

## CLIPPINGS FOR TODAY JANUARY 10, 2025

### **A. MANILA BULLETIN:**

**DA imposes temporary ban on domestic, wild birds from New Zealand over avian flu outbreak**

**Laurel names new DA undersecretary for livestock**

**A hope for the new year**

### **B. THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

**Kanlaon eruption damage to agricultural sector reaches P129.39 million**

**Armyworms attack Pangasinan onion farms**

**'Wild birds, fomites led to Philippines first H5N2 case'**

**Phl-Korea FTA and US tariffs**

**Philippines temporarily bans New Zealand bird imports over avian flu outbreak**

### **C. PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

**Treading on dangerous waters**

### **D. BUSINESS WORLD:**

**Corn production to be disrupted by rains**

**Tobacco industry backs pause in excise tax hike to deter smuggling**

### **E. BUSINESS MIRROR:**

**Farm, fisher jobs top employment decline**

**Thin supply seen behind spike in red onion prices**

### **F. THE MANILA TIMES:**

**Philippine agriculture in crisis (1)**

### **G. REMATE:**

**Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act suportado ng grupo**

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# **DA imposes temporary ban on domestic, wild birds from New Zealand over avian flu outbreak**

**BY [AARON RECUENCO](#)**

Jan 9, 2025 06:10 PM

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Domestic and wild bird importation from New Zealand will be temporarily banned amid threats of an avian influenza outbreak, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said.

DA Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. said the move is aimed at preventing the entry of high pathogenic avian influenza into the Philippines.

“The poultry industry, including egg production, is a multi-billion-peso sector that supports significant investments, creates numerous jobs, and plays a vital role in ensuring the country’s food security,” said Laurel.

“The ban on the importation of domestic and wild birds, as well as eggs, day-old chicks, semen, and poultry meat, is crucial in preventing the entry of high pathogenic avian influenza into the Philippines, safeguarding the health of the local poultry population,” he added.

The ban was stipulated in the memorandum issued by Laurel, which was based on the tests conducted by the New Zealand National Animal Health Laboratory on domestic birds from East Otago, Waitaki, and Canterbury in late November.

The tests yielded positive test results for H7N6 strain of high pathogenicity avian influenza. The outbreak has been officially reported by New Zealand authorities to the World Organisation for Animal Health.

Laurel also ordered the immediate suspension of processing, evaluation, and issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances for these items from these areas from New Zealand as part of the ban.,

He, however, said that shipments already in transit, loaded, or accepted at ports before the official communication of the ban will be allowed entry, provided the products were slaughtered or produced before Nov. 9, 2024.

Quarantine authorities, he said, have been instructed to confiscate different poultry commodities cited in this Memorandum Order.

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<https://mb.com.ph/2025/1/9/da-imposes-ban-on-domestic-wild-bird-from-new-zealand-over-avian-flu-outbreak>

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# Laurel names new DA undersecretary for livestock

BY [AARON RECUENCO](#)

Jan 9, 2025 10:07 AM

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Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. has designated a new undersecretary for livestock following the passing of Undersecretary Deogracias Victor Savellano.

In a statement, Laurel said Assistant Secretary Constante J. Palabrica will take over the position of Savellano who also headed the National Livestock Program, on a temporary basis.

In his order Laurel said Palabrica, a doctor of veterinary medicine, will temporarily fill the role left vacant by Savellano, while still fulfilling his responsibilities as Assistant Secretary for Swine and Poultry.

Palabrica played a key role in overseeing the swine and poultry sectors, tackling challenges such as the African Swine Fever (ASF) and bird flu, and implementing measures to support the industries during these crises.

“He brings extensive experience in agricultural policy and livestock management. He will take on the expanded duties of Undersecretary for Livestock, continuing his work in the Department of Agriculture,” said Laurel.

Palabrica’s appointment as DA Undersecretary remains subject to the approval of President Marcos.

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<https://mb.com.ph/2025/1/9/laurel-names-new-da-undersecretary-for-livestock>

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# A hope for the new year

BY [YVETTE TAN](#)

Jan 10, 2025 07:09 AM

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**AVANT GARDENER**



It's the second week of the new year, the week when—let's face it—everyone really returns to work, and then just barely.

As we all know, many agricultural workers aren't able to take long breaks. Pests aren't going to stay away from your field just because it's the holidays and your cows aren't going to milk themselves.

It being the week when everyone's minds forcefully shift to work mode, it's not too late to list one's New Year resolutions. Besides, when you think about it, the new year hasn't started, if you go by the lunar calendar, that is.

With the upheavals that the world has been subjected to over the past years, beginning, depending on who you talk to, in 2020 because of the pandemic or perhaps a few years before that, it's become tiring to set resolutions for the incoming year. It's become tiring to want to change oneself for the better when the world seems to have other plans on a global scale.

Nowhere is this more true than in the agriculture industry. It seems that either nothing has changed or things keep getting worse globally. Our food system continues to be precarious, so that people go hungry but also, farmers are forced to dump excess crops because it isn't worth selling them to a glutted market. This isn't just a Philippine phenomenon; the global food system really is broken.

It's said that the world actually produces enough food to feed its entire population, except the way it's distributed means an excess in some areas and a lack in others. It's also said that if Thanos, the villain the Marvel movie Endgame, really wanted to end inequality with a snap of his fingers, he wouldn't have wiped out half the world's population, he would have fixed the world's distribution systems, including food. But I digress.

Fortunately, setbacks like these, have not stopped passionate individuals and organizations from making changes in their own corners of the world. From small farms to the buying of Class B produce that would otherwise have gone to waste, individuals and enterprises continue to see opportunity in an industry that is both challenging and filled with potential.

