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**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# 'Agyaman kami': House honors late DV Savellano of Ilocos Sur

BY [ELLSON QUISMORIO](#)

Jan 14, 2025 03:53 PM

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## AT A GLANCE

- The House of Representatives adopted during plenary session Monday, Jan. 13 a measure expressing its “profound condolences” to the family of the late agriculture undersecretary and former Ilocos Sur 1st district Rep. Deogracias Victor "DV" Savellano.



Ilocos Sur 1st district Rep. Deogracias Victor Savellano (Facebook)

The House of Representatives adopted during plenary session Monday, Jan. 13 a measure expressing its “profound condolences” to the family of the late agriculture undersecretary and former Ilocos Sur 1st district Rep. Deogracias Victor "DV" Savellano.

Adopted as the sense of the 307-plus strong lower chamber was House Resolution (HR) No. 2165.

The measure was introduced by House Speaker and Leyte 1st district Rep. Martin Romualdez, Senior Deputy Speaker Pampanga 3rd district Rep. Aurelio "Dong" Gonzales Jr., Zamboanga City 2nd district Rep. Mannix Dalipe, Senior Deputy Majority Leader Ilocos 1st district Rep. Sandro Marcos, Assistant Majority Leader Tingog Party-list Rep. Jude Acidre, and Committee on Accounts Chairperson Tingog Party-list Rep. Yedda Marie Romualdez.

Savellano, or simply “DV” to family, friends and colleagues, passed away last Jan. 7 at the age of 65. He was also a former House deputy speaker, governor, and vice governor of his province.

He is survived by his wife Geraldyn Schaer Bonnevie-Savellano; children Josephine Elizabeth Marie Savellano-Padua, Patricia Angelique Marie Savellano-Singson, Deogracias Jose Victorino Savellano, Virginia Nicole Savellano, and Rita Marie Savellano-Ocampo; and step children Danica Sotto-Pingris and Vittorio Mari Sotto.

In their resolution, Romualdez and his co-authors noted the “heartfelt tribute for a dear friend” President Marcos has made for the late Ilocos Sur congressman.

They said the President described Savellano as “someone whose heart always belonged to the people he served, and his profound farewell message ended with ‘Agyaman kami kadagiti amin a naipaay a tulong ken serbisyom, apo DV (We are thankful for all the help and service you have given, Sir DV)”.

“Honorable Savellano’s unfaltering advocacy for the promotion of agricultural development, the upliftment of the lives of farmers, and commitment in the preservation of local culture epitomize the real essence of an excellent public servant,” they said.

DV was born on Nov. 25, 1959 in Cabugao, Ilocos Sur to parents, Victorino Ancheta Savellano and Virginia Vister Barbers-Savellano.

The resolution’s authors said the late lawmaker’s political career and public service started when he was elected and served as vice mayor Cabugao, Ilocos Sur from 1981 to 1986.

He was later voted senior board member in 1988; vice governor from 1988 to 2001, 2004 to 2007 and 2010 to 2016; from 2001 to 2004, and 2007 to 2010; and representative of the first legislative district during the 17th Congress from 2016 to 2019 and 18th Congress from 2019 to 2022.

In 2023, he was appointed as undersecretary of the Department of Agriculture (DA) for livestock, oversight official of the National Tobacco Administration and DA representative to the Philippine Bamboo Industry Development Council.

In the House, Savellano also served as chairperson of the Committee on North Luzon Growth Quadrangle and vice chairperson of the Committee on Agrarian Reform. He was actively involved with stakeholders and administrators of the National Tobacco Administration and provided invaluable inputs in the formulation of the Sustainable Tobacco Enhancement Program in 2020 for the upliftment of the lives of tobacco farmers.

He authored several bills and laws for the promotion of cultural heritage, trade, tourism, and health, among others, including Republic Act (RA) No. 11915, otherwise known as the “National Music Competitions for Young Artists Act”; RA No.11904, otherwise known as the “Philippine Creative Industries Development Act”; RA No.11900, entitled “An Act Regulating the Importation, Manufacture, Sale, Packaging, Distribution, Use, and Communication of Vaporized Nicotine and Non-Nicotine Products, and Novel Tobacco Products”;

RA No.11865, entitled “An Act Increasing the Bed Capacity of Ilocos Sur District Hospital-Magsingal in the Municipality of Magsingal, Province of Ilocos Sur from Twenty-Five (25) Beds to One Hundred (100) Beds, and Appropriating Funds Therefor”; RA No.11760, entitled “An Act Creating an Extension Office of the Maritime Industry Authority in Vigan, Ilocos Sur, and Appropriating Funds Therefor”;

RA No.11645, entitled “An Act Establishing a Heritage Zone Within the Municipality of San Vicente, Province of Ilocos Sur”; RA No.11463, otherwise known as the “Malasakit Centers Act”; RA No.11392, otherwise known as the “National Performing Arts Companies Act”; RA No.11333, otherwise known as the “National Museum of the Philippines Act”; RA No.11310, entitled “An Act Institutionalizing the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps)”; and RA No.11291, otherwise known as the “Magna Carta of the Poor.”

As governor of his province, Savellano initiated the Kabsat Caravan, a prosperity program which gave away free farm machineries and inputs to all farmers in Ilocos Sur.

He finished his primary and secondary education at Claret School in Quezon City, and earned his Bachelor of Arts in Economics degree from the University of the Philippines and his Master’s degree in International Business Administration from Monterey Institute of International Studies in California, United States of America.



Ilocos Sur 1st district Rep. Deogracias Victor Savellano (Facebook)

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<https://mb.com.ph/2025/1/14/agyaman-kami-house-honors-late-dv-savellano>

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# **Negros Occidental sustains P128.6-M agriculture damage from Kanlaon**

**BY [GLAZYL MASCULINO](#)**

Jan 14, 2025 04:41 PM

BACOLOD CITY – The Office of the Provincial Agriculturist reported P128.6 million in agriculture damage in 22 barangays in three municipalities in Negros Occidental due to Kanlaon Volcano.



**VEGETABLES sourced from Canlaon City, Negros Oriental are sold during market day in E.B. Magalona, Negros Occidental. (Glazyl Masculino)**



Data submitted to Gov. Eugenio Jose Lacson said that as of Jan. 6, rice incurred P3,059,362.02 in damage, corn, P503,352.50; P124,931,974 in high-value commercial crops, and fisheries, P130,005.

A total of 1,382 farmers suffered losses, affecting 580.87 hectares of land, and 14 fisherfolk were affected in six barangays.

Farms planted to rice were affected in Barangays Binubuhan, Mailum, Ma-ao, Don Jorge Araneta, Ilijan, and Atipuluan in Bago City; Barangays Yubo and Ara-al in La Carlota City; and Barangay Sag-ang in La Castellana town.

Corn fields were affected in Barangays Atipuluan and Ma-ao in Bago City; and Barangays Sag-ang, Biak na Bato, and Cabagnaan in La Castellana.

