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MANILA BULLETIN:

House quinta-comm orders NBI to probe middlemen involved in rice price manipulation

BY [DEXTER BARRO II](#)

Dec 11, 2024 07:16 PM

AT A GLANCE

- The quinta-committee (quinta-comm) of the House of Representatives has ordered the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) to investigate the role of middlemen in the alleged manipulation that keeps rice prices high.



Rice prices from earlier this year (MANILA BULLETIN)

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Iloilo 1st district Rep. Janette Garin made this motion during the hearing Wednesday, Dec. 11, in a bid to shed light on the individuals and organizations responsible for significant mark-ups in the rice supply chain.

“Mr. Chair, will this august body allow me to put forward a motion to direct the [NBI] to investigate [both ways]—from the retailers to the middleman to the wholesalers, or wholesalers papunta rito sa mga middleman papunta sa mga retailers (to the middlemen to the retailers)—so we can specifically identify the responsible people in terms of price manipulation. I so move, Mr. Chair,” said Garin.

The panel’s overall chair Albay 2nd district Rep. Joey Salceda approved the motion after hearing no objections.

Garin’s appeal followed a presentation by the Philippine Competition Commission (PCC), which outlined vulnerabilities in the rice supply chain, particularly among vertically integrated entities and middlemen.

During her interpellation, Garin pressed Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. to clarify which agency was responsible for monitoring middlemen in the rice market.

“There was a chart presented by PCC and they mentioned the vertical aspect itong dito sa wholesaler papunta sa retailer, tila meron doon mga middlemen. ‘Yun po ba, kaninong ahensya ang pag-police ng mga middlemen na iyon?’ she asked.

(From the wholesaler to the retailer, apparently there are middlemen there. Is that so, whose agency is policing these middlemen?)

“In my opinion, Mr. Chair, wala (there is none),” Laurel replied.

Acknowledging these regulatory gaps, Garin pointed out that some middlemen exploited their control over access to legitimate wholesalers. She said this further inflated rice prices.

“At ‘yung retailer ay tila hindi nabibigyan ng direct na linya papunta sa totoong wholesaler kasi kontrolado nito ang mga middleman na ito,” she added.

(And the retailer doesn't seem to be given a direct line to the legitimate wholesaler because it controls these middlemen.)

During Wednesday’s hearing, it was revealed that despite the huge tariff reduction (35 percent to 15 percent) that was intended to make rice cheaper, retail prices for the staple remain high. The price ranges from P55 to P60 per kilo.

Government data also showed that tariff reductions have resulted in P13.3 billion in foregone revenues.

Lawmakers suspect that the revenue may have ended up benefiting rice importers and traders instead of lowering retail prices.

With this, Garin urged the NBI to investigate the rice industry akin to its probe into onion price manipulation last year.

She recalled that investigators traced transactions step by step, from wholesalers to retailers, to expose those profiting unjustly.

“Nakita natin ang mga nagtatago dahil iba ang sinasabi ng importer, wholesaler, iba naman ang sinasabi ng farmers’ association. Only to realize na ‘yung nasa gitna na siyang malaki ang kinikita, there was actually a jump of I believe P250 to P300 per kilo profit only net for that specific person and organization na ngayon nga kinakasuhan na ng NBI,” the Iloilo solon said.

(We have seen those who are hiding since the importers, wholesalers say something different, while the farmers' association says something else. Only to realize that the middlemen are the ones who earn the most, there was actually a jump of I believe P250 to P300 per kilo profit only net for that specific person and organization who is now being charged by the NBI.)

The NBI’s upcoming investigation is expected to uncover whether the alleged manipulative practices by middlemen constitute economic sabotage or profiteering.

If either is proven, this would lead to the filing of criminal charges and possibly regulatory reforms.



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<https://mb.com.ph/2024/12/11/quinta-comm-nbi-middlemen-rice-price-manipulation>

MANILA BULLETIN:

SC asked to stop reclamation, seabed quarrying along Manila Bay

BY [REY G. PANALIGAN](#)

Dec 11, 2024 03:16 PM

A fishers' group and environmental advocates asked the Supreme Court (SC) to stop the various reclamation and seabed quarrying projects along Manila Bay through a petition for a Writ of Kalikasan.

A Writ of Kalikasan is a legal remedy for the protection of a person's right to a healthy environment as mandated by the Constitution.

The petition was filed on Wednesday, Dec. 11, by the Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) and the Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment (Kalikasan).

Named respondents in the petition are the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Philippine Reclamation Authority (PRA).

A copy of the petition was not immediately available.

A press briefer issued by the groups stated that they told the SC of the “distress that coastal communities have been experiencing amid the cumulative and long-term impacts of dredging and reclamation activities across Manila Bay.”

They said the “during 2019-2023 when Executive Order No. 74 was in effect or when holistic approach, cumulative impacts assessment, and reclamation development plans are required prior to issuance of Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC), Area Clearance (AC) and Notice to Proceed (NTP) in reclamation applications, the Philippine Reclamation Authority (PRA) approved 13 of 25 applications for reclamation within Manila Bay, and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) issued ECCs and ACs for the said reclamation projects, as well as at least ten (10) seabed quarry permits for utilization of marine sediment in Manila Bay as construction materials for some of the approved reclamation projects—without first meeting the requirements of the law.”

They also said that the two government agencies “approved the reclamation and dredging projects despite their joint, cumulative, long-term, irreparable and irreversible adverse impacts to the environment, to the livelihood of 300,000 fisherfolks, and to the entire country in terms of food security and patrimony; and, despite non-compliance with the requirements and provisions of environmental laws and regulations.”

“Nagpasya na ang mga mangingisda at makakalikasan na itaas sa Korte Suprema ang aming hinaing laban sa mga mapaminsalang reklamasyon at dredging sa Manila Bay (The fisher folks

and environment advocates decided to elevate the issues to the SC due to damages brought about by reclamation and quarrying projects along Manila Bay),” they added.

“Bagama’t kasalukuyang suspendido ang ilan sa mga nasabing proyekto, hindi kami mapapanatag hangga’t hindi tuluyang napapatigil ang mga ito lalo pa’t malinaw na labag sa batas at nagdulot ng malawakang pagkasira sa kapaligiran at kabuhayan ng mga mangigisda. Dahil nga sa pinsalang dulot ng dredging at reklamasyon, iniinda pa rin ng maraming mangingisda sa Manila Bay ang 80%-90% na pagbagsak ng kanilang arawang kita mula pa 2019. (While some of the projects have been suspended, we will not stop until all the reclamation and quarrying projects are stopped completely because of the destruction of the environment and the loss of livelihood of those affected,” they added.

They told the SC they also filed the petition since they learned that the DENR would soon release its cumulative impact assessment of reclamation projects by the end of the year.

In 2008, the SC ordered the clean-up and rehabilitation of the Manila Bay, and to restore the waters for commercial propagation of shellfish and milkfish as well as for swimming, skin diving and other recreational activities.

Areas covered by the clean-up and rehabilitation are local government units in Metro Manila, Rizal, Laguna, Cavite, Bulacan, Pampanga and Bataan.

The SC later issued a continuing mandamus that compelled the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA), DENR, Department of Education (DepEd), Department of Health (DoH), Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), Department of Budget and Management ((DBM), the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), the Philippine National Police Maritime Group, Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), and the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) to continuously implement the court’s directives.

The SC even formed the Manila Bay Advisory Committee (MBAC) to monitor and evaluate the reports submitted by the agencies tasked to implement its decision.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/12/11/sc-asked-to-stop-reclamation-seabed-quarrying-along-manila-bay>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Typhoon damage forces Philippines to increase rice imports—USDA

BY [BEN ARNOLD DE VERA](#)

Dec 11, 2024 01:36 PM

The Philippines, the world's No. 1 rice importer, would buy an even bigger volume during the current marketing year (MY) after a string of strong typhoons battered farms and slashed harvests, according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The USDA-Foreign Agricultural Service's (FAS) latest Grain: World Markets and Trade" report published on Dec. 10 showed a larger MY 2024-2025 rice import projection for the Philippines—now at a record-high 5.4 million metric tons (MT), from 5.1 million MT previously.

The report attributed this upward adjustment to a "smaller" domestic crop from Filipino rice farmers.

The Philippines' MY for milled rice starts in July of the current year until June of the next year, which means MY 2024-2025 covers the period July 2024 to June 2025.

For the preceding MY 2023-2024, the USDA also hiked its earlier estimates to reflect that the Philippines imported 5.3 million MT, and not just five million MT as previously estimated, also due to the smaller crop in the current MY.

If the USDA's forecast comes true, the Philippines is poised to be the world's biggest rice importer for three MYs in a row or since MY 2022-2023, during which the country bought 3.9 million MT of the staple food abroad, dislodging China from the top position.

In its separate newest "World Agricultural Production" report also on Dec. 10, the USDA-FAS highlighted lower rice production in the Philippines following several typhoons last November.

"USDA estimates MY 2024-2025 rice production at 12 million MT (milled basis), down two percent from [estimates] last month" of 12.3 million MT, it said.

Philippine milled production has been declining yearly, from 12.625 million MT in MY 2022-2023 and 12.325 million MT in 2023-2024.

"Harvested area is estimated at 4.6 million hectares (ha), down two percent from last month and three percent from last year. Yield (rough basis) is estimated at 4.14 tons per ha, down less than one percent from last month, but slightly up from last year," the report added.

The global agricultural production report noted that the Philippines' currently active typhoon season brought six successive storms passing through the country just in November, slashing fourth-quarter rice production.

Even as the majority of these typhoons made no direct landfall, high winds as well as torrential rainfall affected the rice-producing regions of Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon and Ilocos, whose combined production contributed about half of rice output during the last quarter of 2024.

As widespread flooding occurred in these three neighboring regions, rice fields were inundated, the USDA noted, citing local reports.

"Though rice is a hardy crop and can withstand short periods of flooding, area and yield impacts are more probable in extended periods of inundation," it pointed out.

The report cited that while rice is cultivated all-year-round here in the Philippines, production during the fourth and first quarters of each year have the largest volumes, accounting for roughly 38 and 23 percent of annual output, respectively.

On the flip side, rice consumption in the country has been steadily rising, to an estimated 17.2 million MT in MY 2024-2025, from 16.6 million MT in 2023-2024, 16.1 million MT in 2022-2023, 15.4 million MT in 2021-2022, and 14.8 million MT in MY 2020-2021.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/12/11/typhoons-force-ph-rice-imports>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Yamsuan panel echoes Libanan's call for infra build-up in eastern seaboard; here's why

BY [ELLSON QUISMORIO](#)

Dec 11, 2024 11:10 AM

AT A GLANCE

- The House Committee on Aquaculture and Fisheries Resources has amplified calls for the Department of Agriculture (DA) to boost development of modern post-harvest facilities in the country's eastern seaboard as a way to improve fish production and help offset the dwindling catch in the West Philippine Sea (WPS).



(Unsplash)

A House panel has amplified calls for the Department of Agriculture (DA) to boost development of modern post-harvest facilities in the country's eastern seaboard as a way to improve fish production and help offset the dwindling catch in the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

Chaired by Bicol Saro Party-list Rep. Brian Raymund Yamsuan, the House Committee on Aquaculture and Fisheries Resources joined House Minority Leader 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.

In last week's hearing of the committee, 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.

“This is ironic considering that the eastern seaboard is alongside one of the most productive portions of our waters in terms of fisheries resources. The provinces along the eastern seaboard have more than a 100 coastal municipalities dependent on fishing as their main source of livelihood, and a coastline stretching more than 2,000 kilometers,” Yamsuan said.

“Yet, we have learned during our recent hearing that the PFDA seems to have neglected this marine resources-rich area and have focused its attention and infrastructure buildup on the western seaboard where we have seen increasingly aggressive actions from China,” he added.

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.

Libanan said during the hearing that the PFDA can counter the declining fish catch in the WPS resulting from China's incursions in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone by giving equal priority to the establishment of fish ports, cold storage plants and blast freezers in the eastern seaboard.

“According to the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), the country's fish spoilage is at 25 to 40 percent. This is because of the fact that we lack modern facilities like fish ports with cold storages to reduce post-harvest losses. These are what we need in Eastern Samar and other provinces along the eastern seaboard, so that they can contribute more to our fisheries output,” he said.