Last year, I had the pleasure to write about various enterprises, and I am excited to continue to do so this year.

The world has been battered, but it is innate in humans to never stop trying to better themselves and their surroundings. It is innate in us to soldier on, to not give up hope. Yes, things may be tough, especially in the agriculture industry, but it doesn't mean that things won't get better. There isn't one solution that will solve all problems, but there are many tiny solutions that each of us can enact that together, might spell a better industry for everyone.

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<https://mb.com.ph/2025/1/10/a-hope-for-the-new-year>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Kanlaon eruption damage to agricultural sector reaches P129.39 million

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

January 10, 2025 | 12:00am



Data from the DA's operations center showed that rice, corn, high-value crops and livestock incurred most of the damage, covering 581 hectares of property.

Philippine Air Force via Facebook

MANILA, Philippines — The amount of damage to agriculture caused by the eruption of Kanlaon Volcano in Negros has reached P129.39 million, according to the Department of Agriculture.

Data from the DA's operations center showed that rice, corn, high-value crops and livestock incurred most of the damage, covering 581 hectares of property.

The volcanic eruption has displaced up to 1,431 farmers.

The DA said 97 percent of the damage involved high-value crops with P124.93 million and 5,311 tons in production losses.

Meanwhile, the amount of damage to rice production reached P3.06 million, covering 124 hectares of farms and production losses of 91 tons.

Livestock and poultry incurred P900,100 in losses and corn, P403,3500, covering seven hectares of land.

“Additional damage and losses are expected as assessment is ongoing in areas affected by Kanlaon's continuous activity,” the DA said.



The agency said at least 771 animal heads were evacuated in La Castellana and La Carlota City in Negros Occidental.

“Various forms of assistance, including agricultural inputs such as rice and corn seeds as well as drugs and biologics for livestock animals have been provided to farmers,” the DA said.

It said up to P1 billion in quick response fund could be tapped for the rehabilitation and recovery of areas destroyed by Kanlaon.

Affected farmers may avail themselves of loans offered under the survival and recovery program of the Agricultural Credit Policy Council.

The DA said farmers covered by insurance will receive indemnification from the Philippine Crop Insurance Corp.

<https://www.philstar.com/nation/2025/01/10/2413135/kanlaon-eruption-damage-agricultural-sector-reaches-p12939-million>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Armyworms attack Pangasinan onion farms

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

January 10, 2025 | 12:00am



Arnel de Mesa, spokesman for the Department of Agriculture (DA), said the armyworm infestation in Pangasinan is an isolated case.

Jam Sta Rosa / AFP

MANILA, Philippines — The state-run Regional Crop Protection Center (RCPC) has been ordered to assist farmers in Pangasinan whose onion farms were destroyed by armyworms.

Arnel de Mesa, spokesman for the Department of Agriculture (DA), said the armyworm infestation in Pangasinan is an isolated case.

De Mesa said the DA is monitoring and ready to address the situation.

“Armyworms are traditional pests. The infestation usually happens during this period, especially when summer is nearing. The RCPC is monitoring the situation. It is a standard protocol for the RCPC to act in times like this,” De Mesa said.

The armyworm infestation will not affect the country’s onion production this year, he said.

“Last year, we reported a significant increase as more than 40 percent was added to onion production. Most likely, it will be the same this year,” De Mesa said, adding that the government did not import red onions because of the increase in production.

“We imported only white onions last year. Bureau of Plant Industry chief Glenn Panganiban said we could sustain the supply of red onions until the first quarter of this year since harvest season is near. No import permit will be issued on red onions for now,” he said.

Based on the DA monitoring in Metro Manila markets, the retail price of local red onions ranged between P100 and P180 per kilo, local white onions between P100 and P160, and imported white onions between P180 and P200 per kilo.

In 2022, the retail price of onions surged to P720 per kilo due to shortage and hoarding.

De Mesa said at least P1.6 billion has been allocated for setting up cold storage facilities nationwide to preserve farm products.

<https://www.philstar.com/nation/2025/01/10/2413148/armyworms-attack-pangasinan-onion-farms>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# ‘Wild birds, fomites led to Philippines first H5N2 case’

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

January 10, 2025 | 12:00am



Avian influenza tumama sa Camarines Norte This photograph shows ducks in the force-feeding room at a duck fattening workshop in Pouillon, southwestern France, on September 6, 2022.

AFP / Gaizka Iroz

MANILA, Philippines — Wild birds and fomites, or objects carrying viruses, could have caused the Philippines’ first-ever outbreak of the H5N2 avian influenza strain, according to an official government report.

The Philippines yesterday reported to the World Organization for Animal Health its first H5N2 outbreak in Camarines Norte last month.

The outbreak began as early as Nov. 11 last year and was confirmed through laboratory tests on Dec. 6.

The Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) announced on Dec. 11 the outbreak to the public.

A farm in Barangay San Nicolas, Talisay, Camarines Norte recorded the outbreak, with backyard or grazing ducks being the affected population.

Based on the government’s report, at least 428 ducks were susceptible to the virus, with 15 confirmed positive for H5N2 bird flu.

Surveillance outside the restricted zone of the bird flu outbreak has yet to be applied, the government said.

As of Jan. 3, the BAI reported that about 136 barangays in 53 municipalities across nine provinces in five regions – including the Camarines Norte outbreak – were affected by bird flu.

The Department of Agriculture earlier assured the public that the outbreak in Camarines Norte has a low transmission rate to humans and would not cause a spike in the domestic prices of eggs and chicken meat.