High-value crops in Barangays Mailum, Don Jorge Araneta, Ma-ao, and Ilijan in Bago City; Barangays Yubo and Ara-al in La Carlota City, and Barangays Masulog and Sag-ang in La Castellana were affected.

<https://mb.com.ph/2025/1/14/negros-occidental-sustains-p128-6-m-agriculture-damage-from-kanlaon>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Beware of rice shortage when gov't sets price cap



**GOTCHA - Jarius Bondoc - The Philippine Star**

January 15, 2025 | 12:00am

Price control on rice is dangerous.

Once the Department of Agriculture sets a maximum suggested retail price starting Monday, Jan. 20, the staple will vanish from market stalls. Retailers will stop selling rather than lose money.

Secretary Francis Tiu Laurel's problem will worsen into rice shortage.

Shortage will incite rampage. Recall the looting in Rizal after Superstorm Ondoy in 2009, and in Leyte after Super Typhoon Yolanda in 2014. Starving folk know no law.

Tiu Laurel finds unacceptable present rates of P62-P64 a kilo: "There should be no P60 per kilo of imported rice. It's profiteering."

Under the new Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, price gouging, smuggling, hoarding are non-bailable life-term offenses. Fine is five times the value of products involved.

Tiu Laurel's maximum suggested retail price will be P58 per kilo of imported stock.

He seems to anticipate doomsday, and so confusedly says, "It's not a suggestion, it's not a price cap either."

That there's a rice price cartel is certain. Agri-sector Rep. Nicanor Briones says that less than 10 importers-wholesalers control three-fourths of supply.

The House Murang Pagkain Supercommittee recently invited seven importers, wholesalers, warehousemen, millers and dealers. "Three of the seven are all of the above and thus dictate rates," Briones laments.



### **Tiu Laurel on market inspection**

#### **PNA photo**

Federation of Free Farmers chairman Leonardo Montemayor cautions Tiu Laurel against going after market vendors. “There are too many of them, they cannot cartelize retail rates,” adds his brother, FFF national manager Raul Montemayor.

DA has no exact count. But before the 2019 Rice Tariffication Law, the National Food Authority required all grains businesses to register: wholesalers, dealers, warehousemen, truckers, millers, retailers. More than half of the 75,000 who signed up were market retailers.

Importers-wholesalers-dealers sell stocks to retailers at high rates. The latter make only P2-P5 per kilo after deducting stall rent and labor costs.

Why can't Tiu Laurel go after the true cartelists – the few that Briones points to? Is it because he knows that high Customs officials formed the cartel and are protected by a VIP – Veritable Influence Peddler?

President Bongbong Marcos should waste no more time convening the Council that he heads under the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act. Four months since he signed it, his subalterns are still drafting the implementing rules.

The Council consists of Secretaries or Usuces of Agriculture, Justice, Finance, Interior and Local Government, Transportation, Trade and Industry, Anti-Money Laundering Council and Philippine Competition Commission.

BBM still relies on the 2016 Anti-Agricultural Smuggling Act. Under that law, Customs must go after cartelists. But what if no less than BBM's Customs appointees are accomplices of the smugglers, hoarders, price manipulators?

Cartelists undervalue and under-declare rice imports.

Customs issues weekly reference rates based on grain quality: five-, ten-, 15- or 25-percent broken. Cartelists fake import values lower than Customs' reference rates, and so pay only 15-percent import duty instead of the normal 35 percent.

In case the true import values are higher, cartelists declare only half of the volume, again in order to avail of lower tariff – “palubog” or hidden in Customs lingo.

The Montemayors propose a maximum suggested imported rice profit. That way, DA can force importers and wholesalers to add on only P5 per kilo to their million-ton shipments. Market vendors can add P8 per kilo.

At the present import rate of P32-P45 per kilo, consumers will buy at only P45-P58.

\* \* \*

The New NAIA Infra Corp. has unearthed another festering racket at the Manila International Airport. A passenger brought to NNIC chairman Ramon Ang's attention the plight of baggage porters under a longtime private contractor.

Forced on the porters by their boss is a daily quota of 100 suitcases each, for which they charge passengers \$1 apiece. If they fail to meet the target, they are made to pay the shortfall out of their own pocket. Yet they receive less than minimum wage.

For fear of losing their jobs, porters start work as early as 6 a.m., logging heavy loads for 13 hours. They have no overtime pay.

The exploitation has been going on for more than a decade. In 2014 newspapers reported the heavy quota of 45 bags a day, when porters usually averaged only 30.

The private contractor more than tripled the quota in 2022, when he last got a contract extension from MIA authority. NNIC, which took over MIA operations only four months ago, said it is "taking the complaint seriously. These porters are not directly employed by us. But as the airport operator, we have a responsibility to maintain standards and ensure that all service providers treat their employees fairly, respect their rights and comply with labor laws."

The portage contractor was involved in the overpriced, substandard construction of NAIA Terminal 3. Past Malacañang appointees at MIA granted him cheap lease of hectares of cargo-handling space, which he subleases at high rates. Another racket: MIA holds the land title to the airport complex. But courts have ordered the closure of two inner gates based on land claim of certain individuals.

The closures have denied cargo handlers direct access to the cargo area. One company beside the area enjoys virtual monopoly.

Cargo business losses will affect NNIC, whose income and huge payments to MIAA depend on briskness of all airport businesses.

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Catch Sapol radio show, Saturdays, 8 to 10 a.m., dwIZ (882-AM).

Follow me on Facebook: <https://tinyurl.com/Jarius-Bondoc>

<https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2025/01/15/2414212/beware-rice-shortage-when-govt-sets-price-cap>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Fast-track rice programs, DA told

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

January 15, 2025 | 12:00am



Rice retailers manage their stalls at Marikina Public Market on January 7, 2025.

STAR / Michael Varcas

MANILA, Philippines — Programs aimed at boosting rice farmers’ productivity should be accelerated by government agencies, President Marcos said, as cited by the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Marcos issued the directive at a recent meeting with DA and budget officials, Agriculture Assistant Secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa said yesterday.

“The primary directive of the President is to immediately release the fund to our rice farmers,” De Mesa said.

The DA, he said, hopes the P10-billion budget allocated for the rice competitiveness enhancement fund (RCEF) under the 2025 national budget will be released earlier than usual.

The agency will also cooperate with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) and Bureau of Customs (BOC) to accelerate the release of rice tariffs collected last year.

As per the extended RCEF, the earmarked fund now has a guaranteed allocation of P30 billion.

“We hope the remaining P20 billion will be given early so that we can bankroll other components (of RCEF), such as solar-powered irrigation and financial assistance,” De Mesa said.

The DA is coordinating with its regional field offices to quickly utilize the regular budget for its national rice program, he noted.

Earlier utilization of the budget and release of interventions will help farmers prepare for the next planting season, he said.

The move would also adjust their planting calendar to avoid destructive weather conditions during the harvest period, De Mesa said.