Libanan, a former congressman and vice governor of Eastern Samar, said that owing to the lack of the appropriate facilities, export-grade tuna from Eastern Samar is sent all the way to General Santos City to be stored and processed.

He said the PFDA should act fast in developing the necessary infrastructure in provinces along the eastern seaboard to harness the full potential of the area's fishing industry and boost its contributions to the country's efforts to attain food security.

The country's eastern seaboard, surrounded by the West Pacific Ocean, is known for tuna fishing. Some areas of Northern and Eastern Samar are within the Tuna Conservation and Management Zone, which is rich in pelagic fishes, such as tuna species, according to BFAR.

The construction of the Oras fishport and its cold storage facilities is provided under House Bill (HB) No.10848 authored by Libanan.

This measure, along with Libanan's other bill, HB No.10850, which aims to build a fishport with ice plant and cold storage facility in Dolores, Eastern Samar, were approved by the House aquaculture and fisheries committee.

<https://mb.com.ph/2024/12/11/yamsuan-panel-echoes-libanan-s-call>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Canada and the Philippines: A winning partnership

[POINT OF VIEW - Mary Ng](#) - The Philippine Star

December 12, 2024 | 12:00am

Mabuhay from Canada!

As I conclude a highly successful Team Canada Trade Mission to the Philippines, one thing is crystal clear: there has never been a better time for our two nations to deepen our economic partnership.

The numbers speak volumes about our existing relationship. The Philippines is our second-largest export market in Southeast Asia, with our two-way trade valued at C\$3.4 billion. Seventy-five years after Canada opened its first trade office in Manila in December 1949, we've brought our largest-ever trade delegation of 300 participants to the Philippines – a beautiful symmetry that reflects how far our partnership has come.

At the heart of our partnership lies an extraordinary human connection that creates natural bridges between our nations. Our million-strong Filipino-Canadian community serves as powerful ambassadors, facilitating business relationships and deepening cultural understanding between our countries. They've enriched Canadian communities in countless ways, including introducing us to the delights of Jollibee's famous Chickenjoy – a taste of home that's become a Canadian favorite! More than 25,000 Canadians have made the Philippines their home. These bonds will soon be strengthened by Air Canada's announcement of direct flights to the Philippines, facilitating business ties and people-to-people exchanges.

The timing of our enhanced engagement couldn't be more opportune. President Marcos' recent signing of the "Create More" legislation signals the Philippines' commitment to creating a more welcoming environment for international investment and partnership. Canada stands ready to share expertise in crucial sectors where we excel: climate finance, infrastructure, telecommunications, clean and renewable technologies, ICT, green mining, aerospace, defense and security. And, did you know? About eight billion peso coins currently in circulation were produced by the Royal Canadian Mint!

This trade mission has already delivered tangible results. Export Development Canada's decision to establish an office here demonstrates our long-term commitment. Canadian technology leader OpenText is expanding its innovation center and building on its existing 1,500-person workforce, while Ostrom Climate has chosen Manila as its ASEAN regional hub. The partnership between Canadian AI firm Lydia AI and Philippine venture capital firm Kickstart Ventures showcases how

our technology sectors can collaborate, while the agreement between Canada's FreeBalance and the Philippine Department of Budget and Management enhances financial management systems.

A particularly significant development was the signing of an Administrative Agreement to fulfill obligations under our 1983 Nuclear Cooperation Agreement. As a tier-one nuclear nation with expertise across the full supply chain, Canada is uniquely positioned to support the Philippines' energy goals.

The momentum in our bilateral relationship has led to an exciting new phase: we are beginning exploratory discussions toward a Canada-Philippines Free Trade Agreement. This potential agreement would create unprecedented opportunities for businesses on both sides of the Pacific. For Filipino businesses, it means enhanced access to North American markets through Canada. For Canadian businesses, it opens doors to one of Southeast Asia's most dynamic economies.

Food security remains a critical priority for both our nations. Canadian exports of high-quality agri-food and seafood to the Philippines have helped address food security needs and inflationary pressures. Our decision to establish the Indo-Pacific Agriculture and Agri-food Office in Manila underscores our commitment to this vital sector. The office is already engaged in technical capacity-building and helping businesses identify opportunities across the Indo-Pacific region.

Our Indo-Pacific Strategy, backed by substantial investment of C\$2.3 billion over five years, helps create the right conditions for Filipino businesses to thrive in North American markets while enabling Canadian companies to strengthen their presence in the Philippines.

The foundation of our partnership extends beyond economics to shared values – commitment to the rule of law and inclusive economic growth. As we look to the future, our complementary strengths create natural synergies.

The path forward is clear: through continued engagement and strategic investment, we can build a more prosperous future for both our nations. Canada stands ready as the partner of choice for the Philippines in its journey of economic transformation.

* * *

Mary Ng is Canada's Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development.

<https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2024/12/12/2406695/canada-and-philippines-winning-partnership>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

EDITORIAL - Again, price manipulation

The Philippine Star

December 12, 2024 | 12:00am

With rice retail prices refusing to go down despite tariff cuts and the resulting flood of imports, the nation is again hearing officials talking about cartels and price manipulation. Whether the talk will lead to anyone being indicted for price manipulation or cartel-like operations remains to be seen.

Since last year, rice prices have been going up, due mostly to El Niño and India's consequent ban on its export of non-basmati rice as well as geopolitical tensions that have disrupted global supply chains. The high prices have been fueling food inflation in the Philippines, which in turn has accounted for the biggest component of headline inflation.

All surveys by reputable pollsters have consistently shown the administration getting the weakest points in taming inflation. This is despite the provision of rice at heavily subsidized prices along with other commodities in the Kadiwa outlets.

So the government decided to bring in more rice imports. In June this year, President Marcos signed Executive Order No. 62, cutting tariffs on certain commodities particularly rice from 35 percent to just 15 percent. The move, recommended by the National Economic and Development Authority, was made despite concerns raised by local rice producers about the impact of the flooding of rice imports. Government data showed that the tariff cut has resulted in P13.3 billion in forgone revenues so far. To the dismay of government officials, however, rice retail prices still range from P55 to P60 per kilo.

The Department of Agriculture has reportedly blacklisted 10 companies believed to be involved in unfair or illegal trading in agricultural commodities. Meanwhile, the quinta committee of the House of Representatives wants the National Bureau of Investigation to identify entities along the supply chain who might be responsible for manipulating rice prices.

Some lawmakers think that with the tariff cuts, rice retail prices should be at P35 a kilo. Even at Kadiwa outlets, however, the lowest price that the government can offer is P40 per kilo under the Rice-for-All program, with the aspiration that it can still be brought down to P36 to P38 by January. Agriculture officials have said the tariff cuts are probably taking time to make an impact because traders are still unloading their stocks that were bought before EO 62 took effect.

Lawmakers, however, suspect price manipulation, and want the NBI to find out where this is happening along the supply chain. This will involve drawing the line between price gouging and turning a profit from legitimate business practices. The nation has heard such accusations before, and is waiting for the results of the latest probe.

<https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2024/12/12/2406705/editorial-again-price-manipulation>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Bicam keeps P1.3 billion budget cut for OVP

[Cecille Suerte Felipe](#) - The Philippine Star

December 12, 2024 | 12:00am



Vice President Sara Duterte holds a press conference before attending a ‘thanksgiving party’ yesterday

Michael Varcas

MANILA, Philippines — Lawmakers have approved the bicameral conference committee report on the P6.532-trillion national budget for 2025, retaining the P1.3-billion funding cut in Vice President Sara Duterte’s office amid tensions between her and President Marcos.

The bicam report, which is expected to be ratified by both chambers of Congress, does not include any increase in the P733-million allocation for the Office of the Vice President (OVP), which disappointed Duterte’s allies.

Sen. Imee Marcos, a close friend of Duterte, and Sen. Bong Go, a longtime aide of Duterte’s father former president Rodrigo Duterte, skipped the ceremonial signing of the bicam report, while Sen. Ronald dela Rosa arrived late and left before the event ended. He refused to affix his signature to support the budget.

Sen. Grace Poe, chairperson of the Senate committee on finance, said the OVP did not ask for additional funding for 2025 after the P1.3 billion was slashed, and did not submit documents justifying any request to restore its original proposed outlay.

During the Senate’s budget hearing, Duterte said she was leaving the decision on the OVP’s budget to Congress.

For his part, House appropriations committee chairman Rep. Zaldy Co questioned the OVP's overlapping projects, such as financial and burial assistance.

"These are duplications of national agencies' programs. It's not logical for the OVP to have separate social services," Co said. "We considered the Senate's concerns, particularly on the OVP budget."

"We decided to maintain the P1.3-billion budget cut and not to further reduce the OVP's travel funds. The slashed funds were allocated to agencies like DOH (Department of Health) and DSWD (Department of Social Welfare and Development) with tested programs like AICS (Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation) and MAIFIP (Medical Assistance for Indigent and Financially Incapacitated Patients)," he added.

Dela Rosa admitted being frustrated for failure to secure an increase in the OVP budget.

"We can't do anything if they don't want to, just look at my eyes and how frustrated I am. Hopeless," he said.

Bicam retains AKAP

Both houses thumbed up the controversial Ayuda para sa Kapos ang Kita Program (AKAP) after senators were also given their fair share from the program. The Senate and the House of Representatives were allotted P5 billion and P21 billion, respectively.

The Senate was also allocated an increase of P1.1 billion, bringing to P13.930-billion allocations for 2025, while the House got an additional budget of P17.324 billion or a total of P33.670 billion for next year.

Senate President Francis Escudero and Speaker Martin Romualdez led the contingents from the Senate and House of Representatives during the ceremonial signing of the bicameral committee conference report held at the Manila Hotel.

Escudero vouched for the proposed 2025 national budget, saying this will help the administration of President Marcos.

"The logic here is simple: the President was elected by 31 million, so it is only right that Congress paves the way for him to fulfill his promises, vision and plans for the country according to the mandate given to him," Escudero said in his speech during yesterday's bicameral conference committee meeting at Manila Hotel.

No PhilHealth subsidy

Meanwhile, Congress did not allocate a budget for the subsidy of the Philippine Health Insurance Corp. (PhilHealth) after its leadership declared a surplus of P89.9 billion that was supposed to be transferred to the national treasury.

In the House version of the budget, PhilHealth was allotted a P74.4-billion subsidy. This was reduced by the Senate in its version to P64.4 billion.

In the end, the PhilHealth government subsidy was totally deleted in the reconciled budget version because the state insurer failed to utilize its P600 billion in supposed “reserve funds.”

“We saw PhilHealth failed to use the subsidy provided by the government for 2024. PhilHealth now, if I’m not mistaken, has P600 billion in reserved funds. It’s just deposited in a bank and its income is less than the inflation. So the government is still at a loss. For now, PhilHealth has not been given a budget,” Poe said.

Sen. Risa Hontiveros opposed the zero subsidy to PhilHealth, saying it denies the Filipinos’ right to universal health and could be unconstitutional.

Hontiveros said it should be the government’s responsibility to give subsidy to PhilHealth for the payment of premiums of the so-called indirect contributors.

She also noted that PhilHealth’s alleged “reserve fund” cannot be used to pay the indirect contributors’ premium as the reserves are “emergency funds for future financial obligations.”

She cited the PhilHealth charter as well as the Sin Tax and the Universal Health Care (UHC) laws as mandating the need to subsidize PhilHealth and its universal health care program.

Sen. JV Ejercito, who sponsored the UHC law, said there could be questions of legalities in the move to totally remove PhilHealth’s government subsidy.

“They may have a P600-billion reserve fund, but there could be questions of legality here in removing the funding that is already earmarked in our laws,” Ejercito said.

Ejercito expressed concern at the budget cuts suffered by different agencies in the reconciled version of the proposed P6.352-trillion budget. “I am both worried and sad over the cuts, because it is always never enough,” he said.

Budget signing set December 20

The enactment of the 2025 budget is expected to take place before Christmas, according to the Presidential Communications Office (PCO).

In a text message, PCO Secretary Cesar Chavez said the signing of the spending bill into law was tentatively slated for Dec. 20 at 9 a.m.

The proposed budget has to be ratified by Congress before it is transmitted to Malacañang for President Marcos’ signature.