Earlier this week, the DA imposed a temporary ban on imported poultry products from New Zealand due to a confirmed H7N6 bird flu outbreak.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/01/10/2413192/wild-birds-fomites-led-philippines-first-h5n2-case>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Phl-Korea FTA and US tariffs

**BUSINESS SNIPPETS - Marianne Go - The Philippine Star**

January 10, 2025 | 12:00am

In the first month of the year, our country is already facing two trade issues that will greatly impact our economy.

The first trade issue is the effectivity of the Philippines-Korea Free Trade Agreement (FTA) last Dec. 31, 2024, which is supposed to enhance market access for Philippine products, such as bananas and pineapples, to the Korean market.

The second is the tariff threat made by US president-elect Donald Trump on some of its trade partners, particularly China, Canada and Mexico. Although the Philippines is not a target of the US tariff threat, there are fears that it could have some negative ripple effect on Asia because of China.

On a more positive note, our long friendly relation with the US could once again improve our preferential tariff arrangements.

On the other hand, the Phl-Korea FTA is supposed to unlock significant opportunities for both countries and foster deeper trade and investment ties across key sectors such as industry, agriculture, infrastructure and energy, according to the Korean embassy.

The Phl-Korea FTA encompasses a comprehensive array of provisions, covering areas such as the trade in goods, trade remedies, rules of origin, customs procedures, trade facilitation, economic and technical cooperation, competition and legal and institutional matters.

In terms of the Philippines' priorities within the FTA, the country focused on enhancing market access for key products such as bananas, processed pineapples, various fruits, industrial goods and a diverse range of services.

For Philippine bananas, tariffs shall decrease by six percent by the end of the year and an additional six percent at the start of this year, giving the commodity greater market access in South Korea, according to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

The FTA will grant preferential duty-free entry on a total of 11,440 tariff lines. However, with its effectivity starting on Dec. 31, 2024, only an initial 11,164 tariff lines from the Philippines—accounting for \$3.18 billion or 87.4 percent of South Korea's imports from the Philippines—will take effect.

Under the FTA, the Philippines secured the removal of 1,531 tariff lines on agricultural goods, of which 1,417 were removed upon effectivity of the deal. Additionally, the agreement also calls for the elimination of 9,909 tariff lines on industrial goods, 9,747 of which were similarly removed last Dec. 31, 2024 when the FTA came into force.

On the part of South Korea, it will remove tariffs on approximately 94.8 percent of Philippine products, while the Philippines will reciprocate by abolishing tariffs on about 96.5 percent of South Korean products.

According to DTI Undersecretary Allan Gepty, one of the major beneficiaries of the FTA is the banana industry as the tariff rate for bananas will be reduced to zero in five years. At present, bananas from the Philippines that enter South Korea are subject to a 30 percent tariff.

According to a statement from the Korean Embassy, the Phl-Korea FTA “marks a major leap forward in bilateral relations, signaling a fresh chapter of cooperation between the two nations. With a detailed framework that covers 97 percent of imports, this agreement is anticipated to open doors to significant trade and investment opportunities in diverse sectors like agriculture, industry, infrastructure and energy,” the embassy said.

The FTA is also supposed to serve as a “catalyst for shaping the future of both countries,” fostering collaboration in areas such as health care, carbon reduction, innovative technologies and electric vehicles.

Korean Ambassador Lee Sang-hwa was quoted as saying that with the Korea-Philippines FTA comes “the dawn of a new era in our strategic partnership.”

The Phl-Korea FTA was signed on Sept. 7, 2024 on the sidelines of the 43rd ASEAN Summit in Jakarta, Indonesia, with both President Marcos and former South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol in attendance.

South Korea is among the Philippines’ top trading partners and is also a source of foreign direct investment.

However, a more significant victory in the FTA for South Korea is the elimination of tariffs on many automotive units and components. This development opens opportunities for South Korea’s auto industry to expand its presence in the Philippines, which had a limited footprint in this sector.

South Korean automakers, such as Kia and Hyundai, are expected to benefit from the FTA which will remove the five percent duty on Korea-made automobiles. Tariffs on Korean electric and hybrid vehicles would also be removed within five years.

Apart from tariff reductions, the FTA includes provisions for capacity-building and technical cooperation between the Philippines and South Korea.

My own fear, however, is that Korean agricultural and food products, together with manufactured goods will swamp the Philippine market, even as they already have, even before the FTA took effect.

In my own experience, I have been patronizing Korean-owned groceries, buying their much larger vegetables like Chinese cabbage and radish which I also regularly see in local wet markets such Farmers' Market in Cubao. I also now use more Korean vinegar and fish sauce since they have better quality and flavor than Philippine made counterparts.

My household essentials like kitchen scissors and knives are mostly Korean or Chinese made, as well as my frying pans and some pots. Thankfully, since I don't use a lot of make-up or beauty products, I have not fallen for the variety of Korean beauty products already available locally.

I also lament the fact that even though Hyundai has been in the country for several years, it has chosen not to engage in local assembly of its vehicles in the country and continues to import its vehicles. Hopefully with the FTA now in force, it will finally pour in actual investments to do some local assembly of its vehicles and contribute to job creation in the country.

But good luck to our balance of trade figures.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2025/01/10/2413047/phl-korea-fta-and-us-tariffs>



**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Philippines temporarily bans New Zealand bird imports over avian flu outbreak

[Dominique Nicole Flores](#) - Philstar.com

January 9, 2025 | 11:52am



A man prepares chickens and ducks for sale at a market in Manila on May 9, 2024.

AFP / Jam Sta Rosa

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippines won't be importing domestic and wild birds from New Zealand in the meantime due to a bird flu outbreak, the government announced on Wednesday, January 8.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) issued [Memorandum Order No. 1](#) to impose a temporary ban on New Zealand-based poultry and its byproducts.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. received reports from the New Zealand National Animal Health Laboratory confirming the avian influenza outbreak.

