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MANILA BULLETIN:

DA chief lauds BPI's role in boosting food security, leading agricultural development

BY [DEXTER BARRO II](#)

Jan 22, 2025 02:58 PM

Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel emphasized that the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) will play a crucial role in strengthening the country's food security as it takes charge of promoting agricultural innovation and enhancing food production and safety.

Laurel issued this declaration in his keynote address during the BPI's 95th anniversary celebration on Wednesday, Jan. 22, as he lauded the agency for its "foundational role" in driving the Philippines' agricultural development.

He noted that the bureau's accomplishments in 2024—which include supporting farmers, safeguarding crops, and ensuring safe food supply—reflect its sheer commitment to Filipinos.

The agriculture secretary likewise cited the increase in production support, improvement in training and extension services, the revitalized research and regulation, and new export market opportunities as among the BPI's successes.

"Through technology, innovation, and support for farmers, we resolve to continue making agriculture a vital driver of national growth and resilience," said Laurel.

The BPI, he said, is now setting its sights this year towards advancing the plant industry, farm productivity, and biotechnology for a more resilient agricultural sector.

Last year, the sector faced a dry spell brought on by the El Niño phenomenon, which was then succeeded by crop damage caused by La Niña as the year ended.

As a result, Laurel said the BPI is looking to harness the reserves of climate-resilient seeds, particularly through supporting local seed production and fostering crop research through tissue culture and plant genetic resources.

"The Bureau will also expand market access for our high-value crops while developing infrastructure like cold storage and food processing facilities," he added.

As an attached agency of the DA, the BPI is set to play a role in the department's vision of making food more accessible to Filipino consumers.

The bureau will soon launch a permanent Kadiwa ng Pangulo (KNP) store in its main office in Malate, Manila.

A temporary weekend KNP activity in its office was held last year, which supported farmers, cooperatives, and associations (FCAs), as well as consumers in the Malate area.

With the aid of advanced monitoring systems, the BPI said it aims to intensify its initiatives in promoting sustainable pest management, honing food safety, and streamlining seed certification processes.

Laurel, meanwhile, noted that the bureau will also be refurbishing its laboratories this year.

This is alongside additional training for the technical skills of quarantine officers and staff to better serve the plant industry.

The DA chief further said that BPI will also be committed to strengthening international partnerships, hosting global meetings, and advancing programs for food safety, security, and agricultural trade.

"Through these initiatives, BPI aims to cultivate a more resilient, sustainable, and globally competitive agricultural sector that can meet both local and global demands while ensuring long-term food security for the nation," he explained.

<https://mb.com.ph/2025/1/22/da-chief-lauds-bpi-s-role-in-boosting-food-security>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Año backs food security emergency over soaring prices of rice

BY [MARTIN SADONGDONG](#)

Jan 22, 2025 03:44 PM



(File photo / MANILA BULLETIN)

National Security Adviser (NSA) Eduardo Año expressed support for the Department of Agriculture's (DA) planned move to declare a food security emergency by the end of January due to the rising prices of rice.

Año said the country's food security "is a national security interest" and a major component of the Marcos administration's 15-point National Security Agenda as outlined in the 2023 National Security Policy (NSP).

Set for implementation from 2023 to 2028, the NSP is the country's overarching policy document that spells out the aspirations and defines the strategic direction of the whole government to protect, preserve, and enhance national security.

It includes a 15-point agenda designed to protect the country's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the well-being of the Filipino people, including ensuring that food is available, affordable, accessible, and safe for everyone.

He said food security is also articulated in the 2024 National Security Strategy (NSS) which mandates the government's role in ensuring food availability, accessibility, affordability, and safety.

“As such, we support the declaration of a food security emergency by the Department of Agriculture to reduce the price of rice in the country,” he stated.

The NSA pointed out that under Republic Act 12708 or the Agricultural Tariffication Act, the Secretary of Agriculture can declare a food security emergency “if there is an extraordinary increase in the price of rice or if there is a rice shortage in the country.”

“While there is a sufficient supply of rice in the country, the price of rice, however, remains artificially high despite declining global rice costs and tariff reductions ordered by the President,” Año said.

“Since rice is the country’s staple food, artificially high prices directly impact the lives of all Filipinos. The Department of Agriculture therefore is well within its authority to effectively regulate and reduce the price to protect the interests of the public,” he said.

