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MANILA BULLETIN:

New agreements, fresher hopes for Mindanao's exporters

BY JOHN TRIA

Dec 24, 2024 07:26 AM

#MINDANAO



As we savor the Christmas food and take a rest during the holidays, we reflect on the importance of two new agreements that will help our agriculture and Micro Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

We reflect on the NEDA's announcement of the implementation of the Philippines- South Korea Free Trade Agreement (FTA) which is welcome news for many Mindanao exporters of fresh fruit. The FTA was first signed in September 2023. This agreement, among other things, ensures greater market access for many products, especially our agricultural exports. Another is the signing of the joint memorandum between the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Trade and Industry to boost exports. In a statement on the DA website, the agreement aims to achieve this through initiatives such as "trade promotion, strategic investments, empowering small and medium enterprises, and resolving issues like market access and tariffs. "Since both the DA and DTI have jointly put together the various commodity roadmaps in the previous administration, I hope that this agreement can harness the spadework of cooperation that the roadmaps developed.

Both new institutions are relevant to Mindanao because the island is our food basket and export hub for agricultural products such as coconut, banana and pineapple. Increasingly, new products such as avocado and durian are emerging as new exports that may interest local and foreign buyers. The hope lies in getting higher volumes of exports to more markets. After all, our agri exports constitute between eight and nine percent of Philippine GDP. Strong export performance brings foreign exchange and can create more stable rural jobs.

There are, however, challenges. The first is increasing export volumes. One of the oft-repeated concerns is the lack of supply of a given commodity when demand peaks especially abroad. This can be helped by using innovation and technology to produce more per tree or hectare

planted. New products for a wider range of markets can be developed. This can help sustain market demand, and opportunity for producers.

Other measures include promoting affordable and efficient logistics to bring the products from farm to table or factory. Yet another is removing all bottlenecks that hamper exports. These are enablers that can encourage more exports and bring more export income.

A good opportunity, in particular to the DA-DTI memorandum, is to leverage on DTI's capability to help exporters innovate using technology and the creative industry. In the case of Mindanao, a lot of its creativity is inspired by the crops being grown and other natural endowments that play a large part in local culture. This special capability will enable the creation of new and exotic products to meet changing market preferences.

The key for these agreements to achieve their hoped-for outcomes is vigilance by the private sector in ensuring that the advantages and benefits of these institutions for the industry are maximized. Having strong partnerships between the DTI, DA and the private sector can help producers plan production over time to continuously meet demand and help capture opportunity.

Industry associations will therefore need to continuously engage in constructive dialogue with government counterparts to promote the benefits of such agreements, particularly in export promotion abroad and the scaling up of local agroprocessing. This ensures that these benefit the broadest range of producers, processors, and exporters. This creates more job opportunities and sustains incomes that help the local economy thrive. As the new year comes, we hope to further examine how these agreements can be harnessed for our economic growth.

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https://mb.com.ph/2024/12/24/new-agreements-fresher-hopes-for-mindanao-s-exporters#google_vignette

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Philippines to slap P60/MT fee on imported sugar alternatives

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

December 24, 2024 | 12:00am



The Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) board approved and issued Sugar Order (SO) 6 that would slap a clearance fee on imported commodities under the tariff headings 1701, 1702 and 1704.

STAR / File

MANILA, Philippines — The government will slap a clearance fee of P60 per metric ton (MT) on imported sugar alternatives and other sugar-based products, including sucrose, flavored syrups and even white chocolates, as part of its efforts to monitor the entry of these imported commodities.

The Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) board approved and issued Sugar Order (SO) 6 that would slap a clearance fee on imported commodities under the tariff headings 1701, 1702 and 1704.

Commodities belonging to 1701 include sucrose, specialty sugar, flavored syrup while those under 1702 include so-called “other sugars” like lactose, glucose, maltose, maple syrup, honey and caramel.

Goods under tariff heading 1704 are sugar confectionery items such as chewing gum and white chocolate not containing cocoa.