The DA is optimistic that domestic palay output this year will return to 20 million metric tons on the back of more favorable weather conditions and intensified government interventions.

Release of the P10-billion fund for the RCEF will be processed by the DBM as soon as the DA issues guidelines in accordance with Marcos’ veto message, Budget Undersecretary Goddes Hope Libiran told The STAR.

The P10-billion RCEF budget has been tagged as conditional implementation.

Republic Act 12078 extended the life of RCEF until 2031 and increased its annual appropriation to P30 billion from P10 billion.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/01/15/2414271/fast-track-rice-programs-da-told>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Philippines slips to 4th biggest banana exporter in 2024

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

January 15, 2025 | 12:00am



The Philippines may have fallen to fourth place in the global banana export rankings last year as production woes persisted and worsened, reversing the country's recovery in 2023, according to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

STAR / File

MANILA, Philippines — Top three, no more?

The Philippines may have fallen to fourth place in the global banana export rankings last year as production woes persisted and worsened, reversing the country's recovery in 2023, according to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The ranking is a notch lower than the third spot the country tallied in 2023, based on the preliminary report released by the FAO.

The FAO estimated that the Philippines exported 2.28 million metric tons of bananas last year, three percent lower than the 2.35 million MT shipped in 2023.

The Philippines is now ranked behind Guatemala and Colombia, which are estimated to have exported a total of 2.59 million MT and 2.31 million MT, respectively, last year.

Ecuador remained as the world's largest banana exporter last year with 5.76 million MT, according to the FAO.

This now marks the second straight year the Philippines drops in the world banana export rankings.

Last year, the country was dislodged by Guatemala as the second-largest exporter of the prized yellow fruit.

The FAO attributed the drop in the Philippine banana exports to worsening spread of Panama disease tropical race 4 in domestic farms.

The country's estimated banana exports last year was also 29 percent lower than its average export volume of 3.22 million MT from 2018 to 2022, based on FAO data.

Citing a local industry group, FAO said only 51,000 hectares out of the 89,000 hectares of banana cultivation remain operational.

The FAO also cited rising geopolitical tensions in the West Philippine Sea as one of the factors affecting the country's banana exports, which was earlier reported by The STAR.

Banana imports by China and Japan from the Philippines posted declines last year due to domestic supply shortfall, according to the FAO.

"Preliminary monthly trade data show that Chinese imports of Filipino bananas dropped by 39 percent year-on-year over the first nine months of 2024," it said.

"Available monthly trade data for the first seven months of the year accordingly show year-on-year declines in import quantities into Japan from the Philippines by (four) percent," it added.

The STAR earlier reported that the government and banana industry stakeholders are looking at legislating a plan that will not just revitalize the country's ailing banana sector but also salvage the country's sagging market share abroad.

International trade data showed that the Philippines has been losing substantial market share in its key Asian markets to not just South American producers but also to neighboring Asian countries.

The Philippines lost nearly 11 percentage points of banana market share in South Korea from January to August 2024 compared to the previous year's level.

The Philippines also lost almost 13 percentage points of market share in China from January to July 2024 versus the same seven-month period the prior year.

With the latest figures, the country's share in South Korea's banana market is now down to 60 percent, while in China it currently accounts for 24.5 percent.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2025/01/15/2414180/philippines-slips-4th-biggest-banana-exporter-2024>



**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# House probe of surge in tomato prices pushed

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 05:29 AM January 15, 2025



Inquirer photo/Grig C. Montegrando

MANILA, Philippines — A legislator is calling for a congressional inquiry into the “sudden and drastic” increase in tomato prices, which has reportedly reached P360 per kilogram in Metro Manila.

Agri Rep. Wilbert Lee filed House Resolution No. 2158, which would task a House committee to determine the possible role of price manipulators, hoarders and cartels in the “artificial tomato crisis.”

“There is a need to take decisive action and measures from the government to protect our consumers as well as the livelihood of Filipino farmers through stricter and serious enforcement of laws, which the inquiry must ascertain and realize,” Lee said.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) earlier reported that tomatoes were being sold from P200 per kilogram to P360 per kilogram in markets in Metro Manila. It attributed the hike to a shortage in local supply due to the series of typhoons that hit parts of the country last year. —*Jeannette I. Andrade*

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2024735/house-probe-of-surge-in-tomato-prices-pushed>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# PH slips to No. 4 in banana export ranking

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

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 02:10 AM January 15, 2025



Photo by Andrew Tadalán/PDI photo

The Philippines dropped by one notch to fourth place among the world's top global banana exporters in 2024 as shipments fell by 3 percent due to inclement weather and a plant disease outbreak.

In a report, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said the country's ranking as banana producer had fallen from third in 2023 to fourth last year, trailing behind Ecuador, Guatemala and Colombia.

However, the Philippines remains the leading banana exporter in Asia.

In 2024, the country's volume was even lower than the 3.216 million tons recorded between 2018 and 2022.

Deliveries from the archipelago declined to 2.278 million tons in 2024, down from 2.35 million tons a year prior. The FAO noted that it continued to be affected by the spread of Banana Fusarium Wilt Tropical Race 4 (TR4) disease.

Citing information from the Pilipino Banana Growers and Exporters Association, the report said only 51,000 out of the original 89 000 hectares of land available for banana cultivation in Mindanao, the country's key banana-producing region, continued to be productive, with the rest infected by TR4 fusarium in the soil.

The group "further reported that rising geopolitical tensions in the South China Sea additionally affected some exports of Philippine bananas," it said.

Danilo Fausto, president of the Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc., said that aside from TR4, the sector was also affected by rainfall, flooding, drought and hurricane, alongside high input costs and logistical issues.

When asked whether the country could recover from these challenges, Fausto said, "I'm afraid we cannot show optimism until we find scientific solutions and improved technology approaches to food production."

TR4 is a deadly plant disease caused by a fungus that attacks the roots of banana plants.

"The fungus affects many varieties including cavendish bananas, which provide around half of global banana supply and almost all of the bananas exported," the FAO said.

The country's banana exports mirrored the global banana trade, which was estimated to have dropped by 1 percent to 19.1 million tons in 2024, affected by adverse weather conditions and the prevalence of plant pests and diseases.

"Higher supplies were reported from Colombia, India and Vietnam during the first eight months of the year, where production growth was seen on the back of higher investments in production expansion and favorable climatic conditions," the FAO said.

"Conversely, adverse temperatures, excessive rainfall and the passing of tropical storms reduced supplies available for export from Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala and Mexico," it added.

Furthermore, the FAO said the devastating spread of TR4 in the Philippines and its alarming presence in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Peru had caused further production losses as well as financial strain from the substantial costs associated with disease prevention.

<https://business.inquirer.net/501321/ph-slips-to-no-4-in-banana-export-ranking>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Ex-BFAR execs post bail for VMS-related graft raps

By: [Kurt Dela Peña](#) - Content Researcher Writer / [@inquirerdotnet](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 11:21 AM January 14, 2025



VMS composite image from INQUIRER file photos

MANILA, Philippines — Two former executives of the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR) posted bail for four counts of graft charges filed against them by the Office of the Ombudsman in connection with a controversial P2-billion vessel monitoring system (VMS) project in 2018.