During the past months, rice prices have remained high despite declining global rice costs and tariff reductions ordered by President Marcos Jr.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said he will declare a food security emergency before the end of January to address the spiking retail prices of rice.

This, as the National Price Coordinating Council (NPCC) issued a resolution urging the DA to declare a “food security emergency for rice.”

The declaration of a food security emergency will allow the National Food Authority (NFA) to sell rice stocks to local government units (LGUs) and other government agencies at a lower price, free up space in NFA warehouses, and help local farmers through palay procurement for the upcoming harvest season.

Meanwhile, Año called on market actors to be “one with the government” in addressing the high prices of rice.

“Profiteering from the food security emergency, politicizing this issue for partisan political interest, and other malicious activities will cause more harm to the Filipino people. Now is not the time for more profits. Now is the time to put the country first,” he said.

https://mb.com.ph/2025/1/22/ano-backs-food-security-emergency-over-soaring-prices-of-rice#google_vignette

MANILA BULLETIN:

NFA seeks additional P9 billion to cover extra rice buffer stock

BY [DEXTER BARRO II](#)

Jan 22, 2025 03:22 PM

AT A GLANCE

- The National Food Authority (NFA) announced on Wednesday, Jan. 22, that it requires an additional funding of P9 billion to comply with the law-mandated increase in the national rice buffer stock.

The National Food Authority (NFA) announced on Wednesday, Jan. 22, that it requires an additional funding of P9 billion to comply with the law-mandated increase in the national rice buffer stock. NFA Administrator Larry Lacson said the agency is now obligated to maintain a buffer stock equivalent to 15 days of rice consumption, an increase from the previous nine-day requirement. In a statement, Lacson said this comes after the recent enactment of Republic Act (RA) No. 12078, which amended the Rice Tariffication Law. Based on the agency's data, 37,000 metric tons (MT) of rice is the daily average for national consumption.

Adding six days to the buffer stock will require the NFA to procure about 300,000 MT of palay or unmilled rice from local farmers, with an estimated price of P23 per kilo.

"We were initially allocated a budget of P9 billion for buffer stocking this year, based on the 9-day requirement," said Lacson.

"But the additional 6 days will necessitate an extra P9 billion for palay procurement considering that our palay price procurement per kilo increase in 2024," he explained.

Restoring NFA's influence

RA No. 12078 also earmarked P2 billion for the NFA's rice procurement program, which is an excess of the collected rice tariffs under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF) set at P30 billion.

The RCEF is a program of the Department of Agriculture (DA) that aims to modernize rice farming and support local farmers.

While an additional P2 billion for its palay procurement looks promising on paper, DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel said it should ideally cover up to 20 percent—or around 4 million MT—of the country's total domestic production.

Currently, the procurement rate remains at a minimal 3 to 4 percent.

"The NFA used to be a market maker—both a buyer and seller of rice. Now it is restricted to buffer stocking and buying rice from local rice farmers," said Laurel, chairman of the NFA Council.

"We aim to restore its influence on palay pricing by purchasing more local rice, helping to boost Filipino farmers profitability," he added.

Earlier, the NFA Council approved a resolution that enables the agency to sell rice to local government units (LGUs) for disaster preparedness.

Lacson said the NFA will release around 25,000 MT of rice every month, noting that this will not jeopardize the buffer stock needed to respond to emergencies or calamities.

<https://mb.com.ph/2025/1/22/nfa-seeks-additional-p9-b-to-cover-extra-rice-buffer-stock>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

ASF-affected barangays down to 133

Bella Cariaso - The Philippine Star

January 23, 2025 | 12:00am



Despite the decline in the number of ASF cases and adequate supply of imported frozen pork in local markets, the BAI said the retail price of pork remained high.

AFP / File

MANILA, Philippines — The number of barangays that remained affected by African swine fever (ASF) has decreased to 133 from 225 previously, according to the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI).

Despite the decline in the number of ASF cases and adequate supply of imported frozen pork in local markets, the BAI said the retail price of pork remained high.

As of Jan. 10, data from the BAI showed a decrease of 59 percent in the number of ASF cases recorded in eight regions, 11 provinces and 35 municipalities.

On Dec. 27, 2024, up to 11 regions, 21 provinces and 67 municipalities reported similar cases.

Among provinces, North Cotabato recorded the highest number of ASF-affected barangays with 86 followed by Kalinga with 15 and Bohol with eight.