Marcos had certified the 2025 budget as urgent, exempting it from the rule that a bill can only be passed on final reading three days after it was approved on second reading.

Budget cuts

Under the summarized version of the General Appropriations Bill, the DSWD has the biggest budget cut of P95.923 billion, followed by the Commission on Higher Education with P26.912 billion.

The budget of DOH was the third agency that suffered a budget slash of P25.795 billion, followed by the Department of Agriculture with P20 billion.

The Department of Labor and Employment also got a budget cut of P18.013 billion as well as the Department of Transportation with P16.683 billion.

While the 1987 Constitution provides that education must have the highest budget, the Department of Education budget was cut by P11.569 billion while the budget for state of universities and colleges was slashed by P7.233 billion.

The Department of Justice was cut by P1.603 billion as well as the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development by P582 million. The Department of Science and Technology also suffered a cut of P172.5 million.

Budget increases

Based on the summarized bicam report, the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) got P1,113,764.447, or a P288.648 billion increase.

Some senators, who refused to be quoted, claimed they were surprised to find out that the DPWH would get over a trillion-peso budget, the first time in the budget allocation.

Meanwhile, there has been notable increases in the budgets of the Department of National Defense with P8.857 billion, Department of Information and Communications Technology with P4.007 billion, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao with P3.012 billion, Department of Tourism with P262.269 million and Department of Trade and Industry with P1.520 billion.

Other agencies receiving budget increases include the Department of Environment and Natural Resources with P162 million, Department of the Interior and Local Government with P131.4 million, Department of Migrant Workers with P245 million and the Department of Agrarian Reform with P108.6 million.

The Department of Foreign Affairs also received an increase of P415.222 million, the same as the Department of Finance with P6.818 million.

Funding for government oversight and planning agencies also with notable increases are the National Economic and Development Authority with P59.597 million, Presidential Communications Office with P18.254 million, Mindanao Development Authority with P339.327 million.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court received a boost of P448 million while the Commission on Audit had P200 million.

The approved budget also included an increase in the subsistence allowance for soldiers from P150 to P350 per day or P10,500 a month.

Unprogrammed funds

The proposed 2025 national budget includes P531.665 billion in unprogrammed funds that the government can use to address unexpected situations or prioritize important projects.

Under the national expenditure program, the unprogrammed funds were only P158.665 billion but Congress agreed to increase it by P373 billion.

Kabataan party-list Rep. Raoul Manuel questioned last night the huge increase in the “unprogrammed appropriations” fund in the bicameral conference committee approved 2025 national budget.

Manuel made the manifestation after the majority-dominated House of Representatives ratified the 2025 national budget bicam report through a voice vote.

“We are also questioning the trend under the Marcos Jr. administration. The ballooning of unprogrammed appropriations which increased by triple,” Manuel said in his manifestation.

Unprogrammed funds are items in the budget with no money allocated yet. The funds are seen as the latest version of the pork barrel. Should the government generate the money, or should there be new sources for it, then it will get reallocated to the project. Funds impounded from PhilHealth and other government corporations will go to unprogrammed funds.

In the 2023 budget, the first one fully crafted under the Marcos administration, the executive proposed P588,162,480,000 in unprogrammed funds. Congress gave the executive branch P807,162,480,000. – **Jose Rodel Clapano, Alexis Romero, Marc Jayson Cayabyab**

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/12/12/2406835/bicam-keeps-p13-billion-budget-cut-ovp>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Rice self-sufficiency ratio recovers to 78.5% in 2023

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

December 12, 2024 | 12:00am



Assistant National Statistician Rachel Lacsá disclosed the latest rice SSR figure during a recent hearing of the quinta committee of the House of Representatives, also known as the Murang Pagkain super committee.

Michael Varcas / File

MANILA, Philippines — The country’s rice self-sufficiency ratio (SSR) recovered to 78.5 percent last year, following a 24-year low of 77 percent in 2022, as a result of lower imports and higher domestic output.

Assistant National Statistician Rachel Lacsá disclosed the latest rice SSR figure during a recent hearing of the quinta committee of the House of Representatives, also known as the Murang Pagkain super committee.

The SSR measures the extent that the country’s supply for a specific commodity or good comes from its own domestic production.

Lacsá pointed out that a lower SSR would mean that “domestic production is insufficient to meet total domestic needs.”

“(It means that) 78.5 percent of total (rice) supply in 2023 came from domestic production and the other 21.5 percent came from rice imports,” she said.

It was the third year in the past six years that the country’s rice SSR was below 80 percent.

Government officials and industry stakeholders attributed the slight increase in rice SSR last year to higher rice production coupled by reduced import volume.

The country's milled rice production last year reached a record-level of 13.119 million metric tons (MT), according to Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) data.

Meanwhile, total rice imports fell to 3.59 million MT from 3.851 million MT in 2022.

"The climate conditions prevailing in 2023 is way better than this year which will explain a higher food sufficiency ratio," Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. president Danilo Fausto told The STAR.

However, Fausto cautioned that certain parameters used by the PSA need urgent review as they might be outdated already.

For example, the PSA still uses a palay-to-rice conversion ratio of 65.4 percent, which is not representative of the realities on the ground, he pointed out. Fausto noted that the average conversion ratio of rice millers nationwide is now below 65 percent.

Furthermore, Fausto said the inclusion of imports in the sufficiency formula could "misled" the public regarding the actual food production performance of the country.

Critics have been questioning the use of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture (FAO) formula by the PSA in measuring the SSR because it excludes the demand data.

"If imports go down as in 2023, the SSR will go up but it does not mean that we became more self-sufficient. [The formula should be] demand divided by local production only," Raul Montemayor of the Federation of Free Farmers said.

Even during the House hearing, Rep. Joey Salceda of Albay asked Lacsas why the demand is not included in the SSR formula to which the PSA official replied that the statistical agency follows the FAO formula.

"It is so counter intuitive," Salceda responded.

Lacsas also presented the country's rice demand-supply ratio upon the request of the House super committee. Based on the PSA estimates, the country had a rice demand-supply ratio of 82.5 percent last year, higher than the 81.4 percent in 2022.

The figure represents the volume of rice supply that was actually consumed in a given year.

"(It shows that) 82.5 percent of our (rice) supply was utilized or consumed in 2023. The remaining 18.5 percent was buffer stocks or beginning stocks of the (following) year," Lacsas explained.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/12/12/2406667/rice-self-sufficiency-ratio-recovers-785-2023>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

DA bans poultry from The Netherlands

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

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 02:24 PM December 11, 2024



INQUIRER FILES

The Department of Agriculture (DA) temporarily banned the importation of poultry products from The Netherlands after cases of bird flu were recorded in the European country.

The temporary importation ban went into effect immediately and was meant to “protect the health of the local poultry population,” the DA said in Memorandum Order No. 56 dated Dec. 9.

The memo covers domestic and wild birds and their products, including poultry meat, day-old chicks, eggs and semen.

Following the imposition of the import restriction, the DA immediately suspended the processing and evaluation of applications, and the issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances.

Shipments originating from The Netherlands either in transit, loaded or accepted unto port before informing Dutch authorities of the poultry import ban are excluded as long as the products were slaughtered or produced on or before Dec. 3.

confiscate poultry commodities delivered into the Philippines at all major ports of entry.

The DA order came after Dutch authorities reported an additional outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza in Putten, Gelderland affecting domestic birds on Nov. 17 this year.

According to the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH), avian influenza is a highly contagious viral disease affecting both domestic and wild birds. It is caused by viruses divided into multiple subtypes whose genetic characteristics rapidly evolve.

“The disease occurs worldwide but different subtypes are more prevalent in certain regions than others,” the WOAHA said in its website.

The DA is authorized by existing laws and policies to implement importation bans or other relevant orders to prevent the entry of animals, animal effects, parts or products from any country with dangerous communicable animal diseases. **INQ**

<https://business.inquirer.net/495894/da-bans-poultry-from-the-netherlands>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Typhoon series jacks up rice imports to new highs

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

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 02:20 AM December 12, 2024



STABLE SUPPLY. Workers move sacks of rice to another truck along Dagupan Street in Tondo, Manila on Sept. 9, 2024. Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel De Mesa said Wednesday (Oct. 2, 2024) rice imports may surpass last year's volume to supplement the country's strong harvest and maintain a stable rice supply in the country. (PNA photo by Yancy Lim)

Shipments of milled rice bound for the Philippines might exceed 5 million metric tons (MT) per year until 2025 as a recent string of storms slashed local production, according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

In a report, the USDA jacked up its projection on the country's rice imports due to a "smaller crop," now estimated at 5.3 million MT for 2024 and 5.4 million MT for 2025.

This was higher than the foreign agency's previous forecast of 5 million MT this year and 5.1 million MT in 2025.

If the projections are met, the yearly volume of inbound cargos of the staple grain will surpass the record-high 3.83 million MT that was reached in 2022.

The USDA revised upward its projections on rice imports as it pegged the domestic milled production at 12 million MT this year, lower than the previously projected 12.3 million MT.

The Philippines became the world's biggest rice importer in 2023 and will remain so until at least 2025, having overtaken China which held the top spot in 2021 and 2022, based on the American agency's monitoring.

In an earlier report released last month, the USDA noted that the Philippines is importing "record amounts" of rice as demand picks up alongside reduced import duties.

The USDA said the Philippines relied on Vietnam, the leading source of imported rice, for more than 80 percent of shipments.

Last June, President Marcos signed Executive Order No. 62 which slashed rice tariff rates to 15 percent until 2028 from 35 percent.

This move is intended to augment local supply while managing prices and alleviating the inflationary pressure of commodities.

So far this year, traders have brought in 4.35 million MT of imported rice as of Dec. 5, based on the latest figures from the Bureau of Plant Industry.

With still three weeks to go, the volume was already higher than the 3.6 million MT recorded for full-year 2023.

In November alone, rice imports totaled 434,655.5 M

The DA said the influx of imported rice has made up for the substantial losses incurred this year due to a series of typhoons that hit the archipelago in recent months.

<https://business.inquirer.net/495952/typhoon-series-jacks-up-rice-imports-to-new-highs>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

1st case of H5N2 bird flu in PH detected in Camarines Norte

By: [John Eric Mendoza](#) - Reporter / [@JEMendozaINQ](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 04:35 PM December 11, 2024

MANILA, Philippines — The first-ever case of H5N2 — a bird flu subtype that was found to be transmittable to humans — in the country has been detected in Talisay, Camarines Norte, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said on Wednesday.

The DA’s Bureau of Animal Industry said it was detected in a duck farm last Dec. 6.

“This is the first detection of HPAI (highly pathogenic avian influenza) H5N2 in the country and the first recorded avian influenza case in the province,” the DA said.

The DA said quarantine procedures within the one-kilometer surveillance zone were conducted.

It also said the culling process of the birds in the area where the virus was detected has already been completed since Tuesday.

In June, the World Health Organization (WHO) said a person in Mexico had died in the first confirmed human case of the virus.

WHO said the patient had “no history of exposure to poultry or other animals.”

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2014624/1st-case-of-h5n2-bird-flu-in-ph-detected-in-camarines-norte>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Reinstating NFA powers can bring down rice prices — DA

December 11, 2024 | 9:22 pm



PHILSTAR FILE PHOTO

LEGISLATORS need to consider reinstating the National Food Authority's (NFA) market regulatory functions as a means of making rice cheaper, Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. said on Wednesday.

Speaking at a House committee hearing, Mr. Laurel said NFA regulation would help control retail rice prices, adding that he sees P42 to P49 per kilo as an appropriate price rather than the current P50 to P60.

“The NFA lost its power to intervene in the market as it used to. Along with this, the DA (Department of Agriculture) also lost its power to control and stabilize rice prices,” he told legislators.

“If the NFA's power... could be restored, the DA would be more effective in curbing the abuses of rice traders and better influence rice prices,” he added.

In November, the Philippine Statistics Authority reported an average price for regular-milled rice of P49.24 per kilo, with well-milled rice fetching P54.64. The average per kilo of special rice stood at P63.

Legislators are looking into the possibility that rice prices are being kept artificially high by a cartel, and have not been allowed to fall to their natural level even after President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.'s order cutting rice tariffs.

“(Rice is still sold) at P50, up to P60. That's not right. Unfortunately, we don't have the authority to catch anyone in the market because we lack enforcement powers,” Mr. Laurel said.