The SRA board has set the clearance fee at P3 per 50-kilogram bag or P60 per MT, significantly lower than its initial proposal of P10 per bag or P200 per MT.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., who chairs the SRA board, earlier disclosed that they would reduce the clearance fee after beverage makers and industrial users complained that the initial fee amount is “inflationary.”

The SRA has been in consultation with the sugar industry stakeholders for months before issuing the SO that is aimed at collecting accurate data on the volume of sugar alternatives that enter the country.

Various quarters of the sugar industry have lobbied for the government to intervene on the unabated entry of these sugar alternatives that they claim displaces the use of locally-produced sugar thus contributing to the decline in farmgate prices.

“During a consultative meeting, sugar industry stakeholders have expressed their grave concern on the effects upon the welfare and sustainability of the sugar industry of the long-practiced unregulated importation into the country of certain ‘sugars’ and ‘sweeteners’ and the Department of Agriculture and the SRA find the same impresser with merit,” read SO 6, a copy of which was obtained by The STAR.

The new clearance fee will take effect 30 days after its filing at the Office of the National Registrar at the UP Law Center.

In a separate statement, SRA administrator and CEO Pablo Luis Azcona lamented that certain groups in the sugar industry are “misinforming” the public about the implementation of the clearance fee on imported sugar products.

The Sugar Council group and the National Congress of Unions in the Sugar Industry of the Philippines earlier claimed that the reduction of the clearance fee from P10 per P50-kg bag would encourage the entry of more sugar alternatives to the detriment of the industry.

“Let me reiterate that we are not proposing a lower import clearance fee for sweeteners to displace locally-produced sugar as these groups say, rather we are now requiring fees and import clearance that the previous SRA ran by people from the Sugar Council never did,” Azcona said.

“There are currently no measures against any of these (products) and it is the first time that fees and clearances will be imposed. From zero fees and no clearance to a fee and clearance - how is that encouragement?” Azcona added.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2024/12/24/2409402/philippines-slap-p60mt-fee-imported-sugar-alternatives>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

‘Quinta comm probe should lead to charges’

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

December 24, 2024 | 12:00am

MANILA, Philippines — The investigation being conducted by the House quinta committee should lead to the filing of charges and conviction of traders involved in hoarding and profiteering, farmers’ group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura said yesterday.

SINAG executive director Jayson Cainglet was referring to the ongoing investigation by the panel on alleged anomalies in the supply and distribution of rice.

“What we want, especially on the part of the local producers, is that the hearings will lead to conviction as there were accusations that there is cartel, profiteering and hoarding but unfortunately, there were no arrests made and no cases have yet been filed,” he stressed.

The quinta panel comprises the committees on ways and means, trade and industry, agriculture and food, social services and the special committee on food security. The committee, headed by Albay Rep. Joel Salceda, is investigating the possible collusion among rice importers and traders in manipulating the prices of the staple.

Cainglet noted that under the newly signed Republic Act 12022 or the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, no bail is allowed for those who will be charged.

“The law is strong. Under the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Law, those who will be charged should be jailed as it is non-bailable,” Cainglet added, emphasizing the need to implement the law in January.

“(President Marcos) mentioned that smuggling of frozen mackerel would be the first case under the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Law. We are hoping that the producers and even consumers will have a merry Christmas,” he further stated.

At least 580 metric tons or P178.5 million worth of smuggled frozen mackerel were seized at the Manila International Container Port last October.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. has identified the importer of 31 container vans of smuggled frozen mackerel as the Pacific Sealand Foods Corp.

At the same time, Cainglet said consumers did not fully enjoy their Christmas bonus and 13th month pay as the retail prices of basic commodities like pork and chicken remain high.

He noted that the retail prices of these meats remain high despite the low farmgate price of the commodities.

“For the past two months, the farmgate price of chicken was only P90 (per kilo), almost the value of the cost of production for chicken,” he said.

He added that the farmgate price of pork was also stable between P180 and P200 per kilo but the retail price remained high at P400 per kilo.