Catanduanes and Ilocos Norte have six and five ASF-affected barangays, respectively.

Batangas, which was the ground zero of the virus, has three barangays that remain affected by ASF.

The rest are Sultan Kudarat, Southern Leyte and Zambales with three, two and one cases, respectively.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said the retail price of pork continued to rise even after the holidays.

The DA said the current prices of pork belly and pork shoulder are higher compared to prices during the holidays.

Jayson Cainglet, chief of the Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura, said that 70 percent of the country's pork consumption is sourced from imported meat.

Cainglet said the lower tariff did not help bring down the retail price of pork.

<https://www.philstar.com/nation/2025/01/23/2416157/asf-affected-barangays-down-133>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

DA short of target on food security

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

January 23, 2025 | 12:00am



Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. inspects rice prices at a public market in Pasig City yesterday.

MICHAEL VARCAS

MANILA, Philippines — The Department of Agriculture (DA) has failed to meet its target on the declaration of a food security emergency as the agency still awaits the signed approved resolution by the National Price Coordinating Council (NPCC).

At a press conference yesterday, Agriculture Assistant Secretary and spokesman Arnel de Mesa assured the public that the implementation of the food security emergency would still push through despite the delay of Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.'s approval.

“We are still awaiting the copy of the NPCC resolution. We were advised that the resolution is being circulated to member agencies for their signatures. Although it is already approved, we still need the signed copy of the approved resolution,” De Mesa said.

He earlier said Tiu Laurel expects to sign the food security emergency by Jan. 22.

“We anticipated that we will receive the copy of the signed resolution last Monday (Jan. 20). As committed by the secretary, the DA will review as part of due diligence in two days; afterwards, the possible declaration can be made. Since the copy of the resolution is still not with us, then we cannot do anything about it,” De Mesa added.

The DA still targets to release the stocks of the National Food Authority (NFA) beginning Feb. 1 despite the delay in the declaration of the food security emergency, according to the agriculture official.

“If we can release (the food security emergency) this week, we are still within the Feb. 1 target, but definitely, there will be adjustment later on,” he said.

Under the newly enacted Republic Act 12078, or the Agricultural Tariffication Act, the DA – upon the recommendation of the NPCC – may declare a food security emergency to address supply shortages or extraordinary increases in rice prices.

A declaration of food security emergency will allow the NFA to release its rice buffer stocks to the market and replace them with locally produced palay.

Tiu Laurel has said that the unloading of 300,000 metric tons (MT) of rice from the NFA warehouse to consumers would help bring down the prices because it would augment supply.

De Mesa said the declaration of food security emergency is still necessary despite a downtrend in the retail price of rice as there are markets that still sell higher than the maximum suggested retail price (SRP) of P58 per kilo, which took effect on Jan. 20.

“(The food security emergency) is still needed as we need to release the stocks of the NFA, and although (the retail price of the staple) is already in the downward trend, based on our market visit, there are (retailers) who still sell at high prices,” he added.

The DA official cited the case of Trabajo Market in Manila, where retail prices of rice are still at P60 per kilo and higher.

He said no penalty would be imposed against violators of the maximum SRP for two weeks.

“We are still at the monitoring stage at present. We want to give ourselves at least two weeks to review this and then our coordination with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) will continue, as well as with local government units. After two weeks, we can have some finality with the guidelines,” he added.

Tiu Laurel issued Administrative Circular 1 on the maximum SRP, but did not include the guidelines.

“The DA has no mandate on penalties, so we cannot really impose penalties. That’s why we need to coordinate with the DTI, like its fair trade enforcement bureau and other offices, government agencies that might have a mandate in imposing sanctions (against violators of the maximum SRP),” De Mesa said.

P9 billion additional budget needed for rice buffer

The NFA needs an additional budget of P9 billion to meet the 15-day rice buffer stocking mandate under RA 12078, according to its administrator Larry Lacson.

Lacson said it would need to secure additional funding to cover the increase in the national rice buffer stock mandated under the amended Rice Tariffication Law.

Under RA 12078, the mandated rice buffer stock of the NFA has been set at 15 days of national rice consumption requirement.

Previously, the NFA’s rice buffer stock target was at nine days nationwide.

Lacson explained that the increase in rice buffer stocking mandate would mean an additional six days of reserve which is equivalent to about 300,000 MT of palay.

