufficiently competitive, “lower rice tariffs would cause dominant players to substitute locally produced rice for imported rice until the cost of acquiring locally produced rice equals the cost of acquiring imported rice.”

If this happens, Neda said the demand for palay would fall and a subsequent reduction in farm-gate prices will be observed.

“Since dominant market players can set prices above competitive market prices, the transmission to retail prices would be minimal. This means that the price dynamics currently observed in the market are more consistent with what would be observed in a non-competitive market structure,” the Neda report said.

Neda also noted that an in-depth investigation should be conducted to determine competition issues at various stages of the rice supply chain. This includes the level of importers and traders or consolidators who may be few but are large enough to be considered dominant players in the rice sector. The report added that following the implementation of lower rice tariffs in July 2024, total rice imports in the third quarter reached 996.9 thousand metric tons (TMT), a 12.2-percent decline from the arrivals in the second quarter.

In the fourth quarter, rice imports are expected to reach 1,254.78 TMT. Out of this figure, some 867.19 TMT have arrived as of November 21, 2024. The Neda noted that between July and October 2024, the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) issued a total of 4,129 Sanitary and Phytosanitary Import Clearances (SPSICs) with an expected volume of 3,290.92 TMT.

The report was presented to the Supercommittee, which is also termed the Quinta Committee. It is composed of the Committees on Ways and Means, Trade and Industry, Agriculture and Food, Social Services, and the Special Committee on Food Security.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/12/10/neda-lower-rice-tariffs-led-to-decline-in-farm-gate-price/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

SRA to probe drop in millgate prices

Ada Pelonia
December 10, 2024

The Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said it is ready to investigate the plunge in millgate prices despite the low supply of sugar.

SRA Administrator Pablo Luis Azcona issued the statement after Negros Occidental Rep. Emilio Bernardino Yulo recently called on the government to take action and stabilize sugar prices that have dropped to the detriment of sugarcane farmers.

Azcona explained that the lowest millgate price on record was P2,400 per 50-kilo bag, which amounts to less than P50 per kilo.

The SRA chief noted that the stock level of raw sugar stood at 150,000 metric tons (MT) while refined sugar was 300,000 MT.

He said these numbers were higher than raw and refined sugar stocks two years ago at 178,000 MT and 228,000 MT, respectively. However, millgate prices during that time settled at over P3,000 per 50-kilo bag.

“We have to remember [that] 85 to 90 percent of our farmers are small farmers of one to two hectares [...] the current pricing is at breakeven or even lower than their cost to produce,” Azcona told reporters on Tuesday.

“We are coming from bad weather, higher [production] costs, lower yield, and yet our prices are exceptionally low,” he said partly in Filipino.

Azcona explained that the ideal pricing should range from P2,650 per bag to P2,728 per bag, offering planters a slightly better margin.

The SRA chief floated the concern that farmers would shift to planting other crops if the chance to gain a better profit margin did not come.

“The whole industry will basically dwindle and disappear if we no longer have sugarcane. Globally, the sugar supply is also decreasing. So we cannot be dependent on outside sources all the time,” Azcona said.

‘Bitter Christmas’

YULO recently noted the “staggering decline” in millgate prices during his privileged speech, which he said began at P2,850 per bag at the start of the milling season and plunged to P2,470 per bag last week.

He said this was “alarming” considering that the pricing had fallen below the production cost.

“Despite relatively low supply and an expected surge in demand for sugar this Christmas season, prices continue to drop,” Yulo said last Monday.

“Christmas is supposed to be sweet, but for thousands of sugar farmers, their Christmas this year will be bitter.”

The prevailing price of refined sugar in selected Metro Manila markets is P80 per kilo while washed sugar is P75 per kilo, based on the Department of Agriculture’s (DA) latest price monitoring report.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/12/10/sra-to-probe-drop-in-millgate-prices/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

PHL's elusive quest for rice self-sufficiency: Milestones, challenges, and the path forward

BusinessMirror Editorial
December 11, 2024

The Philippines nearly became self-sufficient in rice in 2013, six years before Congress approved a measure that would transform the local rice industry. That year, the self-sufficiency ratio of rice hit nearly 97 percent, which means domestic production was able to supply almost all the requirements of citizens. The second-highest rice SSR in the last 14 years was recorded in 2016, the year President Duterte assumed office.

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed that unmilled rice output in 2013 reached 18.439 million metric tons, more than 2 percent higher than the previous year's output of 18.032 MMT. Palay production almost reached a record 19 MMT in 2014, when it jumped to 18.967 MMT. As production fell drastically in 2015, the rice SSR also slipped to below 90 percent, mainly due to the impact of the El Nino event, which lasted until the next year and destroyed \$325 million worth of crops, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization.

These production milestones were achieved despite the absence of mechanisms, such as the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), which consisted of tariffs from imported rice purchases. What is remarkable is that the country saw significant increases in palay production—nearly 1 MMT in 2011 and almost 1.3 MMT in 2012 – sans a dedicated fund for the rice sector. The country would reach another production milestone in 2017, when rice harvested hit an all-time high of 19.27 MMT, two years before the implementation of a policy that removed the quantitative restrictions on the staple and halted the government's intervention in the domestic market.

The next major production milestone was reached last year, when the Philippines saw a record output of 20.059 MMT. This happened four years after the government started implementing a new rice policy and created the RCEF, which bankrolled several interventions that sought to increase the productivity of farms and boost the income of planters. RCEF was created by virtue of the Rice Tariffication Law, which mandated the national government to set aside P10 billion of tariffs collected from imports to be earmarked for the fund.