The Rice Tariffication Law of 2019 liberalized rice imports and removed the NFA's authority to intervene in the rice market. It instead charged tariffs on rice imports of 35% initially, and 15% at present — the proceeds of which were to fund the modernization of the rice industry.

The law barred the NFA from releasing its rice reserves onto the market, limiting its power to intervene in times of calamity. It also revoked the NFA's licensing powers over rice market participants.

“Restoring the (NFA's) power would make a significant difference,” Mr. Laurel said. — **Kenneth Christiane L. Basilio**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/12/11/641094/reinstating-nfa-powers-can-bring-down-rice-prices-da/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Rice imports hit 4.35 MMT by early Dec.

December 11, 2024 | 9:20 pm



REUTERS

PHILIPPINE rice imports amounted to 4.35 million metric tons (MMT) as of early December, the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) said.

According to the BPI, rice imports as of Dec. 5 had surpassed the 3.61 MMT total reported for the 2023 full year.

Rice shipments in November amounted to 434,655 MT, more than double the 250,895 MT reported a year earlier.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is projecting that rice imports of 4.5 MMT for 2024 following the lowering of tariffs on rice imports, with demand for foreign rice spurred by an estimated decline in domestic production.

In June, the government lowered tariffs on imported rice to 15% from 35% until 2028 through Executive Order No. 62. It was billed as an inflation-containment measure.

In its Grain: World Markets and Trade Report, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) said the Philippines is projected to import about 5.4 million MMT next year citing the prospect of “smaller crops.”

The USDA’s new forecast represents a 300,000 MT upgrade from the estimate of 5.1 MMT issued in November. The projection for next year is slightly higher compared to the 5.3 MMT forecast for 2024.

The DA said palay (unmilled rice) production will likely decline 3.63% to a four-year low of 19.3 MMT in 2024, after typhoons damaged the standing rice crop.

The BPI reported that Vietnam remained the top supplier of rice as of early December, accounting for 76.8% of all imports in the year to date, or 3.34 MMT.

Thailand supplied 556,248 MT during the period, or 12.9% of the total, followed by Pakistan with 224,629 MT, or 5.2%.

It added that Myanmar and India shipped 197,952 MT and 22,572 MT of rice, respectively.

The BPI issued 109 sanitary and phytosanitary import certificates, with approved applicants seeking to import 66,988 MT, in early December. Total permits issued in the year to date numbered 9,451 with applicants seeking to ship in 9.08 MMT. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/12/11/641093/rice-imports-hit-4-35-mmt-by-early-dec/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

First case of H5N2 bird flu found in Camarines Norte

December 11, 2024 | 9:15 pm



REUTERS

THE Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) said on Wednesday that farmed ducks in Talisay, Camarines Norte tested positive for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) Type A, Subtype H5N2.

“This is the first detection of HPAI (subtype) H5N2 in the country and the first recorded avian influenza case in the province,” the BAI said in a statement.

The BAI said the cases were detected on Dec. 6, after routine surveillance by the Department of Agriculture’s Regional Field Office V (DA-RFO V).

“Following confirmation, BAI promptly endorsed the results to DA-RFO V and recommended an immediate quarantine and biosecurity measures to prevent the virus from spreading,” it added.

The BAI said that the remaining birds were culled and disposed of.

“A thorough investigation is ongoing to trace the movement of birds and identify additional risks,” it added.

The DA’s regional field office had also activated its command center to oversee operations, while protocols in line with the Avian Influenza Protection Program are being reviewed with the Regional Quick Response Team for Animal Disease and Emergencies.

“The BAI is committed to protecting Philippine’s poultry industry from the threat of avian influenza and will maintain close cooperation with other government agencies and stakeholders,” it said.

“We encourage the public to remain vigilant and report any unusual poultry deaths or signs of illness to local authorities for immediate action,” it added.

As of Dec. 6, two municipalities in separate provinces had ongoing cases of avian influenza, the BAI reported, the other one being Pandi, Bulacan. Both outbreaks involved duck farms. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2024/12/11/641089/first-case-of-h5n2-bird-flu-found-in-camarines-norte/>

REMATE:

EDA kinontra ng DA: Pinababang taripa nagpababa sa presyo ng bigas

December 12, 2024 07:13



MANILA, Philippines – Kinontra ng Department of Agriculture (DA) nitong Miyerkules, Disyembre 11 ang sinabi ng National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), at sinabing ang executive order na nagbawas ng taripa sa imported na bigas mula 35% patungong 15% ay nagresulta sa mas mababang retail prices ng bigas.

“Kung titignan natin ay mayroon namang pagbaba sa presyo ng bigas per the monitoring na rin natin. Kung titignan natin, isa pang punto, sa dami ng naging pinsala at pagtaas din ng dollar exchange, kung wala itong taripa, ‘yung pagpirma ng ating pangulo, pagbawas ng from 35% to 15%... sigurado na mas mataas pa ‘yung presyo ng bigas sa panahon na ito,” pahayag ni DA spokesperson Arnel De Mesa sa Bagong Pilipinas Ngayon public briefing.

Ang pahayag ng DA ay kasunod ng sinabi ng NEDA nitong Martes na hindi naman bumaba ang presyo ng bigas sa Executive Order 62 ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. nagpapababa ng taripa sa imported na bigas.

This is a puzzle also for us... perhaps this deserves a more nuanced analysis,” ayon kay NEDA Director Nieva Natural kasabay ng House Murang Pagkain Supercommittee hearing.

Sinabi ni Natural na mas mataas sa competitive levels ang presyuhan ng dominant market players, dahilan para mapantayan lang nito ang retail prices ng locally produced na bigas.

Ayon naman sa Bureau of Customs, bagamat ang tariff cut ay nagpababa sa presyo ng imported na bigas mula P40.26 patungong P33.93 kada kilo, nananatiling mataas ang retail prices nito.

“Dahil dito nawalan rin ng insentibo ang mga smugglers na ituloy ‘yung smuggling dahil mababa na ‘yung taripa, marami na ring volume na pumasok,” sinabi pa ni De Mesa.

Ang kasalukuyang presyo ng bigas sa mga pamilihan ngayon ay nasa P45 hanggang P50 kada kilo. *RNT/JGC*

<https://remate.ph/neda-kinontra-ng-da-pinababang-taripa-nagpababa-sa-presyo-ng-bigas/>

REMATE:

Magtutubo na hagip ng pagsabog ng Kanlaon, aayudahan ng SRA

December 11, 2024 17:58



MANILA, Philippines – SINABI ng Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) na magbibigay ito ng tulong sa mga magsasaka ng tubuhan na apektado ng pagsabog ng Mt. Kanlaon nitong Martes.

Sa isang panayam, sinabi ni SRA Administrator Luis Pablo Azcona na gagamitin nila ang ipon ng ahensya mula sa mga Christmas party, na nakarehistro matapos sundin ang mga direktiba ni Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin at Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. “upang makatipid sa mga pagdiriwang ng Pasko at tumulong sa biktima ng kalamidad.

“Sa ngayon, ang SRA ay nakaipon na ng hindi bababa sa PHP700,000 para sa mga selebrasyon. So galing lang yan sa mga selebrasyon,” sabi pa nito.

Sinabi ni Azcona na maaari nilang gamitin ang mga bahagi ng corporate social responsibility (CSR) fund ng SRA na nagkakahalaga ng PHP2 milyon.

Nakatakang ipamahagi ng SRA ang inuming tubig, bigas, iba pang maliliit na pagkain, at hygiene kits sa mga apektadong magsasaka at kanilang pamilya.

Samantala, tiniyak ng SRA ang mahigpit na pagsubaybay sa mga epekto ng pagputok ng bulkan at ang resulta ng pagbagsak ng abo nito sa mga sakahan ng tubo, gayundin ang mga pagsisikap sa pagbawi at tulong sa mga apektadong magsasaka.

Ayon kay Azcona na tinamaan ng ashfall ang La Carlota sa Central Negros, ang pinakamalaking lugar para sa tubo.

Sinabi niya na ang La Carlota ay isa sa “pinakamalaking single mill” sa lalawigan at may pinakamalaking bilang ng mga asosasyon ng mga magsasaka ng asukal sa bansa.

Ipinaliwanag niya na ang kaasiman ng abo mula sa pagsabog ng bulkan ay itinuturing na nakakapinsala sa produksyon ng tubo kung mananatili ang abo sa mga dahon.

Aniya, masusunog ng abo ang mga dahon at mapapabilis ang pagkahinog ng tubo, na magrerresulta sa pagbabaligtad ng asukal sa suka. (*Santi Celario*)

<https://remate.ph/magtutubo-na-hagip-ng-pagsabog-ng-kanlaon-aayudahan-ng-sra/>

REMATE:

Tapyas-taripa sa imported rice bigong maibaba ang presyo ng bigas – NEDA

December 11, 2024 14:05



INAMIN ng National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) kay Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr. na bagama't naibaba ang taripa sa imported rice mula 35% ay naging 15% base sa Executive Order 62, nabigo naman itong maibaba ang presyo ng bigas.

“This is a puzzle also for us... perhaps this deserves a more nuanced analysis,” ang sinabi ni NEDA Director Nieva Natural sa House Murang Pagkain Supercommittee hearing.

Ipinaliwanag ni Natural na sa isang competitive market, ang pagtapyas sa taripa ay dapat na maging dahilan ng pagtaas ng rice imports, pagpapataas sa suplay at pagkatapos ay pagpapababa sa retail prices. Gayunman, ang ganitong outcome ay hindi naobserbahan.

Sa halip, sinabi nito na ang dominant market players ay ang pagpe-presyo sa mga kalakal sa itaas ng mga antas ng kompetisyon, gawin na ang retail prices halos pantay sa locally-produced rice.

“This behavior resulted in minimal price changes in both wholesale and retail markets, consistent with a non-competitive market structure,” ayon kay Natural.

Sinabi naman ni Customs Commissioner Bienvenido Rubio na kahit pa nabawasan ng tariff cut ang halaga ng imported rice mula P40.26 ay naging P33.93 per kilogram, nanatili namang mataas ang retail prices.

“The lower tariffs spurred a 62% increase in imported rice demand but also led to lower government revenue, which fell to P2.952 billion due to reduced tariff rates,” ayon sa ulat.

Dahil sa situwasyon, hinikayat naman ni House Ways and Means Chairperson Joey Salceda ang Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) na i-audit ang tax payments ng mga pangunahing rice importers, pinaghihinalaan na may mga kompanya ang may malaking pakinabang mula sa tariff reduction.

Binatikos din ni Salceda ang ‘profiteering practices, binigyang diin ang ‘substantial price gap.’ Sinabi pa nito na kapag nagpatupad ang gobyerno ng rice price cap mula September hanggang October 2023, ang pagakakiba sa pagitan ng import at retail prices ay P3 kada kilogram.

Matapos bawiin ang cap, ang gap ay pinalawak sa P20 per kilogram, kahit pa bumagsak ang farmgate price.

“This is just short of supernatural. There is clearly pricing abuse—we just need to pinpoint at which stage,” ayon kay Salceda, nagmumungkahi na ang ‘large retailers at wholesalers’ ay maaaring sangkot.

Sa ngayon, ang retail price ng rice hovered ay P45 hanggang 50 kada kilo.

Samantala, sinabi naman ng Department of Agriculture na nangangailangan ito ng P50 billion kada taon para makapagbigay ng bigas na ang halaga ay P29 kada kilo. *Kris Jose*

<https://remate.ph/tapyas-taripa-sa-imported-rice-bigong-maibaba-ang-presyo-ng-bigas-neda/>

REMATE:

10 kumpanyang swak sa illegal trading blacklisted sa DA

December 11, 2024 09:33



MANILA, Philippines – Blacklisted sa Bureau of Plant Industry ng Department of Agriculture ang 10 kumpanya sa nakalipas na anim na buwan dahil sa pagsasagawa ng mga ilegal na gawain sa kalakalan.

Sa isang pahayag nitong Martes, sinabi ng DA na ang mga kumpanyang ito ay naka-blacklist para sa pag-import ng mga gulay, prutas, at iba pang produktong pagkain nang walang sanitary at phytosanitary import clearance ng BPI.

Sa mga kumpanyang pangkalakal na ito, apat ang hindi lisensyadong importer.