The laboratory discovered that the domestic birds from East Otago, Waitaki and Canterbury tested positive for the H7N6 strain of "high pathogenicity avian influenza" in late November 2024.

The DA said the World Organization for Animal Health has been officially informed by New Zealand authorities of the bird flu outbreak.

The [avian flu](#) rarely affects humans, according to the United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). A person can become infected with the virus if it enters the eyes, nose or mouth, or if it is inhaled.

Symptoms may include eye redness, mild flu-like upper respiratory issues, fever, cough, sore throat and a runny nose.

**What products are banned?** Aside from domestic and wild birds, the importation of day-old chicks, eggs, semen and poultry meat have also been temporarily banned.

The order also mandates the immediate suspension of processing, evaluating and issuing sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances for these specific products from New Zealand, the DA said.

“However, shipments already in transit, loaded, or accepted at ports before the official communication of the ban will be allowed entry, provided the products were slaughtered or produced before November 9, 2024,” the agency added.

Tiu Laurel said the ban allows the country to prevent the spread of bird flu in the country, “safeguarding the health of the local poultry population.”

The temporary ban is not just a health measure but also a step toward safeguarding food and economic security, the DA stressed. The poultry and egg industry, which is a “multi-billion-peso sector,” contributes significantly to investments and job creation in the country.

**Market price.** As of Monday, January 6, the DA monitoring reports that whole chicken prices in Metro Manila markets range from P175 to P215 per kilogram.

Egg prices vary between P6 and P12 each, depending on their type and size.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2025/01/09/2412984/philippines-temporarily-bans-new-zealand-bird-imports-over-avian-flu-outbreak>

# Treading on dangerous waters

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 05:15 AM January 10, 2025

Those who have less in life should have more in law.”

The words of the late President Ramon Magsaysay might well apply to the fisherfolk adversely affected by a Supreme Court ruling that affirmed a lower court’s decision to grant commercial fishing companies access to municipal waters that, under the Fisheries Code, is restricted to small-scale fishers.

The preferential access was questioned as “unconstitutional” by the Mercidar Fishing Corp. before a Malabon Regional Trial Court (RTC) on Oct. 25, 2023. Two months later, on Dec. 11, the court ruled in its favor.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court First Division in a resolution dated Aug. 19, upheld the lower court’s ruling, saying that pleadings by the Office of the Solicitor General in the case had been filed “out of time” and without any “legal basis.” The Department of Agriculture and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR) also failed to file a timely appeal against the RTC ruling, for which they were deservedly slammed by the Federation of Free Farmers and the Magsasaka party list for “sleeping on the job.”

## **Fragile ecosystem**

The DA-BFAR has now filed a petition seeking a reversal of the high court ruling, pointing out that allowing commercial fishing within the 15-kilometer municipal water zone would have “far-reaching consequences for sustainable resource management, environmental protection, and the welfare of affected communities.”

In a similar petition, several fishers’ groups, a local government, civil society representatives, and environmental nongovernment organizations led by international marine protection group Oceana

noted that “coupled with climate change impacts, pressures (from commercial fishing fleets) threaten to destabilize an already fragile ecosystem (amid) dire consequences to the population and food security.”

Aside from questioning the “breakneck speed” of the judicial proceedings at the lower court, the petitioners accused the court of “haphazard constitutional interpretation that sought to kill the established legislative policy of protecting municipal fisherfolk and empowering (local government units).”

The RTC ruling struck down the outright ban on commercial fishing in waters with a depth of less than seven fathoms, or 12.8 meters. It also invalidated Section 16 of the Fisheries Code giving municipal governments the jurisdiction to regulate commercial fishing in municipal waters of up to 15 km from the shoreline.

### **Crude fishing methods**

The ruling would pit small fisherfolk using crude fishing methods against commercial fishers with their bigger vessels and advanced fishing equipment in an unfair competition for limited resources. “Their catch for one day is equivalent to the catch of 300 small boats that spent 14 hours at sea,” one fisherman from La Union said of commercial fishing companies.

Such overfishing could impact food security, the petitioners noted, with scientist Dr. Wilfredo Campos of OceanBio Lab at the University of the Philippines citing investigations from the 1980s. “Most of our traditional coastal fishing grounds are overfished,” he said.

Just as impacted are the fisherfolk in Zambales already marginalized by China’s aggression in the West Philippine Sea. Harassed by the China Coast Guard who bar them from Scarborough Shoal, they now rely on municipal waters for a living.

The Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) meanwhile noted that roughly 90 percent of fishing grounds used by small-scale fishers in the country would now be open for exploitation with the RTC ruling. Only 10 percent of municipal waters are less than 12.8 m deep, Pamalakaya vice chair Ronnel Arambulo said, citing a study by marine scientists.

## **Technical lapses**

Given such compelling arguments, the high court should reconsider its ruling and go beyond earlier technical lapses by the contending party, as something bigger than legal procedures are at stake here. Why should a lower court be allowed to tamper with policies already established in the Fisheries Code? And why the haste in promulgating a decision that affects an entire sector and future generations, since the marine environment is at risk as well?

For its part, the government, particularly DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., should firmly exercise his mandate to protect the country's marine resources and support small fishing communities that are part of his constituency. This is an opportunity for him to show that his family's commercial fishing business won't be in conflict with his sworn duty and responsibility to serve the public.

Fortunately, upholding social justice in this case is certainly within the powers and mandate of the courts. As stated by BFAR, "The agency remains hopeful that the judicial process will yield a resolution that protects both the environment and the people who depend on its resources." Obviously, people's welfare is more important than legal technicalities that breed injustice.