“Pork shoulder and pork belly are sold from P380 to P400 per kilo. Those who already received their Christmas bonus and 13th month cannot afford to buy delicious food for their Noche Buena because of its high cost,” Cainglet noted.

He called on the authorities to have the political power to go after hoarders and profiteers.

“They (authorities) know the identities of importers, wholesalers and retailers. They just need political power so that those involved in price manipulation will be charged,” he said.

Stable prices

Retail pork prices next year are expected to remain stable or even soften as domestic supplies improve on the back of continued repopulation of pigs and changes in movement policies of the government.

“The domestic pig industry is anticipated to post a ‘good’ production recovery as hog raisers are doubling down on biosecurity measures coupled by the expected commercialization of the vaccine against African swine fever (ASF),” Tiu Laurel said.

He added that proposed changes in the Department of Agriculture (DA)’s zoning policies on ASF would contribute to better pork supplies next year as the agency is now drafting the modified zoning plan that would just identify municipalities, whether they have confirmed outbreaks of ASF or none.

The modification does away with the current color coding practice of identifying the ASF status of a given municipality.

At present, the Bureau of Animal Industry implements the national zoning and movement plan that serves as the overarching framework for the transport of pigs and pig products to and from areas, depending on their ASF situation.

Under the plan, areas are identified by colors depending on their ASF risks such as red for infected areas, yellow for surveillance zones and dark green for low-risk and ASF-free areas.

“It is either ASF-free or not. It is easier. Because right now there is a stigma among hog raisers and that is why they do not want to report their disease situation because they do not want to be in the red zone,” Tiu Laurel said.

“That system already has a negative connotation with everybody. So we have to change it and copy the best practices of other countries that, you know, is it (the area) free from the disease or not?” he added.

Tiu Laurel expounded that under the new plan, which is expected to take effect next month, the DA would implement a test-and-ship policy that would enable hog raisers in ASF-infected areas to transport their pigs as long as they test negative for the disease.

This, the agriculture chief said, would ensure the continuous flow of pork supply nationwide without sacrificing biosecurity measures against the fatal hog disease.

Under present rules, local government units ban outright the entry of any pork supply from a declared ASF red zone even if some farms in the identified area are free from the disease. This leads to a situation where one area has a pork surplus while others have a shortfall, thus resulting in price disparities.

“That will basically stabilize the market for pork. We will avoid imbalance in supplies wherein prices in one area collapse while in another area prices are high,” he said. “This should lower the average price of pork.” — **Jasper Emmanuel Arcalas**

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/12/24/2409436/quinta-comm-probe-should-lead-charges>

BUSINESS WORLD:

PBBM sets farmers free from years of agrarian debt

December 24, 2024 | 12:06 am

Distribution of COCROMs and CLOAs to Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries in Cabagan, Isabela

DEBT-FREE!



On November 22, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. granted Certificates of Condonation with Release of Mortgage (COCROM) and Certificates of Land Ownership Award (CLOA) to Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs) in Isabela Province. Granting of COCROMs liberated beneficiaries from over PhP1 billion in debts comprising amortization, interest, and surcharges.

AGRARIAN REFORM PROGRAM IN ISABELA	
COCROMs	25,773
CLOAs	456
ARBs	21,000
Total Debts Condoned (amortization, interest, surcharges)	PhP1 PLUS

"Wala na kayong iisipin pa kaugnay ng amortisasyon. Ang tanging aalalahanin ninyo lamang ay kung paano lilinangin ang inyong mga kakayahan sa pagsasaka at kung paano palalaguin ang inyong mga lupa."

FERDINAND R. MARCOS JR.
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES

Presidential Assistance to Farmers, Fisherfolk and Families (PAFFF) in Isabela

Farmers are priority

The President assured farmers of the government's unwavering support to ensure their welfare. He also vowed the government would continue supporting farmers and fisherfolk until they fully recover from the effects of recent typhoons in the country. He recognized the resilience of Filipinos in Isabela Province who braved and survived the onslaught of six consecutive typhoons.