In an order by Branch 141 of the Antipolo City Regional Trial Court, former agriculture undersecretary and BFAR national director Eduardo Gongona and Demosthenes Escoto, who also served as BFAR national director, each paid a cash bond worth P360,000 on Jan. 7, 2025, a day after they were ordered arrested by the court.

Their arraignment and pre-trial have been set on Jan. 22 and Feb. 26 at 1:30 pm.

Looking back, a complaint was filed in 2022 by lawyer James Mier Victoriano on alleged irregularities in the procurement of VMS transreceivers for BFAR's Integrated Marine

Environment Monitoring System (IMEMS) Project Phase II. The contract was worth P2.09 billion and awarded to the British company SRT Marine Systems Solutions Ltd.

#### ELECTRONIC REPORTING SYSTEM



INQ | SOURCE: FAO NO 266

GRAPHIC: Ed Lustan/INQUIRER.net

Both Gongona and Escoto have been charged with two counts of violation of Section 3(e) of Republic Act (RA) 3019, or the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act, as well as one count each of violation of Sections 3(g) and 3(j) of the same law, for their alleged involvement in the “improper awarding” of the contract to the British company.

Simon Tucker, chief executive officer of the solutions provider, is a co-accused, too.

### **Disadvantageous to gov’t**

Victoriano’s complaint in 2022 asked the Ombudsman to charge Gongona, Escoto, Tucker, former agriculture assistant secretary Hansel Didulo, and SRT Marine Systems Solutions Ltd. chief financial officer Richard Hurd with violations of RA 3019, as well as the Government Procurement Reform Act.

This, as the initial invitation to bid in 2017 for the IMEMS Project Phase II stated that the project was to be funded by the French Republic and through a loan agreement. The initial invitation to bid had an Approved Budget for the Contract (ABC) of P1.6 billion.

Victoriano said the loan agreement required that the bidder must be either a French national or possess a joint venture agreement with a French national, and that the goods must be of French origin. However, “despite the requirement, SRT participated in the bid and was declared by DA-BFAR to be eligible and eventually won the bid.”

Victoriano said it was clear that DA-BFAR did not comply with the conditions provided in the initial invitation to bid and would have continued with the award if not for the disapproval by the French government, which resulted in the cancellation of the loan agreement.

The procurement proceeded with the use of local funding.

Back in October 2018, BFAR conducted the last bidding with an ABC of P2.09 billion. SRT Marine Systems Solutions Ltd. was eventually awarded the contract to equip fishing vessels with VMS transceivers, which are seen to help in protecting marine resources by keeping track of commercial fishing vessels.

### PH LOSSES FROM ILLEGAL FISHING



GRAPHIC: Ed Lustan/INQUIRER.net

The project’s scope eventually expanded to include 5,000 VMS transceivers for commercial vessels and satellite service subscriptions, significantly increasing the

government's obligations, which was initially set at only 3,736. This made the contract "disadvantageous to the government."

The complaints against Didulo and Hurd were dismissed for lack of evidence.

The Ombudsman affirmed its February 2024 decision by denying in October 2024 the motions for reconsideration filed by the respondents. Escoto has already been dismissed from government service by the Ombudsman after being found guilty of grave misconduct in relation to the same transaction.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2024466/ex-bfar-execs-post-bail-for-vms-related-graft-raps>



**BUSINESS WORLD:**

# Disease dampens 2024 PHL banana exports

January 14, 2025 | 9:01 pm



[ANFLOCOR.COM/TADECO](https://ANFLOCOR.COM/TADECO)

PHILIPPINE banana exports fell 2.97% in 2024, with the industry currently dealing with Fusarium wilt, also known as Panama disease, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said.

In its Banana Market Review, the FAO said that preliminary data indicate that exports of Philippine bananas dropped to 2.28 million metric tons (MMT) in 2024.

The Philippines has ceded its position as the third-leading banana exporter in 2023 and is now fourth.

Fusarium wilt is a soil-borne fungal disease that blocks the banana plant's vascular system and deprives it of minerals, nutrients, and moisture. Affected plants turn yellow and die.

The Tropical Race 4 (TR4) strain of fusarium wilt was first detected in Davao City in 2009 and continues to threaten the Cavendish banana, the main export variety.

“Supplies from the Philippines, the main exporter from the region, reportedly continue to be affected by the spread of TR4,” the FAO added.

The United Nations agency said that the spread of the disease has continued to cause production losses, with disease containment efforts also adding to the industry's financial burdens.

“Producers faced added difficulty stemming from unfavorable exchange rates amid the depreciation of the dollar in the first half of (2024),” the FAO added.

Citing the Pilipino Banana Growers and Exporters Association, it added that about 51,000 hectares out of the 89,000 hectares of land available for banana cultivation continued to be operational amid the spread of TR4.

The group had also said that the rising geopolitical tensions in the South China Sea additionally affected some exports of Philippine bananas.

Manila and Beijing have repeatedly clashed in the disputed waterway, with both sides accusing each other of raising tensions.

China claims over 80% of the waterway, but the Permanent Court of Arbitration voided its claim in 2016, which Beijing rejects.

Despite tensions China remained among the Philippines' top Cavendish banana markets.

Chinese imports of Philippine bananas dropped 39% year on year over the first nine months of 2024.

Additionally, the FAO said global banana exports declined 1% to 19.1 MMT.

“Developments in the first half of 2024 showed strongly diverging trends among global banana exporting countries, with most suppliers affected by declines, in several cases even at double-digit rates, and only a few seeing large increases,” it added. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/01/14/646712/disease-dampens-2024-phl-banana-exports/>

**REMATE:**

# Mga magsasaka sa Ilocos nagpasaklolo sa water shortage

January 14, 2025 18:12



MANILA, Philippines – Humingi ng tulong ang isang farmers’ association na naka-base sa San Nicolas, Ilocos Norte, sa Sangguniang Panlalawigan (SP or Provincial Board) nitong Lunes, Enero 13 para tugunan ang water shortage.

Sa isang public dialogue na isinagawa sa session hall, sinabi ni group president Willy Mahor na ang daloy ng tubig sa Bonga Pump 2 water intake ay apektado ng nagpapatuloy na quarry operation at maaaring makaapekto sa paparating na cropping season.

Ang grupo ang isa sa tatlo sa probinsya na pumasok sa rice contract farming program sa National Irrigation Administration (NIA) para magproduce ng bigas sa mas mababang production cost at ibenta ito sa mga consumers ng P29 kada kilo.

Mayroon itong coverage area na 400 ektarya ng irrigated rice field.

Kung ang water shortage ay hindi umano agad na matutugunan, maaapektuhan nito ang programa at hindi maaabot ng mga magsasaka ang target yield na limang tonelada kada ektarya.