“We were initially allocated a budget of P9 billion for buffer stocking this year, based on the nine-day requirement. But the additional six days will necessitate an extra P9 billion for palay procurement considering that our palay price procurement per kilo increased in 2024,” Lacson said.

In a separate development, the NFA Council, the agency’s highest policymaking body, on Tuesday approved a resolution that will enable the NFA to sell rice to local government units (LGUs) for disaster preparedness.

Lacson noted that the NFA should ideally release around 25,000 MT of rice every month to LGUs without jeopardizing the buffer stock needed to respond to emergencies, calamities or a national food emergency declaration aimed at stabilizing rice supply and prices.

Earlier, Tiu Laurel, who also chairs the NFA Council, said that NFA would be selling rice to LGUs at P36 per kilo so that the latter can sell the stocks at a retail price of P38 per kilo.

“But by March, we want to sell the NFA rice stocks at P33 per kilo, so that LGUs and other participating government units can sell it to the market at P35 per kilo,” he added.

The sale of NFA’s rice stocks to LGUs and eventually to the market under a food security emergency is one of the measures also being eyed to decongest the grains agencies’ warehouses in time for the dry season harvest.

“The warehouses are full – they have almost 300,000 metric tons of rice – and harvest season is coming. If the warehouses are full, then the NFA will not be able to buy palay from local farmers at a good price,” Tiu Laurel said.

He noted that the NFA’s palay procurement should ideally account for up to 20 percent of the country’s domestic production – around four million MT – to be able to make a dent in the local rice market.

At present, the NFA only procures three percent of the local palay production.

“The NFA used to be a market maker – both a buyer and seller of rice. Now, it is restricted to buffer stocking and buying rice from local rice farmers. We aim to restore its influence on palay pricing by purchasing more local rice, helping to boost Filipino farmers profitability,” the agriculture chief said. – **Jasper Emmanuel Arcalas**

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/01/23/2416223/da-short-target-food-security>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

NFA approves LGUs' rice allocations for disaster preparedness

Bella Cariaso - The Philippine Star

January 23, 2025 | 12:00am



ADVERTISEMENT

MANILA, Philippines — The National Food Authority has agreed to sell 25,000 tons of NFA rice monthly to local government units for the LGUs' disaster preparedness program.

NFA Administrator Larry Lacson gave assurance that the monthly release of NFA rice to LGUs would not affect the buffer stock required to respond to emergencies, calamities, or declaration of a national food emergency.

Lacson said the NFA needs additional funds to perform its functions after Republic Act 12078, or the amended Rice Tariffication Law, mandated the agency to ensure a buffer stock of 15 days from the previous nine-day requirement.

Lacson said that with national rice consumption averaging 37,000 tons daily, the additional six days of reserves would require the NFA to procure approximately 300,000 tons of palay from local farmers.

“We were initially allocated P9 billion for buffer stocking this year based on the nine-day requirement. But the additional six days will necessitate another P9 billion for palay procurement as our price procurement increased in 2024,” Lacson said.

He said the law allotted P2 billion for the NFA rice procurement, which will be sourced from rice tariffs in excess of the P30 billion allocated to the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said that palay procurement should account for up to 20 percent of the country's total domestic production, or at least four million tons compared to the current rate of approximately four percent.

<https://www.philstar.com/nation/2025/01/23/2416167/nfa-approves-lgus-rice-allocations-disaster-preparedness>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Government to siphon off 300,000 MT of raw sugar from local market

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

January 23, 2025 | 12:00am



The Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) board has started its deliberations and industry consultations regarding the implementation of a voluntary purchase program for the current crop year 2024-2025.

Pixabay

MANILA, Philippines — The government is planning to siphon off about 300,000 metric tons (MT) of raw sugar from domestic market circulation for as long as three months to lift the farmgate prices of the commodity.

The Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) board has started its deliberations and industry consultations regarding the implementation of a voluntary purchase program for the current crop year 2024-2025.

Under a draft sugar order, the program would involve the purchase of 300,000 MT of raw sugar at a premium on a first come, first served basis.

The sugar bought under the program would be held off from domestic market sale for a period of not more than 90 days, effectively reducing the available supply with the hopes of increasing farmgate prices of the sweetener.