Samantala, apat pang kumpanya ang napatunayang sangkot sa mga anti-competitive practices, tulad ng manipulasyon sa presyo at sabwatan.

Sinabi ni BPI Director Gerald Glenn Panganiban na binawi na ang lisensya ng mga blacklisted firms, habang ang mga walang lisensya ay ipinagbawal.

“Nag-blacklist kami ng mas maraming kumpanya sa nakalipas na anim na buwan kaysa sa pinagsama-samang nakaraang anim na taon. Ito ay dapat magsilbing isang malinaw na babala sa mga nagtatangkang hamunin ang ating pasya sa paghabol sa mga smuggler at walang prinsipyong mga mangangalakal na ang mga ilegal na aktibidad ay nakakapinsala sa ating mga magsasaka, mangingisda, at mga mamimili,” sabi ni Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

Ang pag-blacklist ng mga firm na nakikibahagi sa ilegal na pangangalakal ay bahagi ng hakbang ng DA upang labanan ang pagpupuslit sa agrikultura, profiteering, hoarding, at mga aktibidad ng kartel, na binanggit na “magpataas ng mga presyo ng pagkain at masira ang lokal na merkado.”

Iniulat ng Philippine Statistics Authority na bumaba ang rice inflation sa 5.1% noong Nobyembre, na siyang pinakamababang inflation print para sa palay mula noong Hulyo 2023. *RNT*

<https://remate.ph/10-kumpanyang-swak-sa-illegal-trading-blacklisted-sa-da/>

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL:

Brian Poe: Harness youth potential to boost agri sector

Tuesday, December 10, 2024 Journal Online



FPJ Panday Bayanihan Partylist First Nominee Brian Poe encouraged Filipino youth to invest in farming and agriculture, as a viable business opportunity.

“With a growing youth population in the country, the agriculture sector offers a great potential for generating youth employment and business opportunities,” Poe said.

Poe shared the success stories of the Binhi ng Pag-Asa Program (BPP) in partnership with the Department of Agriculture’s Agricultural Training Institute (DA-ATI).

The program seeks to empower the youth by enhancing and strengthening their leadership and values toward their agripreneurship journey. Beneficiaries of the program are provided with agricultural starter kits, modules and capacity-building activities.

BPP recently conducted its 5th National Summit and Year-End Assessment last November 29 at Swiss Bel Hotel Blue Lane in Manila. 100 youth beneficiaries from the provinces of Tarlac, Laguna and Oriental Mindoro gathered for the event.

Present at the summit were Assistant Central Director Antonieta Arceo and the regional directors from Regions 3, 4-A and 4-B. During the summit participants shared their journey to success, pitched agricultural projects and showcased their respective produce through the trade fair.

They also bared their gains from the program and plans for the future.

“Bilang kabataan, ang pangarap ko hindi lamang para sa akin kundi sa kapwa ko. Sana maisulong pa ang agrikultura para kumita. At the same time, pang-konsumo na rin para ma-boost ang

economy natin. Pino-promote ko rin ang paggamit ng organic para maprotektahan ang environment natin,” Nahum Cupiado from Oriental Mindoro shared.

Tarlac resident Carl Glen Caballero stressed the possibilities of the being an agripreneur, “Gusto kong maipakita sa kanila na may financial security at future ang agriculture, hindi lamang para sa retirement at sa mga matatatanda, kundi ito na po ang kinabukasan ng mamamayang Pilipino na mas lumago ang kabuhayan sa pamamagitan ng agrikultura.”

On the contribution of the BPP program in their lives, Ana Velasco shared, “Malaki ang naitulong sa akin ng Binhi ng Pag-asa Program. Natulungan po ako nitong mapalawak ang kaalaman ko sa agrikultura, mas ma-involve pa sa mga gawaing pang-agrikultura, at makatulong maging isang kabataang lider.”

<https://journal.com.ph/brian-poe-harness-youth-potential-to-boost-agri-sector/>

MANILA STANDARD:

DA: Reduced tariff led to low rice prices



By Manila Standard

December 12, 2024, 12:30 am

The Department of Agriculture refuted the claim of the National Economic and Development Authority that reduced tariff on imported rice did not result in lower retail prices.

“If we will take a look, there’s a decline in the price of rice per our monitoring,” DA spokesperson Arnel De Mesa said.

“If not for the tariff cut from 35% to 15% signed by the President, rice prices these days would be higher because of damage to agriculture and the high dollar exchange rate,” De Mesa added.

NEDA Director Nieva Natural on Tuesday told the House “Murang Pagkain” Super Committee that the President’s Executive Order 62, which lowered the tariff on imported rice, did not lead to a reduction in prices as expected.

“This is a puzzle also for us... Perhaps this deserves a more nuanced analysis,” Natural said.

<https://manilastandard.net/news/314535064/da-reduced-tariff-led-to-low-rice-prices.html>

MANILA STANDARD:

NBI urged: Probe high rice prices

By Maricel Cruz, Othel V. Campos, Miguel C. Gil & Darwin G. Amojelar

December 12, 2024, 12:55 am

House super panel cites possible market manipulation

The House of Representatives Quinta Committee, also known as the “Murang Pagkain” Super Committee, ordered the National Bureau of Investigation to probe the alleged market manipulation that has kept rice prices high.

Albay Rep. Joey Sarte Salceda, chair of the House committee on ways and means, likewise asked the Bureau of Internal Revenue to look into the filings and tax payments of top rice importers, following allegations of profiteering in the domestic rice trade.

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

“This is a puzzle also for us. Perhaps this deserves a more nuanced analysis,” NEDA Director Nieva Natural told the House committee Tuesday.

The motion of the super committee, forwarded by House Deputy Majority Leader and Iloilo 1st District Rep. Janette Garin, sought to identify individuals and organizations responsible for significant mark-ups in the rice supply chain.

“Allow me to put forward a motion to direct the [NBI] to investigate—from the retailers to the middleman to the wholesalers—so we can specifically identify the responsible people in terms of price manipulation,” Garin said.

Cavite Rep. Lani Mercado-Revilla seconded the motion, which was approved by Salceda, lead chair of the super panel.

Garin’s motion followed a presentation by the Philippine Competition Commission outlining vulnerabilities in the rice supply chain, particularly among vertically integrated entities and middlemen.

In her interpellation, Garin pressed Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. to clarify which agency is responsible for monitoring the middlemen in the rice market.

Laurel admitted that no agency is specifically tasked with monitoring middlemen, highlighting the regulatory gaps that allow manipulative practices to persist unchecked.

Despite tariff reductions intended to make rice more affordable, retail prices remain high, ranging from P55 to P60 per kilo.

Garin said some middlemen exploited their control over access to legitimate wholesalers, inflating prices further. Government data showed the tariff reductions have resulted in P13.3 billion in foregone revenues, which lawmakers suspect may have ended up benefiting rice importers and traders instead of lowering retail prices.

Salceda, for his part, said the BIR should step in.

“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,” he said.

Salceda added 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.”

“Around the time of the President’s rice price ceiling, the gap between landed import price and domestic retail price was just 3 pesos per kilo. Now it has swelled to 20 pesos 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,” Salceda said.

Finance Secretary Ralph Recto said he supports the ongoing investigation of the House Quinta committee.

“The government is focused on bringing down rice prices,” Recto said.

For its part, the Philippine Rice Industry Stakeholders Movement (PRISM) urged the government to provide clearer guidance on rice importation, citing concerns that traders are importing high-cost varieties with little regard for the broader consumer base, which relies on affordable rice.

PRISM co-founder Orlando Manuntag said the expected reduction of P5 to P6 per kilogram in rice prices, following the tariff reduction, has not been realized.

Manuntag attributed the “insignificant price drop” to the type of rice being imported.

From January to December 2024, 74 percent of the 4.3 million metric tons (MT) of imported rice that arrived were premium varieties, primarily whole grain, which are significantly more expensive, he said. Only a small fraction consisted of well-milled or broken rice—varieties intended to lower prices for consumers.

“The law mandates that at least 25 percent of imports should be well-milled or broken rice, but this regulation was not enforced. As a result, importers prioritized premium rice, keeping market prices elevated,” Manuntag explained.

To address the issue, Manuntag called on the government to enforce regulations requiring a mandatory allocation of at least 10 percent of imports for well-milled and broken rice.

“World market prices are already decreasing, and with proper coordination, we can make rice more affordable for Filipino families,” he said.

Currently, 80 percent of the country’s rice imports come from Vietnam, with smaller quantities sourced from Thailand, Myanmar, Pakistan, and India.

In the local market, premium rice is priced between P48.50 and P52 per kilogram, well-milled rice ranges from P42 to P45, and broken rice is sold at P38 to P40.

“We support the President’s rice initiative, but we need more retailers to offer rice at P40 to P42 per kilogram. Affordable rice should be readily available without unnecessary hassle for consumers,” Manuntag said.

As this developed, Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. (PCAFI) on Wednesday said rice traders are to blame for the high retail prices of the staple grain despite the reduction in tariffs.

In an interview with Manila Standard, PCAFI president Danilo Fausto said the reduction of tariffs only seem to benefit “middlemen” as they do not pass the savings on to consumers.

He said possible hoarding may be exacerbating rice supply pressures arising from El Niño and La Niña, which put a strain on rice production in 2024.

“We suggest that the government import rice on a government-to-government basis, with India as the source. This would be an effective strategy for bringing down the retail price [of rice] in a hurry,” Fausto said.

<https://manilastandard.net/news/314535046/nbi-urged-probe-high-rice-prices.html>

THE MANILA TIMES:

Greedy rice traders break our laws and God's

By Ricardo Saludo

December 12, 2024

THERE's a grave sin by certain business people, enabled by negligent or corrupt officials, which our prelates and priests, especially new Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David, an outspoken servant of the poor and the powerless, should denounce in their Dec. 15 homilies on this Third Sunday of Advent, also called Gaudete or Rejoice Sunday.

The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) reports that the huge reduction of rice tariffs from 35 percent of landed cost to 15 percent, forgoing over P13 billion in state revenues so far, hardly budgeted retail prices of the staple.

"This is a puzzle also for us," NEDA Director Nieva Natural told the House of Representatives murang pagkain supercommittee last week. She said lower tariffs cut rice import prices by 17 percent, forcing local farmers to reduce palay costs. But retail prices dipped by just 1.7 percent.

Party-list Rep. Erwin Tulfo asked why imported rice costing P33 a kilogram was sold at P50 per kg in public markets. Clearly, merchants along the rice distribution network kept prices up and just pocketed billions of pesos in import and palay savings.

Farmers lose income, and consumers, including the poor supposed to be helped by decreased duties, still buy high. Clearly, a double-whammy against rural and urban poor from Malacañang's Executive Order 62 slashing rice tariffs.

Economists and officials have intricate explanations for why that happened despite nationwide price monitoring and the Department of Agriculture blacklisting several firms. But experts, accepting profit maximization as normal, will not mention one clear cause of continued costly rice which our moral and spiritual leaders should condemn.

Greed.

That transgression, one of the seven cardinal sins, should be decried in sermons on the Sunday Mass Gospel reading from St. Luke (Lk 3:10-18), citing St. John the Baptist's admonition, mouthing God's command: "Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise."

Robbing the poor

Frankly, if the Catholic Church keeps silent on this enormity against poor Filipinos, including one in every three children ages 5 or younger, stunted in body and mind and restricted in learning and earning for life, we can take no pride in being Asia's only Christian nation. Or its next upper-middle-income economy, for that matter.

This avaricious profit maximization starving millions of Filipinos undermines life just like the thousands of drug-war killings rightly denounced by Cardinal David and other religious leaders and rights advocates.

And because it robs indigent youth of the learning and earning potential to lift their families into the middle class, our economy has been stuck at lower middle-income status for 35 years as our neighbors zipped by with much faster poverty reduction.

Ideally, the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry and other business associations should also call out enterprises, especially those within their ranks, profiteering on staple foods and thus denying indigents minimum nutrition.

As noted earlier, that gouging of the poor leads to, among other ills, the stunting of one-third of Filipinos 5 years old and younger, which restricts what they can learn and earn all their lives. Not to mention limiting the pool of trained, capable personnel.

The Brotherhood of Christian Businessmen and Professionals (BCBP), which advocates moral rectitude and social responsibility in commerce, has constantly and strongly condemned government corruption.