Siniguro naman ni Rafael Medina, chairperson ong Committee on Environment, ang mga magsasaka na resolbahin ng SP ang isyu sa quarry operator.

“We have talked to the quarry operator and he expressed his willingness to cooperate with the irrigators association,” aniya.

Maaaring bawiin ang permit ng quarry operator kung hindi nito susundin ang hirit ng mga apektadong magsasaka.

Sa ngayon ay magsasagawa ng inspeksyon ang Provincial Quarry Office sa quarry site at sisiguruhin na hindi maaantala ang pagdaloy ng tubig patungo sa Bonga Pump 2. *RNT/JGC*

<https://remate.ph/mga-magsasaka-sa-ilocos-nagpasaklolo-sa-water-shortage/>

**REMATE:**

## **2 ex-BFAR officials, nagpiyansa sa 4 graft cases sa P2-B VMS project anomaly**

January 14, 2025 08:57



MANILA, Philippines – Nagpiyansa ang dalawang dating mataas na opisyal ng Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR) para sa apat na kaso ng graft na isinampa laban sa kanila ng Office of the Ombudsman kaugnay ng umano’y iregularidad sa P2-bilyong vessel monitoring system (VMS) project noong 2018.

Naglagak ng tig-P360,000 na piyansa sina dating DA Undersecretary for Fisheries at BFAR National Director Eduardo B. Gongona at dating BFAR National Director Demosthenes R. Escoto sa Antipolo City Regional Trial Court (RTC) kapalit ng pansamantala nilang kalayaan.

Itinakda ng korte ang kanilang arraignment sa Enero 22 at ang pre-trial sa Pebrero 26.

Kasama sina Gongona at Escoto sa kinasuhan ng dalawang paglabag sa Section 3(e) ng Republic Act (RA) No. 3019 o “Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act”, at tig-isang paglabag sa Sections 3(g) at 3(j) ng parehong batas dahil sa umano’y maling paggawad ng kontrata sa isang British company.

Pinangalanan ding akusado sa kaso si Simon Tucker, CEO ng UK-based SRT Marine Systems Solutions Ltd (SRT-UK). Nagpiyansa sina Gongona at Escoto noong Enero 6, isang araw matapos maglabas ng arrest warrants ang Antipolo RTC laban sa kanila.

Ang mga kaso ay orihinal na isinampa sa Quezon City RTC noong Disyembre 3 ngunit inilipat sa Antipolo RTC dahil sa jurisdiction issue.

Nagmula ang mga kasong graft sa reklamong inihain ni Atty. James Mier Victoriano laban kina Gongona, Escoto, Tucker, dating DA Assistant Secretary Hansel Didulo, at Chief Financial Officer ng SRT-UK na si Richard Hurd.

Ayon sa reklamo, nilabag nila ang RA 3019 at ang Government Procurement Reform Act (RA 9184). Gayunpaman, ibinasura ng Ombudsman ang mga kaso laban kina Didulo at Hurd dahil sa kakulangan ng ebidensya at walang nakitang paglabag sa RA 9184 ang sinuman sa mga akusado.

Batay sa records, ang VMS project na orihinal na nagkakahalaga ng P1.6 bilyon ay popondohan sana ng pautang mula sa French government. Kinakailangang French ang sinumang bidder o bahagi siya ng isang joint venture kasama ang isang French entity.

Noong 2017, nanalo ang SRT-France, subsidiary ng SRT-UK, sa bidding ngunit na-disqualify ito ng pamahalaan ng France dahil sa British ang nagmamay-ari rito at sa kawalan ng operational facilities sa France. Dahil dito, natigil ang loan agreement.

Noong 2018, inilipat sa lokal na pondo ang proyekto at itinaas ang budget nito sa P2.09 bilyon. Sa parehong taon, iginawad ang kontrata sa SRT-UK. Pinalawak din ang saklaw ng proyekto mula sa orihinal na 3,736 VMS transceivers ay naging 5,000 na ito, at isinama ang satellite service subscriptions, na nagdulot ng karagdagang gastos sa gobyerno.

Sa resolusyong inilabas noong Pebrero 5, 2024, sinabi ng Ombudsman na sina Gongona, Escoto, at Tucker ay nagkutsabahan upang igawad ang kontrata sa SRT-UK sa paraang nakapinsala sa gobyerno.

“Pinangunahan nila ang sunod-sunod na mga kahina-hinalang hakbang na humantong sa paggawad ng paborableng kontrata sa SRT-UK,” ayon sa Ombudsman.

Dagdag pa nito, napilitan ang gobyerno na bilhin ang 5,000 VMS transceivers sa halip na 3,736 lamang, na nagresulta sa isang lusing-lusing kontrata.

Ang proyekto, na sinimulan noong Disyembre 4, 2018, ay nakatakhang magtapos noong Disyembre 4, 2021, ngunit ngayon ay itinuturing nang expired.

Pinanindigan ng Ombudsman ang desisyon nito noong Pebrero 2024 sa pamamagitan ng pagtanggap sa mga mosyon na inihain ng mga akusado sa kautusang nilagdaan ni Ombudsman Samuel Martires noong Oktubre 2024.

Tinanggal na sa serbisyo si Escoto ng Ombudsman matapos mapatunayang guilty sa grave misconduct kaugnay ng parehong transaksyon.

Bukod dito, naharap din si Escoto sa kasong contempt of court dahil sa pagpapatupad ng Fisheries Administrative Order (FAO) No. 266 sa kabila ng permanent injunction mula sa Malabon RTC.

Idineklara ng Malabon court na labag sa Saligang Batas ang FAO 266, na nag-aatas ng sistema sa pagsubaybay sa mga komersyal na sasakyang pandagat. *RNT*

<https://remate.ph/2-ex-bfar-officials-nagpiyansa-sa-4-graft-cases-sa-p2-b-vms-project-anomaly/>

**ABANTE:**

# ‘Pinas matumal order, presyo ng bigas sa abroad bumaba

Abante News

- **January 14, 2025**



Bumaba na ang presyo ng bigas mula Vietnam ng \$59 per ton sa \$449 per ton noong nakaraang linggo mula sa \$650 per ton noong Enero 2024 dahil kumonti ang order ng Pilipinas, ayon sa United States Department of Agriculture.

“Vietnamese quotes decreased \$59/ton to \$449/ton reflecting weaker demand from its core market, the Philippines,” sabi ng USDA.

Ang Pilipinas ang top importer ng rice sa mundo dahil lumalaki ang populasyon nito at lumiliit ang lupang tinatamnan ng palay. Noong 2024, lumampas na ng 4 milyong tonelada ang inangkat na bigas ng Pilipinas.

Pati presyo ng Thai rice, na isa rin sa mga binibili ng Pilipinas, ay bumaba ng \$20 sa \$494/ton dahil kumonti rin ang mga nakukuha nitong orders at naghihintay pa ang mga bibili ng bagong ani.