"Napakahalaga po ng inyong papel na ginagampanan sa pagsulong ng ating agrikultura, pagsiguro na may pagkain ang bawat hapag-kainan, at pagpapaunlad ng ating kinabukasan."

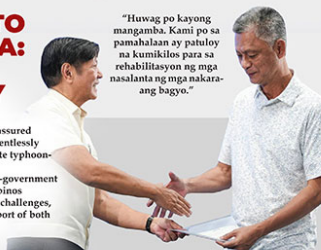


ACTION PLANS

- The government called on farmers and fisherfolk to enroll under the Department of Agriculture (DA)'s extensive insurance program. The program is under the Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation. It aims to protect farmers' seedlings and equipment.
- The government also plans to embark on a program to modernize and develop climate resilient agricultural processes and equipment.

PBBM TO ISABELA: DON'T WORRY

The Chief Executive assured the government is relentlessly working to rehabilitate typhoon-hit communities. He vowed a whole-of-government approach to help Filipinos triumph over climate challenges, assuring the full support of both the national and local governments.



"Huwag po kayong mangamba. Kami po sa pamahalaan ay patuloy na kumikilos para sa rehabilitasyon ng mga nasalanta ng mga nakaraang bagyo."

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<https://www.bworldonline.com/spotlight/2024/12/24/642335/pbbm-sets-farmers-free-from-years-of-agrarian-debt/>

REMATE:

P1.5 ismagel na sibuyas, gulay nasamsam sa bodega sa Taguig

December 24, 2024 13:15



MANILA, Philippines – Nasamsam ng mga awtoridad ang P1.5 milyong halaga ng mga smuggled na puting sibuyas at iba pang gulay at naaresto ang dalawang indibidwal sa pagsalakay sa isang bodega sa Taguig City noong Lunes.

Ang operasyon, na resulta ng isang tip sa Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) at Bureau of Plant Industry, ay natuklasan ang mga sibuyas, karot, luya, at bawang—na marami sa mga ito ay inangat mula sa China nang walang kaukulang permit.

Sinabi ni CIDG NCR Regional Chief, PCol. Marlon Quimno, kinumpirma na ang bodega ay kulang sa kinakailangang mga lisensya sa pag-import at pamamahagi ng mga produkto.

Natuklasan din ng mga awtoridad ang expired na isda at karne sa cold storage ng pasilidad, na nagdudulot ng mga potensyal na panganib sa kalusugan tulad ng food poisoning.

Pansamantalang isinara ng CIDG ang bodega para sa karagdagang imbestigasyon at hinimok ang mga may-ari ng negosyo na sumunod sa mga regulasyon upang maiwasan ang mga naturang paglabag.

Tumangging magkomento ang mga may-ari ng warehouse at grocery store ngunit maaaring harapin ang mga kaso sa ilalim ng Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act at Consumer Act of the Philippines. *RNT*

<https://remate.ph/p1-5-ismagel-na-sibuyas-gulay-nasamsam-sa-bodega-sa-taguig/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

FAO: Tie-ups among govt, academe, private sector vital to agrifood'

Ada Pelonia
December 24, 2024

STEADY communication between the government, academe, and the private sector could improve the country's agrifood system, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) said.

FAO Representative in the Philippines Lionel Dabbadie said addressing the agrifood system, which involves the capacity to deliver food to consumers, requires unwinding the coil of complexities in food production.

"Working on the food system is important because it's not a chain. We talk about value chain, but in reality, it's not value chain. There are a lot of complexities in the middle and we need to tackle these complexities," Dabbadie told the BusinessMirror in an interview.

For one, he expressed concern over the seeming disconnect between the academe and the production sector, particularly with innovations that do not reach the latter.

"One thing that is not working very well, I think in the Philippines, is the connection between the academe and the production," Dabbadie said.

He noted that the country's agriculture sector is brimming with inventions that are being applied by other countries but not the Philippines.

With the food system that encompasses the academe, consumers, and government, Dabbadie stressed the need “to make sure that the things are working well so that the inventions from the academe can reach the production sector.”