The BCBP should do the same to rice profiteering, which violates both our nation's laws against economic sabotage and God's moral standard enunciated by Jesus Christ, on which we will be judged in the next life:

"Go away from me, accursed, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you did not give me food, I was thirsty and you did not give me anything to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, needing clothes and you never clothed me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me. ... Amen, I say to you, insofar as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these [needy people], you neglected to do it to me" (The Gospel of St. Matthew, 25:41-45).

Will we ever change?

Our Lord and his cousin John the Baptist had preached mercy to the poor and condemned exploitation and greed, reprising admonitions throughout the Old Testament since God sent Moses to free the Israelites from enslavement in Egypt, then echoed by Christian saints and preachers over millennia.

Hence, it seems futile to denounce avarice for the nth time, especially in our billionaire-idolizing world. Nor will it move those among the greedy who are non-believers or lapsed or Sunday Catholics, keeping their businesses untouched by conscience.

And if some profiteers do confess, promising to repent and make amends, can they endure the anger and reprisal of fellow traders once they sell low — especially at Christmas when food merchants jack up prices, causing double-digit December hunger rates nearly every year since Social Weather Stations (SWS) began surveying our stomachs in 1998?

Well, if the Church and upright business groups don't speak up, who will? Our top leaders and media are fixated on matters other than the hunger afflicting 25 million Filipinos, based on SWS September data. It showed months ago that some five million more lacked food since June, with hunger incidence doubling outside Luzon ("Congress is neglecting the nation's top problem," <https://tinyurl.com/muymcwb>).

Now, if most Gaudete Sunday sermons nationwide preach against profiteering on essential food and medicine, coupled with public statements from business associations, maybe even the Bishops-Businessmen's Conference so vocal in the first Marcos regime, that will do more for the national good than the political noise and drama all year.

And if our three active cardinals in the Philippines and maybe the one in Rome would convene business groups after the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines plenary in late January to sign a pledge of non-profiteering on an agreed list of essential goods with verification by accounting firms, more poor Filipinos will get ample nutrition and medication — and more business people will enter heaven.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/12/12/opinion/columns/greedy-rice-traders-break-our-laws-and-gods/2019985>

THE MANILA TIMES:

PH rice imports could be even larger – USDA

By Janine Alexis Miguel
December 12, 2024

THE Manila office of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) said that Philippine rice imports could hit 5.3 million metric tons (MT) by year-end due to low local production, higher than its initial forecast of 5.1 million MT.

The agency previously said the Philippines was buying record amounts of rice from abroad due to population growth and reduced import tariffs. Executive Order 62, which President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. signed in June, slashed taxes on imported rice to 15 percent to drive down retail prices and help temper inflation.

Data from the Philippine Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Plant Industry showed the country had shipped 4.35 million MT of the staple as of Dec. 5, surpassing last year's 3.6 million MT and close to breaching the record-high import volume of 3.82 million MT in 2022. The USDA noted the Philippines will remain a primary destination for Vietnamese exports due to logistical advantages and competitive prices.

Export quotes of Vietnam decreased by \$9 to \$508 per ton, while Thailand rose by \$16 to \$514/ton. Pakistani quotes also fell by \$10 to \$452/ton, the most competitive following India.

Rice consumption this year is projected at 17.2 million MT, with an ending inventory of 3.7 million MT, the USDA said.

Earlier, the DA said it was expecting a stable rice supply by year-end, enough to cover consumption for 100 days, despite El Niño and recent typhoons.

Meanwhile, the Philippine Statistics Authority reported palay (unmilled rice) production in the third quarter would be 4.62 million MT, down 1.0 percent for the previous quarter's estimated 4.67 million MT.

Total annual palay production is seen to reach 19.41 million MT, equivalent to some 12.69 million MT of milled rice, excluding the forecast loss of 358,000 MT based on historical damages and actual risks this quarter.

The projected milled rice production is higher than the USDA's latest forecast of 12.3 million MT.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/12/12/business/top-business/ph-rice-imports-could-be-even-larger-usda/2020252>

THE MANILA TIMES:

Arabica coffee hits record high

By Reuters

December 12, 2024

LONDON — Arabica coffee prices rose to the highest on record on Tuesday as dealers fretted over Brazil's crop outlook after one of the world's largest traders slashed its 2025/2026 forecast for the country's arabica output.

Brazil, which grows nearly half the world's arabica — high-end beans typically used in roast and ground blends beloved by baristas — will produce just 34.4 million bags of the bean next season, according to trader Volcafe in a report seen by Reuters.

Volcafe's forecast has been cut by 11 million bags, thanks to a high level of cherry setting failure following this year's drought. Volcafe, as a result, sees an "unprecedented" fifth consecutive global coffee deficit in 2025/2026 of 8.5 million bags.

"The situation of continuous deficits prevalent since 2021 is largely driven by the inability of Brazil to produce a healthy 'on-cycle' arabica crop back to above 50 million bags, primarily due to climate change," said the trader.

Coffee prices have soared around 80 percent this year, driven also by worries over the crop outlook in Vietnam, the largest producer of robusta coffee, a type widely used to make instant coffee.

The price gains have boosted potential earnings for farmers but they are challenging traders, who are facing crippling hedging costs on exchanges and a scramble to receive the beans they are owed.

Rising prices are meanwhile prompting some drinkers to switch to cheaper coffee. The boss of Nestlé, the world's biggest coffee firm, was ousted earlier this year after the board grew unhappy about weak sales and a loss of market share as coffee drinkers switched to cheaper brands.

Arabica coffee futures on ICE, used as a global benchmark, hit \$3.4835 per pound (lb) earlier on Tuesday, their highest-ever level. They closed 1.2-percent up at \$3.3415 per lb.

Dealers said the Volcafe report had come at a time when the market was already nervous over supplies, but cautioned it might be having an outsized impact, especially with the harvest in top robusta producer Vietnam currently under way.

Arabica and robusta are to some extent inter-changeable, so more availability of robusta can work to ease a shortage of arabica.

The United States Department of Agriculture expects Vietnam's robusta crop to rebound to 29 million bags in 2024/2025, while Volcafe sees it at 24.5 million bags.

ICE robusta coffee futures hit a day's high of \$5,510 a ton, still short of the late November peak of \$5,694, the highest in 47 years. Robusta closed 0.6-percent up at \$5,232 a ton.

TRS by Expana, a leading price reporting agency and research firm, sees the total 2025/2026 Brazil coffee crop up slightly on an annual basis at just under 70 million bags, thanks to a strong robusta crop.

The firm has, meanwhile, cut its 2025/2026 Brazil arabica crop forecast by 2 million bags to 43 million, TRS by Expana's head of research Steve Wateridge told Reuters.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/12/12/business/foreign-business/arabica-coffee-hits-record-high/2020216>

THE MANILA TIMES:

PH agri faces issues from climate, agrarian reform

By Conrad M. Cariño
December 12, 2024

THE Philippine agriculture sector lags behind its peers in Southeast Asia, bugged by issues related to climate change and the agrarian reform program.

In his speech during the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Representatives Global Working Conference in Bangkok on Tuesday, former agriculture secretary William Dar said that the country has a lot of catching up in farm output among countries comprising the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean).

FAO Director General Qu Dong Yu led the staging of the conference.



FAO Director General Qu Dong Yu (left) and former agriculture secretary William Dar during the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Representatives Global Working Conference in Bangkok. PHOTO FROM WILLIAM DAR FACEBOOK PAGE

"With such lacklustre performance of the sector, the Philippines has a lot of catching up to do to keep pace with our Asean neighbors — in terms of increasing our rice output and overall farm productivity," he said.

One of the major factors he cited was the lack of economies of scale of smallholder farms, caused by the agrarian reform program. This can be addressed by organizing farmers into cooperatives and clustering/consolidating their farmlands.

"Studies show that Philippine farm productivity declined by 17 percent since the agrarian reform program was implemented in 1988," he said.

"As we all know, the bigger the farm size, the more productive it would be versus smaller ones. Hence, during my term as Secretary of Agriculture, we started and promoted farm clustering and consolidation, which I am glad is being continued by the Marcos Administration," Dar added.

The former agriculture secretary, who also headed the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics for 15 years, also backs that the farm retention limit for farmers increased to 25 hectares from the current 5 hectares. This measure will pave the way for the emergence of middle-class farmers who can become entrepreneurs and have better access to financing and markets.

Also, smallholder farmers must be organized into cooperatives and their lands consolidated or clustered, and the functions of the Department of Agriculture (DA) that were devolved under the Local Government Code of 1991 to local government units be reverted back to the DA and its regional units.

"Related to this, we wish our government would seriously invest and level up in organizing farmers and fisherfolk into cooperatives. I also support the growing clamor to revert back to the national agriculture office the devolved local (city and municipal) agriculture officers and extension workers so they vigorously and directly implement national farm production programs on the ground," Dar explained.

The other reasons cited by Dar for the lackluster performance of agriculture, particularly this year, are the typhoons and African swine fever that was detected months before the start of the pandemic.

"Secondly, our agriculture sector's performance during the three quarters of 2024, from January to September, has declined by 2.2 percent, at constant 2018 prices due to successive destructive typhoons and the lingering African swine fever, among others. This performance is causing higher food inflation in the country presently," he said.

In closing his speech, Dar also said that there should be a global effort to make food production systems resilient and sustainable, and utilize science and technology for countries to attain food security.

"In closing, we must be united in doubling our global efforts and investments in agriculture toward the attainment of sustainable, resilient, and smart food systems. We must seriously address the challenges of climate change, and other major impediments, and subsequently enable us to feed more generations to come," Dar said.

"We must level up and tap the power of science and digital technology in a big way to combat hunger, malnutrition, poverty thereby attaining global food security," he added.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/12/12/business/agribusiness/ph-agri-faces-issues-from-climate-agrarian-reform/2020212>

THE MANILA TIMES:

Shift to cage-free eggs gaining ground

By [The Manila Times](#)

December 12, 2024

A NEW industry report by international nongovernmental organization Lever Foundation revealed a strong shift toward ethical sourcing and animal welfare among restaurant brands in the Philippines.

The 2024 Philippines Restaurant Industry Cage-Free Egg Scorecard, which evaluated the public policies of mid- to large-sized restaurant groups or brands (those operating 20 or more restaurant locations), found that a whopping 62 percent (41 out of 66) have now set public timelines to eliminate the use of caged eggs in their supply chains.

Together, these commitments cover over two-thirds (69 percent) of chain restaurant locations across the country, with nearly 9,000 restaurants now on a path to sourcing only cage-free eggs. Six additional brands, representing an additional 13 percent of restaurant locations across the country, have issued public statements that they are currently working on developing a cage-free egg policy.

"It is encouraging to see that brands in the restaurant and café sector in the Philippines are making food sustainability and animal welfare a priority," said Robyn del Rosario, sustainability program manager at Lever Foundation, that worked with many restaurant groups on their commitments.

"As consumers increasingly prioritize responsible sourcing and sustainable practices, adopting cage-free eggs represents a pivotal step forward for businesses. We are encouraged by the commitment demonstrated by these leading restaurant brands and remain optimistic that the remaining brands will soon align with this industry-wide shift toward more humane practices," he added.

Domestic restaurant brands and groups that have set timelines to transition to using only cage-free eggs include Jollibee, Chowking, Mang Inasal, Red Ribbon, Greenwich, The Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf, Highlands Coffee, Mimi & Bros. by MFT Group, The Abaca Baking Company, Angel's Pizza and Figaro Coffee.

Most leading international restaurant brands present in the country have also committed to making the switch, including BreadTalk Philippines, Andok's, Burger King, Panda Express, Mister Donut, KFC, Dunkin', Pizza Hut, Dairy Queen, Taco Bell, Krispy Kreme, Auntie Anne's, Cinnabon, Subway, Tim Hortons, Popeyes, Marugame Udon, Paul Boulangerie, Buffalo Wild Wings, Olive Garden, Ruth's Chris Steakhouse, Chili's, Superbowl of China, Heybo, Shake Shack, illy, Papa John's and Pizza Express.