<https://opinion.inquirer.net/179898/treading-on-dangerous-waters>

## **BUSINESS WORLD:**

# **Corn production to be disrupted by rains**

January 9, 2025 | 9:15 pm



## **DA.GOV.PH**

BAD WEATHER is expected to disrupt corn production this year after rains forced some farmers to alter their planting schedules, according to the Philippine Maize Federation, Inc. (PhilMaize).

“Bad weather, typhoons, and heavy rains caused delays in planting in some areas. There are some that have completed their planting, while for others, planting is still ongoing,” PhilMaize President Romualdo I. Elvira, Jr. said via Viber.

The government weather service, known as PAGASA, noted an increased likelihood of heavy rains and tropical cyclone activity during the coming month due to the persistence of La Niña conditions in the tropical Pacific.

Planting season for corn in the Philippines typically starts in October and ends in February.

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, corn production may have declined 1.5% to 1.93 million metric tons (MT) due to a decline in the area planted to corn.

Mr. Elvira added that despite the weather, the forecast of better corn prices this year could bolster production.

“We are optimistic that corn prices will be better this year. Market price appreciation will contribute much to the growth of production,” he said.

He added that better post-harvest facilities could provide a boost in improving corn supply.

“Provision of large capacity dryers and storage facilities nationwide is a tremendous impetus on production, that could create surplus,” Mr. Elvira said.

ADVERTISEMENT

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said it is seeking to increase the production of corn crops to meet at least 81% of domestic demand.

Yellow corn, feed wheat, soybeans, and sorghum are raw materials for animal feed. These materials are imported when domestic output cannot meet demand.

White corn is used for human consumption.

Mr. Elvira added that further growth in demand for corn may be driven by the increased demand from the poultry, pet food and food industry.

The DA's National Corn Program is seeking to increase yellow corn yields to 5.17 MT per hectare this year, with the target set at 2.29 MT per hectare for white corn. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/01/09/645839/corn-production-to-be-disrupted-by-rains/>

## **BUSINESS WORLD:**

# **Tobacco industry backs pause in excise tax hike to deter smuggling**

January 9, 2025 | 9:17 pm



**PHILIPPINE STAR/ MIGUEL DE GUZMAN**

THE Philippine Tobacco Institute (PTI) said on Thursday that a pause in raising excise taxes on tobacco could steer consumers away from smuggled cigarettes and stabilize prices of legitimate products.

“By pausing the annual excise tax increases, the prices of legitimate products such as cigarettes can stabilize and decrease the incentive for consumers to purchase illicit smuggled products,” PTI President Jericho B. Nograles told a Senate hearing looking into the illicit trade of tobacco products.

“The second reason is the moratorium period can also strengthen enforcement measures against illicit trade.”

The Philippines imposes an excise tax of P60 per pack of 20 cigarettes while vape products are levied a P54.60 per milliliter (mL) tax for salt nicotine and P63 per 10 mL tax for classic nicotine products, according to the excise tax rates prescribed by the Bureau of Customs for 2024.

The Bureau of Internal Revenue said on Tuesday that it collected P130.91 billion in tobacco excise taxes in the first 11 months of 2024, well behind the pace needed to hit the year’s target of P185.34 billion.

Mr. Nograles also cited Singapore’s imposition of a similar moratorium, which he said eventually boosted tax collections.

The PTI is also calling for the government to revisit the tax system and to come up with a single excise tax rate for all vapor products to simplify collection and implementation, he said.



Mr. Nograles also pushed for the Department of Justice to aggressively go after smugglers, illicit importers, and traders of tobacco products.

In September, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. signed into law a measure classifying agricultural smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, and financing of these crimes as acts of economic sabotage.

Republic Act No. 12022, or the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, imposed a fine equivalent to five times the value of smuggled or hoarded agricultural products, with violators also under threat of life imprisonment.

The law treats smuggling and hoarding of agricultural products as economic sabotage when the value of goods exceeds P10 million.

“Illicit tobacco trade created imbalanced and inequitable conditions against the legitimate tobacco industry,” Mr. Nograles said.

“The tobacco industry is happy to pay taxes so long as the illicit trade is kept at bay, as it undermines so many other government efforts.” — **John Victor D. Ordoñez**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/01/09/645842/tobacco-industry-backs-pause-in-excise-tax-hike-to-deter-smuggling/>

## **BUSINESS MIRROR:**

# **Farm, fisher jobs top employment decline**

- Cai U. Ordinario
- January 9, 2025



FREQUENT typhoons brought by the era of climate change could lead to more job losses in the agriculture sector and threaten the country's food security in the process, according to local economists.

On Wednesday, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported that while unemployment and underemployment improved, the number of employed Filipinos declined. (See: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/08/typhoons-render-farmers-fisherfolk-jobless-in-november/>)

In terms of subsector, the decline in jobs was led by the Agriculture and forestry sector which saw a 1.99-million decline in jobs. The amount includes the 1.6-million jobs in elementary occupations such as farm laborers and fisherfolks.

“I think there are still typhoons expected to come in, so if that's the case, we will continue to lose jobs in agri unless we improve on agrilogistics,” De La Salle University economist Maria Ella Oplas told BusinessMirror.

“There will definitely be a food security problem with the continuing typhoons unless we upgrade our agrologistics,” she added.

Oplas explained that agrologistics referred to planting, harvesting, sorting, grading, storage, transport, marketing, and others. In short, it is the “whole cycle” and a “comprehensive” approach to agriculture in the country.

### **Not surprising—Escucha**

INSTITUTE for Economic Development and Economic Analysis (Idea) President Alex Escucha told BusinessMirror the job losses in the agriculture sector was no longer surprising. Apart from the typhoons, he said agriculture growth has not been robust.