The draft sugar order noted that the aim of the program is to “ensure stable and reasonable farmgate prices of locally produced sugar while maintaining the prevailing level of retail prices.”

The SRA deemed it necessary to implement a second round of the voluntary purchase program after taking into consideration the prevailing sugar industry data and in anticipation of peak production in the next three months.

The program was first done last year and was deemed successful by both the government and the industry stakeholders.

Like last year, the voluntary purchase program would incentivize eligible participants by providing them priority in future sugar import programs of the government.

Under the draft sugar order, eligible participants would be able to import one kilo of raw sugar for every two kilos they bought under the voluntary purchase program.

SRA administrator and CEO Pablo Luis Azcona said the volume stipulated under the draft sugar order is not yet final.

Azcona added that the draft sugar order would be signed by the SRA board, chaired by Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., within the month.

Industry group Sugar Council lauded the proposed voluntary purchase program of the government, which it claimed would shield sugarcane planters from price fluctuations during the peak of the harvest and milling season.

Farmgate price of raw sugar as of Jan. 5 stood at P2,600 per 50-kilo bag, about P200 higher than the P2,406 recorded price in its preceding week, based on SRA data.

Meanwhile, the prevailing raw sugar prices in Metro Manila markets have remained relatively stable between P73 and P80 per kilo despite fluctuations in the farmgate price of the commodity since September, SRA data showed.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2025/01/23/2416125/government-siphon-300000-mt-raw-sugar-local-market>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Pangilinan tells DA to sell rice stocks through Kadiwa outlets

By: [Zacarian Sarao](#) - Reporter / [@zacariansINQ](#)

11:58 AM January 22, 2025



Photo from Kiko Pangilinan's Facebook page.

MANILA, Philippines — Former Senator Francis “Kiko” Pangilinan on Wednesday called on the Department of Agriculture (DA) to distribute the National Food Authority’s (NFA) aging rice stock to Kadiwa outlets nationwide to ensure that affordable rice is available to the public.

According to Pangilinan in a statement, the DA’s aging rice stock amounts to 300,000 tons.

He made the pronouncement after the government recently announced that it would announce a national food emergency.

“Sa mahal ng mga biling ngayon, malaking tulong at ginhawa para sa mga kababayan natin ang pagkakaroon ng mura at abot-kayang bigas na maaring bilhin sa mga Kadiwa centers,” Pangilinan, who is running for senator in the 2025 polls, said.

(With the high cost of goods today, having cheap and affordable rice that can be purchased at Kadiwa centers is a great help and relief for our countrymen.)

Pangilinan explained that while Republic Act (RA) No. 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law prohibits the NFA from selling directly to the public, Pangilinan said RA No. 12078 grants the DA Secretary the authority to sell NFA rice stocks to the public through Kadiwa outlets during such emergency.

“Kailangang maipatupad ito sa lalong madaling panahon nang sa gayon ay maibsan ang mga pasanin ng mga naghihikahos nating kababayan,” he added.

(This needs to be implemented as soon as possible to alleviate the burdens of our impoverished countrymen.)

Pangilinan previously served as head of the NFA during former President Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino III’s term.

During this stint, the former senator managed to reduce rice prices up to P3 pesos per kilo through interventions that reduced rice inflation from 15 percent to 0.8 percent.

<https://business.inquirer.net/502561/amid-rice-price-surge-pangilinan-tells-da-to-sell-rice-stocks-through-kadiwa>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Local agri firm inks agreement for durian plantations in PH

By: [Alden M. Monzon @AldenMonzonINQ](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 12:56 PM January 22, 2025



Go Negosyo founder and ASEAN Business Advisory Council (BAC)–Philippines chair Joey Concepcion (seated, second from right) witnesses the signing of the MOU on durian between the Philippines’s Yovel East Research and Development, Inc. and Malaysia’s Bornion Green Sdn Bhd last January 16, 2025 in Penang, Malaysia. The MOU leverages the complementary durian harvesting seasons in the Philippines and Malaysia, and harnesses the expertise and resources of both countries.

One of the pioneer agriculture companies of Go Negosyo’s development program for micro, small, and medium enterprise has inked an agreement with a Malaysian firm to put up new durian plantations in the country.

Go Negosyo, the advocacy arm of the Philippine Center for Entrepreneurship (PCE), said Yovel East Research and Development Inc. had signed a memorandum of understanding with Malaysia’s Bornion Green SDN BHD.