‘Innovation system’

“The academe has inventions, they have a lot of inventions, but most of these inventions do not translate into practice,” Dabbadie said.

He noted that for these inventions to turn into reality, there should be an environment that is favorable to the emergence of innovation.

This system could be created through investing in the knowledge network between people, he added.

“You make sure that the people, they know what is available, they know each other, they talk to each other, they brainstorm [...] that’s what we call the innovation systems,” Dabbadie said, noting that this comes part and parcel of the agrifood system.

Among the programs he mentioned that favor innovation in the country are the Department of Agriculture’s (DA) Agri-Industrial Business Corridors (ABCs) and the FAO’s Farmer Field School (FFS).

Dabbadie said ABC is an “interesting model” since it clusters farmers and orients public investment. To improve the innovation system, he said the ABCs could be maximized.

With FFS, he explained that it is part of agricultural extension which is also crucial for innovation. Unlike a top-down extension system where farmers only listen, FFS gravitates toward hands-on group learning.

“I really believe that innovations [are] the result of the connections between the people,” Dabbadie said.

“In the Philippines, I think you have almost all the elements. It’s just about making the connections. If you create the connections, then the system will start working well and operate well.”

https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/12/24/fao-tie-ups-among-govt-academe-private-sector-vital-to-agrifood/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAAR228W9yaHb7uJGQbSanq3w5Q1gCUwgAf6AggVWjOPogdMrsVPXuGHTWJio_aem_dBpex8vqngZlg9k-MRykJw

BUSINESS MIRROR:

Sale of Casecnan dam to raise ₱50B for govt

Cai U. Ordinario
December 24, 2024

THE national government is keen on privatizing the Casecnan dam to shore up revenues for next year, according to the Department of Finance (DOF).

“Nasa pipeline na malaki yung Casecnan Dam. You probably can get P50 billion or more there,” Finance Secretary Ralph G. Recto told reporters last week. “I think we’re confident that it will be sold by next year.”

Recto said the DOF is working with the Department of Energy and the Power Sector Assets and Liabilities Management Corp. (Psalm) regarding the sale of the dam.

“They should be part of the green energy auction so that you create more value for that particular asset up for privatization,” Recto said.

In February, the Psalm formally turned over on Monday the 165-megawatt (MW) Casecnan Hydroelectric Power Plant to Fresh River Lakes Corp. (FLRC), a subsidiary of the Lopez-led First Gen. Corp.

Personnel from the Psalm and the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) formally handed over the operations of the Casecnan hydro facilities in Pantabangan, Nueva Ecija to First Gen after securing all regulatory permits and remitted payment for the purchase of the power plant.

The FLRC's \$526-million bid offer was way above the government's minimum bid price.

Aside from the plant itself, the power components that First Gen acquired from the government include the switchyard, the administration complex, guest house and some roads.

Meanwhile, ownership of the non-power components of Casecnan, such as the irrigation facilities, the weir and the tunnel, remains with the government, through the NIA and the Psalm.

The use of these non-power facilities is governed by separate operations and maintenance agreements involving the FRLC, the NIA and the Psalm.

https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/12/24/sale-of-casecnan-dam-to-raise-%e2%82%b150b-for-govt/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAAR0Y1n69ZVw8Mlbpp0YfEx0s67w8wa8SSgTgCuVT_CBpOncKnPgO0RIcDg_aem_0vENFcNKWvm5zD8pLbKTGQ

BUSINESS MIRROR:

PHL seen importing more corn for animal feed

Ada Pelonia
December 24, 2024

The country's corn imports will rise by 7.2 percent to 1.63 million metric tons (MMT) for marketing year (MY) 2024-2025 to meet the increasing demand of the domestic animal feed industry, according to an international report.

The United States Department of Agriculture-Foreign Agricultural Service in Manila's (USDA-FAS Manila) also projected that the Philippines's corn production will grow by a measly 0.4 percent to 8.15 MMT from 8.119 MMT in the previous MY.

"The forecast production increase will not keep pace with feed demand and FAS Manila increases its forecast for corn imports in MY 2024/25, as the broiler, layer, and pet food industries continue to grow," its report read.