Escucha said farm growth in the second and third quarters of 2024 contracted 2.3 percent and 2.8 percent, respectively. Palay growth even posted a double-digit decline at 12 percent in the third quarter.

With slow growth, Escucha said agriculture has not been able to attract job seekers and many children of farmers are also not keen on making agriculture their source of livelihood.

“Children of farmers choose not to pursue farming because of the very poor economic and financial returns,” Escucha told this newspaper on Wednesday.

The country’s economists, and even the President himself in his last State of the Nation Address (Sona), Escucha also said, have recognized that food security cannot be attained through self-sufficiency.

He said the lackluster performance of the farm sector and the growth of the population requires the country to not only improve food production but also supplement it with imports.

This is crucial, Escucha said, since the World Bank projects that the agriculture sector for the next 5 years is expected to grow by a percent or less.

### **Decline in agri, increase in others?**

Meanwhile, Oplas said if there is a decline in jobs in the agriculture sector, this can also mean an increase in jobs in other sectors such as manufacturing and services.

Based on the latest PSA data, manufacturing as well as accommodation and food service activities were the industries that saw the largest increases in employment with an addition of 784,000 and 528,000 jobs, respectively.

For its part, the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) said the government has recognized the challenges posed by calamities.

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan said the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) will expand its cash-for-work and training programs to reach climate-vulnerable communities.

These programs include the Local Adaptation to Water Access (Lawa) and Breaking Insufficiency through Nutritious Harvest for the Impoverished (Binhi).

“The effective implementation of the Building on Social Protection for Anticipatory Action and Response in Emergencies and Disasters Program will help minimize the impact of flooding, typhoons, and droughts by preparing communities and implementing protective measures before disasters strike,” Balisacan added.

“The government complements these efforts by developing climate-resilient infrastructure and early warning systems to strengthen agricultural productivity and build long-term resilience.”

Moreover, the DSWD, in partnership with Neda and the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), is currently developing a tool to better assess beneficiaries’ eligibility for the Ayuda Para sa Kapos ang Kita Program (Akap) and minimize leakage or duplication of aid. A process monitoring and impact evaluation mechanism will also form part of the program’s implementation to help ensure its efficiency and effectiveness.

“In line with these efforts, we remain committed to achieving our employment targets under the Philippine Development Plan 2023-2028. The 2024 Philippine Development Report, which Neda will release this month, will guide our efforts with evidence-based strategies to create quality jobs and sustain economic growth,” the country’s chief economic planner said. Nonetheless, Balisacan said remains robust given the consistently high employment rates and reduced underemployment.

The latest Labor Force Survey showed a decline in the underemployment rate to 10.8 percent in November 2024 from 11.7 percent in November 2023, indicating better job quality and fewer workers seeking additional work hours or jobs.

“The next step is to expand business and employment opportunities to enable more Filipinos to actively and productively contribute to the economy,” Balisacan said.

“Moreover, we will encourage business upgrading and skills training programs to ensure that these jobs offer competitive wages as our workers raise their productivity by developing their human capital,” he added.

The labor force participation rate (LFPR) in November was 64.6 percent, lower than the estimated 65.9 percent for November 2023.

Youth LFPR declined to 32.4 percent, down from 34.4 percent in the same month last year. Many young individuals cited schooling (402,000) for not participating in the labor force.

Similarly, the female LFPR fell to 53.9 percent, down from 55.4 percent, primarily due to prime-working-age women prioritizing household responsibilities (445,000).

Neda stressed that a multifaceted approach to ensuring an efficient labor market. This approach involves enabling investments in quality job-generating sectors, enhancing skills and workforce mobility, and improving employment facilitation services.

## **SECRETARY’S STATEMENT**

### **On the November 2024 Labor Force Survey**

The November 2024 Labor Force Survey results reaffirm the administration’s unwavering commitment to generating quality employment opportunities and enhancing the livelihoods of all Filipinos. The employment rate has risen to 96.8% in November 2024, up from 96.4% in the same period last year. The number of employed persons increased by 1.385 million compared to October 2024. The unemployment rate has improved from 3.6% in November 2023 to 3.2% in November 2024, demonstrating positive results from ongoing efforts to create more job opportunities. The underemployment rate has also declined from 11.7% in November 2023 to 10.8% in November 2024. Despite these positive developments, challenges persist, such as technological advancements, adoption of artificial intelligence, and climate change, which have impact on youth and women labor force participation. In this regard, we note a decline year-on-year – from 6.92 million to 6.516 million, and 55.4% to 53.9%, respectively.

Key sectors such as manufacturing, accommodation and food services, health and social work, other services, and transportation have shown substantial growth, significantly contributing to job creation. This necessitates continuing efforts to enhance workforce engagement through various employment programs aimed at improving skills and job readiness.

The recently enacted Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises to Maximize Opportunities for Reinvigorating the Economy (CREATE MORE) Act is expected to generate

additional income opportunities and stimulate economic growth. The Enterprise based Education and Training Framework Act addresses labor sector gaps by expanding training and upskilling programs in partnership with the private sector. With the enactment of the abovementioned laws, the Department will vigorously continue to foster inclusive growth and ensure equitable access to job opportunities, prioritizing the upskilling and reskilling of the workforce to equip Filipino workers with the necessary skills for today's dynamic job market. We have consistently updated our youth employability modules to meet industry standards to ensure the absorption of our young new entrants in the ranks of the employed.

Looking ahead to 2025, we anticipate a year of continued economic growth and job creation. DOLE will continue to enhance programs particularly for groups in vulnerable sectors and will remain steadfast towards the realization of a Bagong Pilipinas.

(sgd.)