While the jubilation of some quarters over the increase in allocation for RCEF to P30 billion in the next six years is understandable, the higher amount is not a guarantee that there will be a significant jump in the productivity of rice farms (see "More of cheap Kadiwa rice to be sold with bigger RCEF," BusinessMirror, December 10, 2024). Based on data from the PSA, palay

production in 2022 had even fallen by 1 percent. That year, the rice SSR of the Philippines fell to a historic low of 77 percent, which means the country imported 23 percent of its rice requirement.

The nation is now awaiting the implementing rules and regulations of Republic Act 12078 signed by the President last Monday. It is our hope that aside from the judicious use of a bigger RCEF, policymakers also have a viable plan for expanding the production of the nation's staple amid global warming, which has become a major threat to the Philippine agriculture sector.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/12/11/phls-elusive-quest-for-rice-self-sufficiency-milestones-challenges-and-the-path-forward/>

ABANTE TONITE:

Mga Importer, Trader tumiba ng P13B sa Bigas

December 10, 2024

Tumataginting na P13 bilyon ang posibleng kinita ng mga importer at trader ng bigas sa pagsasabwatan upang hindi maibaba ang presyo ng bigas sa kabila ng ginawang pagtapyas ng gobyerno sa taripa.

Sa pagdinig ng Murang Pagkain super committee, sinabi nina Marikina City Rep. Stella Quimbo at AGAP Party-list Rep. Nicanor Briones na mayroong pattern ng hoarding, pagkakapareho ng may-ari ng mga kompanyang nag-aangkat ng bigas at pagnanais ng malaking kita.

Batay sa datos ng Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), sinabi ni Quimbo na mayroong diskonek ang kondisyon sa merkado at ang presyo ng bigas. Bagama't bumaba umano ang demand-supply ratio ng bigas mula 82.5% noong 2023 sa 69% ngayong 2024 ay isang pahiwatig na mayroong oversupply.

“May excess supply. Kung ano ang kailangan natin na bigas ay mas mababa sa kung ano ang meron tayo. At kapag may excess supply, dapat bumaba ang presyo. Pero bakit hindi bumababa?” tanong Quimbo.

“Nakita natin sa presentation ng PSA, klarong-klaro na merong pagsasabwatan,” dagdag pa nito.

Hanggang noong Nobyembre 1, ang kabuuang rice stock inventory ng bansa ay nasa 2.5 milyong metriko tonelada, mas mataas ng 25% kumpara noong nakaraang taon.

Sa pagbaba ng taripa ng imported na bigas sa 15% mula sa 35%, nadagdagan ng P13 bilyon ang kita ng mga importer at trader.

Pero sa halip na ipasa sa konsumer ang kanilang natipid, sinabi ni Quimbo na inipit ng mga negosyante ang suplay kaya nanatiling mataas ang presyo.

“Nasa kamay ‘yan ng importers at traders na yumaman po ng P13 billion dahil sa pagbaba ng taripa. Pero wini-withhold nila ang rice stocks sa ngayon,” sabi ni Quimbo.

Kumpara noong nakaraang taon, ang landed price ng bigas ay bumaba umano ng P11 kada kilo pero ang presyo ay tumaas mula P51 at naging P55.30.

Kung ang diperensiya umano ng landed cost at domestic price noong 2023 ay P3 lamang kada kilo, lumobo ito sa P20 ngayong 2024 na isang malinaw na patunay na mayroong nagaganap na manipulasyon.

“Dapat nasa bandang P35. Pero ngayon, malinaw na ito ay pagsasamantala,” sabi ni Quimbo.

Sumang-ayon naman si Briones sa sinabi ni Quimbo at ipinunto ang pagkakapareho ng mga may-ari ng mga kompanyang nag-aangkat ng bigas.

Tinukoy nito ang dalawang pa-ngunahing importer ng bigas— ang RBS Universal Grains Traders Corp. at Sodatrade Corp.—na nakapag-angkat ng kabuuang 273,000 metriko tonelada ng bigas.

“Pag tiningnan mo, ang mga may-ari ay iisa. Ibig sabihin, dito pa lang malinaw na may sabwatan,” punto ni Briones. (Billy Begas)

<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2024/12/10/mga-importer-trader-tumiba-ng-p13b-sa-bigas/>

ABANTE TONITE:

Romualdez pinamamadali IRR ng Rice Tariffication Law

December 10, 2024

Pinamamadali ni Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez sa Department of Agriculture (DA) at iba pang ahensiya ang paggawa ng implementing rules and regulations (IRR) para agad na maramdaman ang epekto ng amiyenda sa Agricultural Tariffication Act.

“The swift implementation of this law is non-negotiable. Our people, especially ordinary Filipinos, need to feel its benefits as soon as possible. I call on DA and its attached agencies to prioritize the drafting of the IRR and ensure that it is completed within 30 days,” sabi ni Romualdez.

Iginiit ng lider ng Kamara de Representantes ang kahalagahan na maramdaman ang bagong batas upang mapatatag ang presyo ng bigas, malabanan ang hoarding, at masuportahan ang magsasakang Pilipino.

“Without the IRR, the law cannot be enforced effectively, delaying much-needed relief for consumers and support for farmers,” sabi ng solon.

“Ang batas na ito ay ginawa para tugunan ang pangangailangan ng bawat Pilipino—lalo na ang mga hirap makabili ng bigas sa abot-kayang presyo. Pero walang mangyayari kung hindi agad maipapatupad nang maayos. Kailangang kumilos na ngayon,” dagdag pa nito.

Ayon sa lider ng Kamara, ang napapanahong paglabas ng IRR ay makatutulong upang masiguro na mapopondohan ang mga programa para sa mga magsasaka sa ilalim ng Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) na pinalawig hanggang sa 2031. (Billy Begas)

<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2024/12/10/romualdez-pinamamadali-irr-ng-rice-tariffication-law/>