Nakikita ng Estados Unidos na bababa ang produksiyon ng bigas ngayong taon sa mundo dahil mas kaunti ang nakikita nitong aanihin ng China at Bangladesh. –(Eileen Mencias)

<https://www.abante.com.ph/2025/01/14/pinas-matumal-order-presyo-ng-bigas-sa-abroad-bumaba/>



**MANILA STANDARD:**

# Gov't asked to restore 35% tariff on rice imports to help farmers

By Othel V. Campos

January 14, 2025, 8:40 pm

The Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) asked the government to reinstate the 35-percent tariff on rice imports, claiming that the tariff reduction to 15 percent under Executive Order 62 benefited importers and wholesalers while harming farmers by driving down farmgate prices.

An FFF analysis of Bureau of Customs (BoC) data on rice imports revealed that average import prices dropped by about P9 per kilogram between July and December 2024 compared to the first half of the year.

The decline was attributed to the tariff reduction, which contributed roughly P6 of the decrease, and a modest softening of international rice prices, accounting for around P3 per kilogram, the group said.

Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) data showed that retail prices for well-milled rice decreased by only P2 per kilogram during the same period.

The FFF pointed said importers and wholesalers retained most of the P7-per-kilo savings, while retailers saw minimal trading margin growth of just P0.30 per kilogram.

The report claimed that retailers were largely responsible for the persistently high rice prices.

The FFF estimates that if the full savings from tariff cuts were passed on to consumers, retail prices could drop significantly.

Rice with 5-percent broken grains could be sold for P50 per kilogram, down from P54, while regular-milled rice with 25-percent broken grains could retail at P45 per kilogram, or P5 lower than its current level of P50.

The reductions would still allow importers, wholesalers and retailers to maintain reasonable profit margins, the FFF said.

The FFF said foregone customs revenues from the tariff cuts amounted to P14.4 billion as of December 2024, reducing funds earmarked for palay farmers under the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).

“If the government cannot discipline the importers and wholesalers, it might as well restore the tariff rates to 35 percent. Retail prices should not increase because we will just be removing the extraordinary profits that the middlemen have pocketed,” said FFF national manager Raul Montemayor.

<https://manilastandard.net/business/314546866/govt-asked-to-restore-35-tariff-on-rice-imports-to-help-farmers.html>

**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# Farmers' group wants rice tariff back at 35%

**By Giselle P. Jordan**

**January 15, 2025**

THE Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) wants the tariff on rice imports restored to its old rate, arguing that its reduction to 15 percent from the previous 35 percent has not helped consumers, but instead only benefited rice importers and wholesalers.

On June 20, 2024, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. issued Executive Order 62 modifying the import duty rates of various commodities, including rice, which was expected to pull down the staple's retail prices. The FFF said its analysis, indeed, showed average rice import prices in the second half of 2024 dropped by P9 per kilogram (kg) compared to the first half. The group cited the tax reduction, plus international prices declining by P3/kg.

Yet retail prices of well-milled rice fell by only P2/kg in the same period. Retailers said their profit margins grew by just P0.30/kg — which meant that, from the P9 import price decrease, P7 went to importers and wholesalers.

The FFF reasoned out that if importers would pass on the savings to consumers, the retail price of 5-percent broken rice could go down to P50 from the current P45. Regular-milled, or 25-percent broken rice, could also be sold at P45/kg, or P5 lower than the current P50.

This pricing would still allow importers, wholesalers and retailers to have profitable margins, the FFF said.

"If the government cannot discipline importers and wholesalers, it might as well restore the tariff rates to 35 percent. Retail prices should not increase because we will just be removing the extraordinary profits that middlemen have pocketed," FFF national manager Raul Montemayor said.

He also pointed out there might be a surplus of imported rice in the harvest season in 2025. This will discourage local farmers from increasing their production in the next planting seasons.

The excess supply of imported rice has likewise made local traders to buy palay (unmilled rice) from local farmers at cheaper prices.

The 200,000-strong trade union said it could not understand why the government is allowing this to happen, despite the lowered tariffs proving to be ineffective in bringing down rice prices.

Reduced tariffs also meant reduced funding for farmers under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund, the group pointed out.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/15/business/top-business/farmers-group-wants-rice-tariff-back-at-35/2038800>

**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# Ilocos granted P3.40B for agriculture projects

**By Giselle P. Jordan**

**January 15, 2025**

THE Ilocos Region (Region 1) has been granted P3.4 billion worth of agri-fishery subprojects from the Philippine Rural Development Project (PRDP) ScaleUp, the Department of Agriculture (DA) reported.

The PRDP ScaleUp is one of the DA's flagship programs designed to address gaps in the commodity value chains by improving the efficiency of the food supply chain toward greater connectivity, mobility, accessibility, availability and affordability of food in the market.

The status of the subproject proposals were presented in a recent meeting with consultants and members of the PRDP Regional Project Coordination Office 1 (PRDP RPCO 1).

Three subprojects are currently in construction. One is the San Jose multipurpose warehouse with a solar dryer in Vintar, Ilocos Norte. Two provincial warehouses with multipurpose drying pavements are being built in Bugallon and Santa Barbara in Pangasinan.

Four more subprojects are in the procurement stage while 10 others are under preparation.

Two are in progress. One is waiting for the release of a No Objection Letter 2, and the other is in the material sampling and quality control stage.

Since 2023, Ilocos has developed 24 subproject proposals for funding approval from the PRDP. Most of these were in Pangasinan with 15 proposals; La Union, four; Ilocos Norte, three; and Ilocos Sur, two.

Based on the Regional Project Advisory Board's approval of five proposals in 2024, the number of implemented subprojects is expected to rise this year.

The PRDP RPCO 1 said that it aims to complete the three remaining subprojects under the second additional financing of the European Union Co-financing grant by year-end.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/15/business/top-business/ilocos-granted-p340b-for-agriculture-projects/2038799>

**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# Koronadal holds Farmers Festival

**By Giselle P. Jordan**

**January 14, 2025**

A FARMERS Festival was held in Koronadal City on Saturday to celebrate and recognize the importance of the role farmers play in the local economy.

This is part of the 2025 Hinugyaw Festival, celebrating the 85th founding anniversary of Koronadal.

Department of Agriculture (DA) Soccsksargen regional executive director Roberto Perales assured the farmers of government support and encouraged unity among the agricultural sector.

"I assure that all of you will hopefully be supported by the department through our many projects," he said.

He also talked about the importance of working together between farmers and the government.

"Consolidation and your commitment to us are so important. Together, let us strengthen our force in agriculture so that we can all prosper," he said.

Koronadal Mayor Eliordo Ogena also expressed his gratitude to the city's farmers.

"This festival is not only a celebration of our farmers' hard work and dedication, but also a reminder of how integral agriculture is to the growth and prosperity of our city," he said.

City Agriculturist Reynold Biñas said that the Farmers Festival is their way of thanking the farmers for their hard work and contribution to the city. It was also a way to build and strengthen connections for future projects.