In addition to the restaurant groups that have already set timelines for eliminating caged eggs, three other prominent groups — Max's Group, which operates brands including Max's Restaurant, Pancake House and Yellow Cab; Century Pacific, which operates Shakey's and Peri-Peri; and Goldilocks, the Philippines' largest bakeshop chain — have issued public comments for the Scorecard that they are currently working on developing a cage-free policy.

A large public survey conducted earlier this year by Japan-based GMO Research found that 83 percent of Filipino consumers believe eggs sourced by restaurants, supermarkets, packaged foods companies and similar should come only from hens living in cage-free environments. Recognizing the significance of this shift, the Bureau of Agriculture and Fisheries Standards initiated the development of a national Code of Practice for Cage-free Egg Production in 2020 to support and regulate the growing cage-free egg sector.

As of 2023, a public scorecard released by Lever Foundation found that over 75 percent of the Philippines' leading hotel groups had set a timeline to use only cage-free eggs. The country's restaurant sector is now catching up with this growing sustainability trend.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/12/12/business/agribusiness/shift-to-cage-free-eggs-gaining-ground/2020210>

THE MANILA TIMES:

Benguet launches science-based agriculture plan

By Philippine News Agency

December 12, 2024

BAGUIO CITY — The provincial government of Benguet launched Tuesday the Science and Technology Innovation (STI) Plan, which will serve as its guide to make the highly agricultural province a haven of sustainable community.

"We have identified problems like soil acidity that is affecting the production and in the process of adopting the STI plan, we have also identified some measures that will address the issues," provincial board member Joel Tingbaoen said in a press conference here for the launch of the STI plan and the capacity development.

He said Benguet is the first to approve an STI plan in the region, making it a mirror for the others to follow.

"This is a continuing plan. We can revise, adjust depending on the needs of the province, but we are proud to be the first to have it in the region. Everybody is looking at us on how we will implement it," said Tingbaoen, the chairman of the provincial legislative body's committee on Science, Technology and Cooperative.

For her part, Shiela Marie Singa-Claver, provincial director of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) in Benguet, said: "The vision of the STI- Benguet is to be a haven of sustainable communities."

"Benguet's source of income is farming and mining. In farming, we have identified precision agriculture as well as use of smart agriculture technologies as possible solutions to the production problem," she said.

Singa-Claver said DOST has started incorporating projects that will improve the capacity of the farmers and eventually address the growing issues to attain a more sustainable agriculture.

Aside from logistics, farmers are provided with various capacity-building training to increase their know-how on technologies that will improve their livelihood through agriculture and make the industry sustainable.

"We are not zero on this. Farmers are adapting to the technologies, and we provide capacity building," she said.

Nancy Bantog, DOST-Cordillera Administrative Region director, said STI is driving the economy and improving lives.

"We use green technologies for farming. We apply a circular economy to protect the environment, which has been known to affect our agriculture. Through STI, we can achieve sustainability of the communities and also become resilient to disasters," she said.

"Our current administration has identified the use of science and technology in improving people's lives, and DOST continues to come up with programs, projects and activities geared toward sustainability through sci-tech," she added.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/12/12/business/agribusiness/benguet-launches-science-based-agriculture-plan/2020209>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

BOC: Rice tariff cuts cost N.G. P13-B foregone revenue

[Reine Juvierre S. Alberto](#)
[December 12, 2024](#)



In file photo: The Department of Agriculture (DA) launched its “Rice for All” kiosk, offering rice at P40 per kilo, at Kamuning Market in Quezon City on Thursday, December 5, 2024. In a press briefing, the DA announced plans to expand these kiosks across Metro Manila and eventually nationwide to make affordable rice accessible to more Filipinos. This initiative aligns with the government’s goal to address rising food prices and improve food security.

THE reduction in rice tariff rates to 15 percent has costed the national government P13.3 billion in foregone revenues, according to the Bureau of Customs (BOC).

At the hearing of the ‘Murang Pagkain’ Quinta Committee on Wednesday, Customs Assistant Commissioner Atty. Vincent Philip C. Maronilla said the government lost P13.3 billion as of December 6, after rice tariff rates were slashed to 15 percent from 35 percent in its bid to bring down rice prices.

After President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. issued Executive Order No. 62, the government only generated P9.3 billion from the supposed target collection of P22.6 billion should the government retain tariff rates at 35 percent.

Despite the order aimed at lowering rice prices, House Deputy Majority Leader and Iloilo Representative Janette L. Darin raised rice prices has not gone down significantly.

Citing data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), Garin said rice prices declined by only P0.44, far from what Finance Secretary Ralph G. Recto had assumed of P6 to P7 in price reduction.

“Global rice prices and landed costs have gone down. There’s a high supply compared to the demand. However, rice prices did not reduce to how much it should be,” Garin said.

Sinag: Prices still high

THE Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag) echoed that five months into EO 62, rice prices remain high.

“The savings of importers from tariff reduction did not translate to cheaper rice prices. Binulsa lamang ng mga ito ang natipid sa pagbaba ng taripa [They pocketed what they saved from the lowering of the tariff],” they said in a statement.

Sinag urged the Department of Finance (DOF) to return the P13.3 billion in foregone revenues to the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) to give back to the agriculture sector what was lost.

“It is only morally right that these foregone revenues be returned to our rice farmers,” they said.

If the foregone revenues were given as cash aid to the farmers, this would reduce their production cost by as much as P4 per kilo of well-milled rice in the markets by the second quarter of 2025.

Boosting local production and increasing government support, including added subsidies and incentives to rice farmers and local millers, is the “best way” to reduce rice prices and never through tariff reduction, Sinag added.

The Philippines imports a total of 4.5 million metric tons of rice annually. This consists of 3.8 million MT of imported rice and a buffer stock of 10 percent.

Image credits: [Nonoy Lacza](#)

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/12/12/boc-rice-tariff-cuts-cost-n-g-p13-b-foregone-revenue/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

‘Pre-RTL functions of NFA to stabilize local rice prices’

Andrea E. San Juan and Ada Pelonia
December 12, 2024



Rice dealers in Baseco, Tondo, Manila, offer prices ranging from P20 to P48 per kilo for Quynhildy rice imported from Vietnam under the government’s rice aid program. This initiative supports President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.’s campaign promise to make rice affordable at P20 per kilo for Filipinos.

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Philippine Competition Commission (PCC) want the National Food Authority (NFA) to regain the functions it lost when the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) took effect in 2019.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said the NFA must again be allowed to intervene in the domestic rice market. This was Laurel’s response to Sultan Kudarat Rep. Horacio Suansing Jr. who asked whether the NFA should revert to its price stabilization mandate.

PCC, for its part, said there is need to reinstate the functions of the NFA, including the issuance of licenses, recording and keeping the data of all players in the grains industry to avoid price manipulation and other anticompetitive practices. “Upon the implementation of the RTL in 2019, nawalan ng power ang NFA. Sa tingin mo kailangan ba natin ayusin o ibalik ang dating power ng

NFA para sa procurement at saka pag-control ng presyo ng bigas sa palengke?” Suansing asked Laurel.

Laurel said restoring all the functions of the NFA prior to RTL could make retail rice prices stable. He said, however, that “honest people” should manage the agency.

“I believe if we want to control the situation, mas magandang maibalik lahat ng powers ng NFA. It just has to be managed properly by honest people,” Laurel said during the Murang Pagkain Supercommittee hearing on Thursday.

“I think that’s the most important. Assuming meron tayong final formula or meron kayong bagong batas na ilalabas tungkol diyan, that will solve the problems moving forward for many years,” he added.

The committee consists of the Committees on Ways and Means, Trade and Industry, Agriculture and Food, Social Services, and the Special Committee on Food Security.

During the same hearing, PCC Director for Competition Enforcement Office Christian Loren B. De Los Santos underscored the importance of having “readily available” data of inventories and prices of rice, among others, to avoid anti-competitive practices.

“Previously, the NFA had the power to license, record and keep data of all players in the grains industry, so all traders, millers, importers, wholesalers, retailers, must be licensed before the NFA...they must submit their inventories,prices, but that is not present right now,” De Los Santos said.

“One of the problems for us is we have no consistent, readily available data to pinpoint which among these is the problem. So, we have to go to BOC [Bureau of Customs] for importation or DTI [Department of Trade and Industry] and DA [Department of Agriculture] for other parts like wholesalers,” he added.

Supply chain

PCC Executive Director Kenneth V. Tanate noted the differences in the rice supply chain before and after the RTL took effect.

“Prior to RTL, the farmers can sell to the NFA. So, from farmers, they sell it to NFA, trader, millers, and traders and even millers only. And then the NFA can sell it to the wholesaler and directly to the consumer,” Tanate said.

“And then we have the importers that sell directly to wholesalers and wholesalers to retailers and millers to wholesalers, retailers and consumers,” he added.

Upon the signing of the Rice Tariffication Law in February 2019, however, the NFA transformed from being a trading and regulatory agency to a buffer stock agency, Tanate noted.

“The role of NFA was refocused on the acquisition, maintenance, and distribution of rice buffer stock,” he said. Tanate said anti-competitive conduct is “more probable among vertically-integrated entities operating in one or more of supply chain.”

De Los Santos, for his part, noted the possible “choke points” or competition concerns in the rice supply chain. “If there is a player that has one or more involvement in the supply chain, there is likelihood that there is an anti-competitive conduct there,” he said.

President Marcos Jr. signed a new law on Monday amending the RTL, which extended the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) to 2031 and increased its annual allocation to P30 billion in a bid to prop up initiatives such as high-quality seed production, farm mechanization, and water management.

Under the new law, the NFA is allowed to sell rice buffer stocks to government agencies and the public, through Kadiwa ng Pangulo centers, in areas with rice supply shortages or extreme price hikes.

It also permits the NFA to replenish its buffer stocks with imported rice in case of insufficient supply of the locally produced staple.

Image credits: [Roy Domingo](#)

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/12/12/pre-rtl-functions-of-nfa-to-stabilize-local-rice-prices/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

2/3 of PHL resto chains sourcing cage-free eggs

Ada Pelonia
December 11, 2024

OVER two-thirds of chain restaurants in the Philippines have opted to source cage-free eggs, according to US-based non-government organization (NGO) Lever Foundation.

In its report, the organization said 69 percent of chain restaurants nationwide, which covers nearly 9,000 restaurants, have made commitments to sourcing only cage-free eggs in their supply chains.

“It is encouraging to see that brands in the restaurant and café sector in the Philippines are making food sustainability and animal welfare a priority,” Lever Foundation’s sustainability program manager Robyn Del Rosario said.

The organization released the 2024 Philippines Restaurant Industry Cage-Free Egg Scorecard, which evaluated the public policies of mid- to large-sized restaurant groups or brands or those operating twenty or more restaurant locations.

According to the NGO, among the local restaurant brands and groups that have set timelines to shift to using only cage-free eggs include Jollibee, Chowking, Mang Inasal, Red Ribbon, Greenwich, The Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf, Highlands Coffee, Mimi & Bros. by MFT Group, The Abaca Baking Company, Angel’s Pizza, and Figaro Coffee.

It added that most leading international restaurant brands present in the country have also committed to making the switch, including BreadTalk Philippines, Andok’s, Burger King, Panda Express, Mister Donut, KFC, Dunkin’, Pizza Hut, Dairy Queen, Taco Bell, Krispy Kreme, Auntie Anne’s, Cinnabon, Subway, Tim Hortons, Popeyes, Marugame Udon, Paul Boulangerie, Buffalo Wild Wings, Olive Garden, Ruth’s Chris Steakhouse, Chili’s, Superbowl of China, Heybo, Shake Shack, illy, Papa John’s, and Pizza Express.

The NGO said three other known groups have issued public comments for the Scorecard that they are currently working on developing a cage-free policy. This includes Max’s

Group, which operates brands including Max's Restaurant, Pancake House, and Yellow Cab; Century Pacific, which operates Shakey's and Peri-Peri; and Goldilocks, considered the country's largest bakeshop chain.

Meanwhile, the organization cited a public survey conducted earlier this year by Japan-based GMO Research which found that 83 percent of Filipino consumers believe eggs sourced by restaurants, supermarkets, packaged foods companies, and similar should come only from hens living in cage-free environments.

It also noted that as of 2023, a public scorecard released by the organization found that over 75 percent of the country's leading hotel groups had set a timeline to use only cage-free eggs, adding that "the country's restaurant sector is now catching up with this growing sustainability trend."