**BIENVENIDO E. LAGUESMA**

Image credits: [PHOTO CREDIT TO QUANG NGUYEN VINH/PEXELS.COM](https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/09/farm-fisher-jobs-top-employment-decline/)

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/09/farm-fisher-jobs-top-employment-decline/>

## **BUSINESS MIRROR:**

# **Thin supply seen behind spike in red onion prices**

- **Ada Pelonia**
- **January 10, 2025**

THIN supply likely caused the spike in red onion prices, according to an official from the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Retail prices of red onions ranged from P100 to P180 per kilo in Metro Manila markets, based on the DA's latest price monitoring report. This saw an increase from the P70 to P150 range from a month ago.

Agriculture Undersecretary Cheryl Marie Natividad-Caballero said this could be affected by several factors.

"It could be because demand was high, and supply was low; and it wasn't harvest period yet," Caballero told the BusinessMirror on Thursday, noting that the harvest periods for onion are February to April and August to December.

"The ones in cold storage may possibly be just being readied for release, since we were coming from the long holidays the past week," she explained, speaking partly in Filipino.

Data from the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) showed the red onion inventory as of December 27 stood at 13,043 metric tons (MT). Government officials said the country has a monthly red onion consumption of 17,000 MT.

All of the country's red onion stocks last year were locally produced owing to a bumper harvest, which prompted the agency to withhold any importation order for the crop.

Meanwhile, Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said the agency will build a command center by March to serve as a national database for agricultural commodities.

He noted that at a meeting DA hosted last week, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. ordered regulatory agencies such as the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), the

Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI), and the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) to coordinate with the command center.

“The Secretary ordered the regulatory [agencies] to coordinate with the command center to ensure that for this year, the regulatory offices know the production data and when it is necessary to import,” De Mesa told reporters in a recent interview.

“Timing is important, as well as the volume, and should be very predictive to avoid over- or under-importation, especially for the commodities that we have control of,” he added.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/10/thin-supply-seen-behind-spike-in-red-onion-prices/>



**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# Philippine agriculture in crisis (1)

*FINER POINTS*



**By Fermin D. Adriano**

**January 10, 2025**

IN 1984, the government imported around 160,000 metric tons (MT) of rice. In the following years, this rose to more than 200,000 MT and reached almost 300,000 MT during the fateful year when the "People Power" revolution broke out in 1986. Those importation levels were a major source of embarrassment for the Marcos Sr. administration, which had boasted of attaining rice self-sufficiency through its "Green Revolution" program.

Fast forward to four decades later and nearly 5 million MT of rice was imported by the country last year. The United States Department of Agriculture, which runs a relatively reliable forecasting model on agricultural exports and imports, estimates that the Philippines will import more than 5 million MTs this year.

The downward trend in agricultural productivity is unfortunately not confined to rice alone. The country was formerly a major exporter of sugar. It was, if we are to read Australian scholar Alfred McCoy's historical account of the Philippine sugar industry, the *deus ex machina* of local modern capitalist development. Ironically, the industry's embodiment of capitalist entrepreneurship is now just a ghost of itself. Now we import almost half a million MT of sugar yearly.

Similarly, the Philippines was a major coconut producer and exporter of coconut oil. Now, local coconut production lags behind Indonesia and Sri Lanka and our coconut oil export has been overtaken by palm oil in the global market. In fact, we even import half a million MT of palm oil yearly.

We are also importing around 2 million bangus (milkfish) fry from Indonesia when supposedly milkfish is the country's national fish. We are an archipelagic country with more than 7,000 islands, but we resort to massive importation of various fish species to plug supply deficits that are growing by the year.

Local corn production, meanwhile, can only meet 57-60 percent of total annual demand. We thus have to resort to massive importation of feed wheat, which is a poor substitute to corn as animal feed. Similarly, we import hundreds of thousands of tons of different vegetables per year from neighboring countries in Asia despite possessing the agro-climatic conditions to become a vegetable-surplus-producing country.

Our levels of meat importation are also growing every year despite having all the wherewithal to significantly increase production to meet the rising demand of fast-food chains. Recently, poultry producers complained about the massive entry of chicken imports that have depressed local prices and adversely affected local producers.

Our bananas, an agricultural export mainstay, are threatened by the continuing ravages of the "fusarium wilt" or Panama disease virus and the development of massive banana plantations in Cambodia and Laos funded by Chinese capital. The Philippines is slowly being dislodged at the apex of leading banana producers in the world by countries which never produced significant bananas for export before.

These are glaring proofs that Philippine agriculture is losing on all fronts, and yet we have not seen a sense of urgency among policymakers on how to turn around the unrelenting march to the abyss. What we are seeing are the same solutions applied in the past that are now being offered as remedies to address the underdevelopment of our agricultural sector.

- A focus on production without substantial result and, in the process, neglecting to address the problems along the agricultural value chain.
- An obsession with attaining rice self-sufficiency with little positive results, despite pouring an average of 60 percent of the Department of Agriculture's yearly budget and, expectedly, providing little support to the development of crops where the country has a comparative advantage.
- The dispersal of funding for agricultural infrastructure projects is determined by our legislators instead of focusing their provision in areas where the highest returns in terms of productivity and incomes can be achieved.
- Providing support to local government units (LGUs) who are more interested in securing commissions from agri-infrastructure-related projects and not the development of their agricultural sectors.
- Never-ending implementation of agrarian reform, resulting in miniscule and uneconomic farm sizes.
- Inadequate investments in research, development and extension despite studies showing that the highest return in agriculture is in research and technological innovations.
- An absence of a rigorous monitoring and evaluation system to measure progress made by units (i.e., DA and agri-related agencies and LGUs) involved in agricultural development.