The Farmers Festival included activities that allowed farmers to show their skills and forge fellowship with other farmers.

It is a manifestation of Koronadal's commitment to developing their local agricultural sector, Biñas said.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/14/regions/koronadal-holds-farmers-festival/2037726>

**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# Ex-BFAR execs post bail over graft charges

**By Francis Earl Cueto**

**January 15, 2025**

TWO former top officials of the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR) posted bail for four counts of graft charges filed against them by the Office of the Ombudsman.

The charges stemmed from an allegedly anomalous P2-billion vessel monitoring system (VMS) project in 2018.

Former DA undersecretary for fisheries and BFAR National Director Eduardo B. Gongona and former BFAR national director Demosthenes R. Escoto each posted P360,000 before the Antipolo City Regional Trial Court (RTC) for their temporary liberty.

Their arraignment and pre-trial have been set for Jan. 22 and Feb. 26, respectively, the court said.

Gongona and Escoto have been charged with two counts of violating Section 3(e) of Republic Act (RA) 3019, or the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act, as well as one count each under Sections 3(g) and 3(j) of the same law, for their alleged involvement in the improper awarding of the VMS contract to a British firm.

Simon Tucker, CEO of UK-based SRT Marine Systems Solutions Ltd., was also named as a co-accused in the graft charges.

Gongona and Escoto posted bail on Jan. 6, a day after the Antipolo City RTC issued arrest warrants against them.

The cases were initially filed in the Quezon City RTC on Dec. 3 but were transferred to the Antipolo RTC due to jurisdictional adjustments.

The graft charges stemmed from a complaint filed by James Mier Victoriano against Gongona, Escoto, Tucker, former DA assistant secretary Hansel Didulo, and SRT-UK's Chief Financial Officer Richard Hurd.

The complaint alleged violations of RA 3019 and the Government Procurement Reform Act (RA 9184). However, the Ombudsman dismissed the charges against Didulo and Hurd for lack of evidence and found no violations of RA 9184 by any of the respondents.

Records show that the VMS project was initially given a budget of P1.6 billion under a French government loan and required bidders to either be French or part of a joint venture with a French entity.

SRT-France, a subsidiary of SRT-UK, won the bid in 2017 but was later disqualified by the French government due to its British ownership and lack of operational facilities in France. Consequently, the loan agreement collapsed.

In 2018, local funding raised the project budget to P2.09 billion, and SRT-UK was awarded the contract. By then, the project's scope had expanded to include 5,000 VMS transceivers for commercial vessels and satellite service subscriptions, significantly increasing the government's obligations.

In its Feb. 5, 2024, resolution, the Ombudsman ruled that Gongona, Escoto, and Tucker conspired to award the contract to SRT-UK in a manner disadvantageous to the government. The officials were found to have given unwarranted benefits to SRT-UK, violating Sections 3(e) and 3(j) of RA 3019.

"They orchestrated a series of questionable events that culminated in the award of a very favorable contract to SRT-UK," the Ombudsman said.

Further, it noted that the government was compelled to procure 5,000 VMS transceivers instead of the initially planned 3,736, resulting in a grossly disadvantageous contract.

The project, which began on Dec. 4, 2018, was supposed to end on Dec. 4, 2021, and is now deemed expired.

The Ombudsman upheld its February 2024 ruling by denying the motions for reconsideration filed by the respondents in an order signed by Ombudsman Samuel Martires in October 2024.

Escoto has already been dismissed from government service by the Ombudsman after being found guilty of grave misconduct in relation to the same transaction.

He also faced contempt of court charges for implementing Fisheries Administrative Order (FAO) 266 despite a permanent injunction from the Malabon RTC.

FAO 266, which mandated a system to track commercial vessels at sea, was declared unconstitutional by the Malabon court.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/15/news/national/ex-bfar-execs-post-bail-over-graft-charges/2038710>

## **BUSINESS MIRROR:**

# **Colombia, not PHL, now 3rd-largest banana exporter**

Ada Pelonia

January 15, 2025

COLOMBIA has overtaken the Philippines, which has lost its status as the world's third-largest banana exporter, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

The international agency's preliminary report showed that Colombia shipped 2.31 million metric tons (MMT) of bananas last year, which was 29,000 metric tons (MT) more than the 2.28 MMT exported by the Philippines.

Ecuador remained the world's top exporter of bananas, with shipments reaching 5.76 MMT last year. Guatemala trailed behind with 2.6 MMT of banana exports.

The FAO report said the spread of the Banana Fusarium Wilt Tropical Race 4 (TR4) disease continued to drag down Philippine output, with banana growers bearing the brunt of "substantial costs" to prevent the disease.

Philippine banana exports last year fell by 3.1 percent to 2.28 MMT, lower than the 2.35 MMT it shipped in 2023.

Despite this, the report noted that the Philippines remained the top exporter of bananas in Asia, accounting for over half of the shipments from the region.

"Supplies from the Philippines, the main exporter from the region, reportedly continue to be affected by the spread of TR4 in the country," the report read.

The FAO also noted that key Asian markets, such as China and Japan, saw a reduction in their banana purchases from the Philippines "due to supply shortages."



“Available information suggests that imports into China were hindered by supply shortages experienced in Cambodia and the Philippines, from where China procured some 50 to 60 percent of banana imports combined in recent years,” it said.

“Preliminary monthly trade data show that Chinese imports of Filipino bananas dropped by 39 percent year-on-year over the first nine months of 2024.”

The international agency also noted that available trade data from January to July 2024 showed a 4-percent year-on-year decline in Japan’s banana imports from the Philippines.

However, it added these were not offset by higher imports from Ecuador and Vietnam despite fast growth in procurements from these two countries.

“While demand for bananas in the country remained relatively stable, import quantities continued to be reduced by the production shortages experienced in the Philippines, from where Japan typically sources some 75 to 80 percent of its banana imports.”

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/15/colombia-not-phl-now-3rd-largest-banana-exporter/>

## **BUSINESS MIRROR:**

# **Palay farmgate prices hit all-time high in 2024**

Ada Pelonia  
January 14, 2025

THE farmgate price of palay or dry unmilled rice reached an all-time high in 2024, latest government data showed.

Figures from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) indicate that the average quotation of palay jumped by 17.4 percent to P23.33 per kilo last year from P19.88 per kilo in 2023.

Historical data indicated that this was the highest average farmgate quotation since 2010. It was also the second time the country breached the P20 per kilo mark since 2018 at P20.06 per kilo.

PSA data also showed that the highest increase was observed in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), where the average prices registered a year-on-year growth of 29.6 percent.

The average palay farmgate price in BARMM settled at P25.08 per kilo in 2024, higher than the previous year's P19.35 per kilo.

This was followed by Western Visayas which recorded a 26.6 percent growth to P25.14 per kilo last year from P19.85 per kilo in 2023.

“Farmgate prices refer to the prices received by farmers for the sale of their produce at the first point of sale net of the total marketing cost paid by the farmers,” the PSA explained.