It added that the gradual repopulating efforts of the hog industry while waiting for the commercialization of the African swine fever (ASF) vaccine could further drive up the demand for imported feed corn towards the latter part of MY 2024-2025.

The USDA-FAS Manila also increased its forecasts of feed and residual use by 2.7 percent to 7.6 MMT in the current MY from 7.4 MMT.

"Industry contacts report that the demand for chicken meat and eggs are expected to further increase within the current MY, as alternative sources of protein for the growing population," it said. "Additionally, industry contacts also report a positive outlook for pet food this MY."

Meanwhile, the agency projects that food, seed, and industrial (FSI) consumption will rise by 1.4 percent to 2.23 MMT in the current MY from 2.20 MMT due to increased demand for corn-based food snacks and byproducts, such as cornstarch, oil, and syrup.

Rice production

Meanwhile, the USDA-FAS Manila said it expects rice production in the current MY to decline following the series of weather disturbances that struck the country.

The agency projects milled rice production to drop by 3 percent to 11.95 MMT from 12.325 MMT in the previous market year.

“The decline is driven by the combined effects of El Niño and La Niña on the MY 2024/25 crop, which negatively impacted domestic palay production.”

The agency also increased the country’s rice import forecast by 17.8 percent to 5.3 MMT from 4.5 MMT.

“The forecast increase is driven by the need to supplement supply, given the reduction in local palay output,” it said.

Data from the Bureau of Plant Industry showed that rice shipments from January 1 to December 12 have reached 4.48 MMT.

https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/12/24/phl-seen-importing-more-corn-for-animal-feed/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAR0DvIVXCusQH9Ly3lrbbZb3DPTY6OE1eDkxVONzM3UN82pYH9Di9KRJc5c_aem_ZIOIK_q2S-m29I67XKLOfQ

BUSINESS MIRROR:

Fish unloading volume down in Nov– PFDA

Ada Pelonia
December 24, 2024

Regional ports registered a lower fish unloading volume in November, the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA) said.

Figures from the PFDA showed the fish unloading volume in November declined by 21.64 percent to 37,018.50 metric tons (MT) from the previous month's 47,240.81 MT.

It said General Santos Fish Port Complex experienced a minor setback as its fish unloading volume was lower at 15,864.03 MT, compared to the 20,184.63 MT recorded in October.

The PFDA said Navotas Fish Port Complex also registered a decline in November due to the arrival of fewer municipal fishing vessels. It said the largest regional fish port (RFP) in the country unloaded 14,386.14 MT, 30.24 percent lower than the 20,622.75 MT in October.

Meanwhile, the Iloilo Fish Port Complex delivered 1,865.99 MT to consumers in November, lower than the 2,263.98 MT in the previous month.

The government-owned and -controlled corporation attached to the Department of Agriculture reported that other RFPs recorded higher unloading volumes during the period.

For one, the PFDA said the Bulan Fish Port Complex “has been on a successful streak for three consecutive months” as it unloaded 1,614.95

MT of fish products to consumers, which is 27.62 percent higher than the 1,265.45 MT in October.

For four consecutive months, the PFDA said Davao Fish Port Complex reported a “consistent performance” as it delivered 814.13 MT of fish in November, 18.88 percent higher than the 684.84 MT in the previous month.

The Lucena Fish Port Complex unloaded 1,503.63 MT of fish, which showed a 13.15 percent increase in its fish delivery from 1,328.94 MT in October.

PFDA said Zamboanga Fish Port Complex delivered more fish products to consumers in November. It registered an unloading volume of 969.22 MT, 8.93 percent higher than the 889.77 MT in the previous month.

https://businessmirror.com.ph/2024/12/24/fish-unloading-volume-down-in-nov-pfda/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMATAAR3SKLfZwCVtxPc4pNq2KsnkJvviyvfskWx_Z-1Bfl-9eiGCTQxjBpGtds_aem_mxZOL1kfQhxx-ZKvZlOx9w