Albert Einstein, one of the greatest scientists of all time, once remarked: "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result!" If we are to avoid being labelled as foolish, and more importantly reverse the lagging performance of the agricultural sector, drastic changes in our development strategy must be implemented in the manner that our Asian neighbors did several decades ago.

Part II of the column will discuss how the Chinese and Vietnamese turned around the performance of their agricultural sector into the path of high and sustained growth.

Rice funding

in the 2025 budget

The bad news for the rice sector this year is funding for the rice productivity program in the 2025 budget was cut by P10 billion. The National Rice Program's (NRP) budget of P30.8 billion last year was trimmed to around P21 billion this year.

The cut is being justified because the recently signed new Rice Tariffication Law provided that funding for the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) be raised to P30 billion yearly from P10 billion. The increase in the RCEF budget can then cover the reduction in the amount allotted for NRP.

The problem is that funding for RCEF comes from tariffs on imported rice. Whether the targeted P30 billion for RCEF can be attained is doubtful because the rice tariff has been cut to 15 percent from 35 percent.

Former agriculture undersecretary Leocadio Sebastian has observed that given that global rice prices are hovering around \$430-480/MT and with the lower tariff, the country will need to import 7-8 million MT to be able to generate P30 billion for the RCEF.

A colleague, meanwhile, noted that the new RTL provides that any RCEF deficit will have to be plugged by the government from other sources.

Sebastian argued that while rice tariff proceeds from 2024 might be able to meet the P30 billion funding requirement for 2025 (as tariffs were at 35 percent during the first half of the year), tariff collections may not be able to sustain funding in 2026.

He added that government would find it difficult to plug in the deficit due to a revenue shortage, a long list of activities under the unprogrammed appropriations and that P2 trillion will have to be borrowed to cover the budget deficit this year.

From the looks of it, agriculture — particularly the rice sector — is starting inauspiciously this year.

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<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/10/business/top-business/philippine-agriculture-in-crisis-1/2036291>

**REMATE:**

# Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act suportado ng grupo

January 9, 2025 12:44



MANILA, Philippines – Pinuri ng TRABAHO Partylist ang direktiba ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. sa Bureau of Customs (BOC) at Department of Agriculture (DA) na palakasin ang implementasyon ng Republic Act (RA) 12022 o ang Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, na itinuturing na isang hakbang patungo sa pagpapatibay ng sektor ng agrikultura at proteksyon sa mga manggagawa nito.

Ang nasabing batas, na ipinatupad noong 2023, ay naglalayong parusahan ang mga kaso ng ekonomikal na paninira at mga ilegal na gawain na nagdudulot ng pinsala sa industriya ng agrikultura.

Inaasahan na ito ay magiging mabisang panangga laban sa mga indibidwal o sindikato na nagsasamantala at nagpapasama ng kalakaran sa merkado.

Ayon kay Atty. Mitchell-David L. Espiritu, tagapagsalita ng TRABAHO Partylist, malaki ang magiging epekto ng RA 12022 sa kabuhayan ng mga magsasaka at manggagawa sa agrikultura na madalas na nagiging biktima ng pananamantala at ilegal na gawain. Itinuturing ito bilang isang malaking hakbang para sugpuin ang mga mapanlinlang na gawain na nagpapalala ng kalagayan ng lokal na agrikultura.

“Napakahalaga ng pagpapalakas sa sektor ng agrikultura upang matiyak ang food security at ang kapakanan ng mamamayan,” ayon kay Atty. Espiritu. “Ang RA 12022 ay isang mahalagang proteksyon laban sa mga tao o sindikato na nagsasamantala sa ating mga magsasaka at niloloko ang merkado para sa pansariling interes. Sa pamamagitan ng pagpaparusa sa mga gawaing ito ng sabotahiya, nagiging mas ligtas at makatarungan ang kapaligiran para sa mga manggagawa at lokal na prodyuser.”

Binanggit din ng partido na ang pag-apruba sa batas ay tumutugma sa kanilang mga prinsipyo na nagsusulong ng inklusibong pag-unlad ng ekonomiya, katarungang panlipunan, at proteksyon para sa mga manggagawa. Matagal nang nagsusulong ang TRABAHO Partylist ng mga polisiya na magtitiyak ng mas mataas na sahod, mas maginhawang kondisyon sa trabaho, at legal na proteksyon para sa mga manggagawa, partikular sa sektor ng agrikultura na patuloy na nahaharap sa mga hamon ng pabago-bagong merkado, pagsasamantala, at banta ng kalikasan.

Sa isang bansa kung saan pangunahing pinagkukunan ng kabuhayan ang agrikultura para sa milyon-milyong tao, naniniwala ang TRABAHO Partylist na makatutulong ang RA 12022 upang mapagaan ang pasanin ng mga mamimili at gawing mas abot-kaya ang mga pangunahing bilihan.

Bagamat pinuri ng TRABAHO Partylist ang pagpapatibay ng RA 12022, binigyang-diin nila na ang mga pangmatagalang solusyon sa sektor ng agrikultura ay nangangailangan ng mas malawakang reporma.

Kabilang dito ang pagpapabuti ng imprastruktura, pagpapalawak ng access sa teknolohiya, at mas pinahusay na suporta para sa mga maliliit na magsasaka na pinaka-vulnerable sa ekonomikal na paninira.

Sa mga darating na buwan, plano ng TRABAHO Partylist na magtulak pa ng mga legislative initiatives na naglalayong palakasin ang sektor ng agrikultura, pagandahin ang kondisyon sa paggawa, at tugunan ang mga sistematikong problema na humahadlang sa pag-unlad ng mga Filipino farmers at manggagawa. ***RNT***

<https://remate.ph/anti-agricultural-economic-sabotage-act-suportado-ng-grupo/>