“These prices are determined at the farmgate or first point of sale transactions and are also known as ‘producer prices.’”

## Reasons

INDUSTRY experts said several factors could account for the record-high average quotation of palay last year.

The Philippine Chamber for Agriculture and Food Inc. (Pcafi) president Danilo Fausto said that owing to the anticipated lower palay output, the farmgate price during the wet harvest season ranged from P21-P23 per kilo for wet palay and P25-P27 per kilo for dry.

“Before 2010, I recall that farmgate palay prices were around P17-18 [per kilo] for wet palay. This is because price of inputs like [the] fertilizers and seeds are still lower during those times,” Fausto told the BusinessMirror on Tuesday.

Roehlano Briones, senior research fellow at the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), said the increase in international prices of the food staple coupled with the effects of the dry spell likely caused this all-time high average palay price.

“High world prices and El Niño [could have caused the record-high farmgate price],” Briones told this reporter.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) reported that rice export prices skyrocketed after India, the world’s largest rice exporter, issued a ban on non-basmati rice shipments in 2023.

Because of this, USDA said the next largest suppliers, Thailand and Vietnam, caused export quotes to surge to “the highest levels” since 2008. India lifted the ban last September.

Vietnam and Thailand are the Philippines’s two largest suppliers of imported rice, with shipments from both countries accounting for over 4 million metric tons (MMT), based on government data. The Philippines imported a record-high 4.78 MMT in 2024.

Meanwhile, the agriculture damage caused by El Niño reached P15.30 billion last year, based on a report from the Department of Agriculture (DA).

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/14/palay-farmgate-prices-hit-all-time-high-in-24/>

**BUSINESS MIRROR:**

## **₱5 million greenhouse to ensure supply of high-value crops in Antique town**

BusinessMirror  
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he completed PHP5 million solar-powered greenhouse for hydroponics and drip fertigation system in the municipality of Libertad, Antique province in this photo taken in Nov. 2024. Sonie Guanco, agricultural program coordinating officer of the Department of Agriculture's office in Antique, said in an interview Thursday (Jan. 9, 2025) that the greenhouse facilities would ensure the availability of high-value crops in Libertad and its neighboring towns.

SAN JOSE DE BUENAVISTA, Antique – The P5 million solar-powered greenhouse for hydroponics and drip fertigation system project of the Department of Agriculture (DA) will ensure a stable supply of high-value crops (HVC) in Libertad municipality and its neighboring towns in Antique province.

Sonie Guanco, DA agricultural program coordinating officer in Antique, said in an interview Thursday that the greenhouse facilities, established in Barangay Union in November last year, would be managed by the Libertad's municipal government.

“There are three units of greenhouse that would be planted with HVCs, such as lettuce, bell pepper, cabbage, cherry tomato,” he said.

The greenhouse facilities, funded through the initiatives of Senator Loren Legarda and Antique Rep. Antonio Agapito Legarda, are equipped with two overhead water tanks, a hydroponics system, a soilless drip system, and a drip fertigation system.

Guanco said farmers in Libertad usually produce lowland vegetables, such as squash, eggplants, and string beans, but with the greenhouse facilities, they could produce cold-tolerant HVCs.

Farmers in the municipality will be trained on how to grow HVCs and avail of the seedlings from the greenhouse facilities.

“The municipality, being near Boracay island in Aklan province, could also sell the produce to restaurants and other establishments there as part of its economic enterprise,” Guanco said.

Other than Libertad, San Remigio town also availed of greenhouse facilities from the DA. It is operated by the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist.

The greenhouse enables farmers to grow strawberries and cherry tomatoes that they sell to tourists visiting Barangay Aningalan, a tourism destination in San Remigio known for its cold climate and mountain sceneries. *PNA*

Image credits: [DA-Antique Agricultural Program Coordinating Office](#)

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/15/p5-million-greenhouse-to-ensure-supply-of-high-value-crops-in-antique-town/>

**BUSINESS MIRROR:**

# From Ilocos to Silicon Valley: Pinoy student's AI innovation set to revolutionize agriculture

Leilanie Adriano | PNA  
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Aldrin Sojourner Gamayon receives a commendation from the San Nicolas town council in Ilocos Norte province in this undated photo. He is the first Filipino to win the Red Bull Basement World Finals held in Tokyo, Japan last December 2024 for his innovative technology app that can help farmers reduce productivity loss.

LAOAG CITY—Twenty-two year old Aldrin Sojourner Gamayon from San Nicolas town, Ilocos Norte province is taking a leap of faith when he pitched an artificial intelligence (AI)-powered solution to help farmers manage potential risks such as diseases, pests, and climate change.

Wanting to give back to farmers who are regarded as heroes that everyone needs for a sustainable future, Gamayo's groundbreaking innovation, AgriConnect app, won in the recent Red Bull Basement World Finals in Tokyo, Japan.

He stood among the top 10 young innovators and the only Asian who competed against 110,000 others from 39 countries.

He is also the first Filipino to win in the said event.

After winning in the global innovation competition, the fourth year Bachelor of Science in Communications Technology Management student of the Ateneo De Manila University told the Philippine News Agency on Wednesday that he is now gearing up for a three-week immersion program in Silicon Valley, California this year to realize a bigger dream to make farmers more resilient through modern technology.

“I am currently working with Ateneo Blue Nest to prepare for Silicon Valley,” said Gamayon, adding the details are still being ironed out while he is on the process of registering his company.

He is backed by Ateneo's start-up incubation program, which caters to the needs of startups both within and outside of the university by facilitating access to the university's resources as well as drawing intellectual talents from the university's extensive roster of faculty, scientists, researchers, alumni and students. Gamayon said he is determined to scale up his project and broaden its impact to benefit farmers.

Seeing the challenges of farming in his home province, he said he was inspired to “create solutions that empower our farmers and enhance the agricultural sector for the long term.”

His app uses a simple traffic light-like warning system to e complex data into clear actions for farmers.

Green means you are good to go. Yellow means keep an eye out for pests or the weather might cause problems soon. Red means act now.

Through AgriConnect, the young innovator hopes to provide farmers with greater access to technology to protect their livelihood.

Specifically, the goal is to reduce at least 30 percent production loss annually due to lack of real-time data to manage crop risks.

“I’ve seen firsthand how farming can feel like a constant gamble. My family would talk about the anxiety of planting a crop, never knowing if pests, weather, or bad luck would ruin everything,” he said.

Gamayon said he has “spoken to farmers who mix seven pesticides hoping that one of these works, not realizing it’s hurting their crops in the long run.”

“For them, it’s not just about growing rice—it’s about whether there’s enough to eat or if their kids can stay in school. That weight, that uncertainty, it’s what made me want to create something that could help,” he said in an earlier media interview.

For now, Gamayon looks forward to partnering with public and private institutions to make his dream into a reality for the next generation of farmers who could use the technology for the better. *PNA*

Image credits: [Soj Gamayon FB page](#)

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