"As consumers increasingly prioritize responsible sourcing and sustainable practices, adopting cage-free eggs represents a pivotal step forward for businesses," Del Rosario said.

"We are encouraged by the commitment demonstrated by these leading restaurant brands and remain optimistic that the remaining brands will soon align with this industry-wide shift toward more humane practices," she added.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/12/11/2-3-of-phl-resto-chains-sourcing-cage-free-eggs/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

DA must hasten construction of postharvest facilities in eastern seaboard—lawmakers

Jovee Marie N. de la Cruz
December 11, 2024

The House Committee on Aquaculture and Fisheries Resources has called on the Department of Agriculture (DA) to prioritize the development of modern postharvest facilities in the country's eastern seaboard to mitigate the impact of declining catches in the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

Chaired by Representative Brian Raymund Yamsuan, the committee joined House Minority Leader and 4PS Partylist 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 a recent committee hearing, Yamsuan pressed the PFDA to advance the timeline for constructing a fishport in Oras, Eastern Samar, from its original 2028 schedule to 2025 or 2026.

Both Yamsuan and Libanan pointed said 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.

"This is ironic considering that the eastern seaboard is alongside one of the most productive portions of our waters in terms of fisheries resources. The provinces along the eastern seaboard have more than 100 coastal municipalities dependent on fishing as their main source of livelihood and a coastline stretching more than 2,000 kilometers," he said.

"Yet, we have learned during our recent hearing that the PFDA seems to have neglected this marine resources-rich area and have focused its attention and infrastructure buildup on the western seaboard, where we have seen increasingly aggressive actions from China."

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.

Libanan said during the hearing that the PFDA can counter the declining fish catch in the WPS resulting from China's incursions in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone by giving equal priority to the establishment of fish ports, cold storage plants, and blast freezers in the eastern seaboard.

“According to the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, the country's fish spoilage is at 25 to 40 percent. This is because of the fact that we lack modern facilities like fish ports with cold storage to reduce post-harvest losses. These are what we need in Eastern Samar and other provinces along the eastern seaboard, so that they can contribute more to our fisheries output.”

Owing to the lack of the appropriate facilities, Libanan said export-grade tuna from Eastern Samar is sent all the way to General Santos City to be stored and processed.

He said the PFDA should act fast in developing the necessary infrastructure in provinces along the eastern seaboard to harness the full potential of the area's fishing industry and boost its contributions to the country's efforts to attain food security.

The country's eastern seaboard, surrounded by the West Pacific Ocean, is known for tuna fishing. Some areas of Northern and Eastern Samar are within the Tuna Conservation and Management Zone, which is rich in pelagic fish, such as tuna species, according to BFAR.

The construction of the Oras fishport and its cold storage facilities is provided under House Bill (HB) 10848, authored by Libanan. This measure, along with Libanan's other bill, HB 10850, which aims to build a fishport with an ice plant and cold storage facility in Dolores, Eastern Samar, was approved by the House aquaculture and fisheries committee.

A proposed legislation of Quezon 4th District Rep. Keith Micah Tan under HB 10384 to establish a multi-species marine nursery in Lopez, Quezon, was also approved during the hearing.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/12/11/da-must-hasten-construction-of-postharvest-facilities-in-eastern-seaboard-lawmakers/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

BAI detects H5N2 bird flu strain in duck farm

Ada Pelonia
December 11, 2024

The Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) announced on Wednesday the first detection of the H5N2 strain of avian influenza in the Philippines.

BAI said the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) type A subtype H5N2 was found in a duck farm in Talisay, Camarines Norte.

“This is the first detection of HPAI H5N2 in the country and the first recorded avian influenza case in the province.”

The attached agency of the Department of Agriculture (DA) said the Animal Disease Diagnosis and Reference Laboratory (ADDRL) reported the positive result on December 6, following routine surveillance conducted by the DA-Regional Field Office V in November.

Following confirmation, BAI said it promptly endorsed the results to DA-RFO 5 and ordered the immediate implementation of quarantine and biosecurity measures on the affected farm to stop the virus from spreading.

It added that the remaining birds are being culled and disposed of to contain the infection, with the culling operations expected to have been completed by December 10 and the 1-km zone surveillance concluding on December 11.

“A thorough investigation is ongoing to trace the movement of birds and identify additional risks.”

BAI said DA RFO-5 has triggered its Command Center to oversee operations while a coordination meeting was held with the Regional Quick Response Team for Animal Disease and Emergencies (RQRT-ADE) to review protocols in line with the Avian Influenza Protection Program (AIPP). All disease control measures are being coordinated closely with the BAI.

“Rest assured that BAI is committed to protecting Philippines’ poultry industry from the threat of avian influenza and will maintain close cooperation with other government agencies and stakeholders,” it said.

“We encourage the public to remain vigilant and report any unusual poultry deaths or signs of illness to local authorities for immediate action.”

Figures from the BAI showed that two municipalities have active cases of bird flu in the country as of December 6.

The World Health Organization reported last June a confirmed fatal case of human infection with avian influenza A(H5N2) virus detected in a resident of Mexico.

“This is the first laboratory-confirmed human case of infection with an influenza A(H5N2) virus reported globally and the first avian H5 virus infection in a person reported in Mexico,” it said.

“Available epidemiological and virological evidence suggests that A(H5) viruses from previous events have not acquired the ability to sustain transmission between humans, thus the current likelihood of sustained human-to-human spread is low.”

Ban on Dutch poultry

Meanwhile, the DA temporarily banned the entry of imported poultry sourced from the Netherlands due to a new bird flu outbreak that affected domestic birds.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. signed Memorandum Order (MO) 56, which slapped the temporary ban on domestic and wild birds including their products, such as poultry meat, day-old chicks, eggs, and semen from the European nation.

The DA decided to issue the ban after the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality confirmed an additional HPAI H5 outbreak in Putten, Gelderland, Netherlands last November 17.

According to the MO, the Dutch agency submitted its official report on November 18.

“There is need to prevent the entry of HPAI virus to protect the health of the local poultry population,” it read.

Following this report, Laurel ordered the immediate suspension of the issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearance (SPSIC).

He also noted that only birds slaughtered or products processed on or before November 3, 2024, will be allowed to enter the country. The ban does not cover heat-treated products.

The order said heat-treated products are acceptable following a provision under the WOAHA Terrestrial Animal Health Code of 2019.

This is provided, however, that aside from the Veterinary Health Certificate (VHC), the competent authority will include in the certification the temperature and duration of heating or pasteurization of products and that there is no commingling of raw materials with any other materials of animal origin.

The order took effect immediately. Manila usually imposes a temporary ban on poultry products from areas with bird flu outbreaks as a preventive measure.

Data from BAI showed that the country imported 9,169 metric tons of chicken from the Netherlands as of September 30. The European nation’s shipments to the country consisted of mechanically-deboned meat.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/12/11/bai-detects-h5n2-bird-flu-strain-in-duck-farm/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

China's falling corn imports show hit to consumer confidence

Bloomberg News
December 11, 2024

China's corn imports are expected to total just 14 million tons in the current season, less than half of their peak during a buying spree a few years ago, according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The agency trimmed its estimate by 2 million tons for the 2024-25 year through September in a report released Tuesday, citing lower purchases from Brazil. It offers fresh evidence of how China's economic slowdown and property crisis has battered consumer confidence. Corn is mainly used as animal feed in the country, and demand growth has suffered as cost-conscious households cut back on meat and restaurant outings.

Beijing asked traders to buy less foreign grain earlier this year, part of an effort to shield local farmers and support domestic prices, which are near the lowest in more than four years. The USDA is also forecasting China's corn crop will be at a record high this season, despite extreme weather, curbing the need for imports.

China, which satisfies most of its corn consumption domestically, emerged as a heavyweight in global trading of the grain a few years ago as its hog herd recovered from a widespread disease outbreak and local harvests faltered. That sent imports spiraling higher, providing a boon to farmers from Ukraine to Brazil and the US. While its corn purchases are still robust, this season's outlook compares to a peak of more than 29 million tons in 2020-21 and puts Chinese imports behind Mexico, the European Union and Japan. USDA also lowered the outlook for the country's purchases of wheat and barley.

China is set to begin its annual economic work meeting on Wednesday to map out policies for next year, with top leaders hinting at more forceful stimulus amid the threat of a potential trade war with the US.

China's oil demand may peak in 2025, five years earlier than expected, as the shift away from gasoline and diesel accelerates, according to a report from the nation's largest energy producer.

An OPEC for China's solar equipment producers isn't going to work as technological advantages can quickly become obsolete, writes Bloomberg Opinion's David Fickling.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/12/11/chinas-falling-corn-imports-show-hit-to-consumer-confidence/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

File criminal raps against blacklisted firms, DA told

Butch Fernandez
December 11, 2024

While the Department of Agriculture's (DA) blacklisting of 10 companies involved in illegal agricultural trade is commendable, Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel III said the DA must file criminal charges against them to "ensure accountability."

"Hindi sapat ang pagbablacklist lamang. Kailangan maparusahan ang mga nagkasala," he said.

"Dapat may pananagutan ang mga kumpanyang ito sa kanilang mga ginawa."

The DA, through its Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI), blacklisted these companies for engaging in smuggling and other unlawful agricultural trade practices.

The blacklisted companies include 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.

Of these, Kysse Lishh, RCNN, Chastity Consumer Goods Trading, and Golden Rays did not have the necessary license to import goods.

Additionally, La Reina Fresh Vegetables Young Indoor Plants Inc., Vegefru Producing Store, and Yom Trading Corp., all licensed importers, were blacklisted for engaging in anti-competitive practices such as price manipulation and collusion.

"Make an example of these 10 companies para huwag nang tularan. This, however, will only be meaningful if the wheels of justice move swiftly," Pimentel said.

“This is a clear message that the government is serious about protecting our farmers and consumers from unscrupulous traders.”

Pimentel also urged the DA to continue its crackdown on agricultural smuggling and other illegal activities.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/12/11/file-criminal-raps-against-blacklisted-firms-da-told/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

PHL rice imports to surpass 5M tons—USDA report

Ada Pelonia
December 11, 2024

The country's rice imports could breach the 5 million metric ton (MMT) mark by yearend, according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

In its latest report, the USDA adjusted upward its estimate for the country's rice imports to a record-high 5.3 MMT from the previous 5 MMT due to a smaller crop for marketing year (MY) 2024/25.

“Global imports are forecast up with growth for the Philippines, Vietnam, and Nigeria,” the international agency said.

Figures from the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) showed that rice import arrivals as of December 5 reached a record 4.35 MMT.

Of the volume that arrived in the Philippines, BPI data showed that over 3.33 MMT came from Vietnam, which maintained its status as the country's top source of imports.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. recently said the country's rice shipments will hit 4.5 MMT by yearend.

“My estimate is we will hit 4.5 million tons this year for rice,” Laurel said, speaking partly in Filipino.

Meanwhile, the USDA raised its rice imports forecast for the Philippines in 2025 to 5.4 MMT from its earlier forecast of 5.1 MMT also owing to a smaller crop.

The international agency also projected that worldwide rice production would slightly decline in 2024/25.

“Global rice production is forecast down slightly based on decreases for the Philippines and Nepal more than offsetting a larger Brazil crop.”

The DA earlier said that the series of storms that hit the country last month could further shrink paddy rice output by the end of the year. (See: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/11/26/storms-shrink-expected-rice-harvest-to-19-3mmt/>)

Laurel said the agency expects palay production to settle at 19.3 MMT by yearend, lower than its previous forecast of 19.41 MMT following the successive typhoons that battered the country’s agricultural farmlands and fisheries.

“Ang latest estimate namin ngayon is 19.3 million na lang and baka bumaba pa dahil sa mga bagyo.”

Based on government reports, the farm damage from the recent series of typhoons has reached over P10 billion.

The DA said in its latest bulletin that the agriculture and infrastructure damage from tropical storms Nika, Ofel, and Pepito stood at P785.68 million while losses from typhoon Kristine hit P9.81 billion.

The agency said the Philippines may end 2024 with a palay output of 19.41 MMT, lower than the record 20.06 MMT the country produced last year. This projected figure is equivalent to 12.69 MMT in milled rice.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/12/11/phl-rice-imports-to-surpass-5m-tons-usda-report/>

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/>