“The plantations will be in the Philippines, hopefully giving employment to more Filipinos and putting to good use the many farmlands that are suitable for durian planting,” said Go Negosyo founder Jose Ma. “Joey” A. Concepcion III.

“With these agreements, we give the farmers under Yovel East’s management access to money, markets, and mentorship, the three essentials of successful entrepreneurship which we emphasize in our work at Go Negosyo,” he said further. Concepcion also said that the agreement with Bornion is timely, as Malaysia and the Philippines can now meet the global demand for durian year-round.

Additionally, the company has also signed a memorandum of agreement with Land Bank of the Philippines, combining the company’s expertise in farm clustering under its We Will Rice program and the bank’s financial support through its Agrisenso Plus Lending Program.

Go Negosyo touted that it has been instrumental in strengthening private sector participation in the development of MSMEs through its various programs promoting MSME access to money, markets, and mentorship.

Concepcion said they had shared this advocacy in the ASEAN region through his chairmanship of the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (BAC) Philippines.

“The connections made by ASEAN BAC Malaysia were crucial in paving the way for this important partnership in durian,” Concepcion said.

“We look forward to facilitating similar agreements with the private sector of the other ASEAN member-states,” he added.

Yovel East is one of Go Negosyo’s Kapatid Angat Lahat Agri Program (KALAP), the goal of which is to integrate small farmers into the value chain of the large agricultural companies.

It is also a participant in the ASEAN Food Security Alliance (AFSA), which encompasses several private sector initiatives to enhance regional cooperation on agriculture and food security.

<https://business.inquirer.net/502573/local-agri-firm-inks-agreement-for-durian-plantations-in-ph>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Saving – and regrowing – what’s left of our forest cover

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 04:30 AM January 23, 2025



GREEN POCKET The Angat Dam water reserve in Norzagaray, Bulacan, is seen in this July 2023 photo. In the last eight decades, the Philippines has lost an estimated 60-70 percent of its forests due to logging, mining, population growth, and other largely man-made causes. —Grig C. Montegrando

MANILA, Philippines — The 15th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 15) emphasizes the critical importance of biodiversity as humanity’s life support system. The focus on life on land aims to address the relentless depletion of forests, the alarming rate of species extinction, and the need to safeguard key biodiversity areas, encompassing such critical challenges as biodiversity loss, pollution, desertification, land and soil degradation, drought, and deforestation.

In the case of the Philippines, major challenges remain in achieving its SDG 15 objectives. Over the last eight decades, the country has lost an estimated 60-70 percent of its forest cover due to logging, mining, population growth, and other man-made factors.

However, according to the country's Voluntary National Review in 2022, the country's forest cover modestly increased from 7.01 million hectares in 2010 to 7.18 million hectares in 2021. As of the same year, there were 8.7 million hectares of forestland under effective management arrangements, due in part to a decade of rehabilitation and protection efforts.

Such efforts include the National Greening Program (NGP), which is the country's most ambitious reforestation program to date. Executive Order No. 26, signed on Feb. 24, 2011, by former President Benigno S. Aquino III, serves as the legal basis for the implementation of the NGP.

In 2015, another executive order was issued to expand the NGP's coverage from 2016 to 2028, ordering the rehabilitation of all remaining unproductive, denuded, and degraded forestlands estimated at 7.1 million hectares.

The NGP sought to plant 1.5 billion trees in 1.5 million hectares for a period of six years, from 2011 to 2016. The order provides that the NGP shall be implemented by the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Agrarian Reform, and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) as the lead agency.

Launched on May 13, 2011, with a ceremonial planting of a narra sapling at the DENR's Heroes Park, the NGP seeks to bring back the vegetative cover of the country's upland areas. It was designed to achieve more than reforestation; it also aims to contribute to reducing poverty among upland and lowland poor households and indigenous peoples in coastal and urban areas, and implement sustainable management of natural resources through resource conservation, protection, and productivity enhancement.

Per its 2022 report, the NGP has planted an area of over 45,947.60 hectares with 33,927,964 seedlings. As of the third quarter of that year, 174,115 jobs had also been generated and 35,415 persons employed.

The following year, in 2023, the government allocated P2.39 billion for the NGP under the 2023 General Appropriations Act. By then, the program was covering a land area of 13,565 hectares and required the planting of 7,249,642 seedlings and the maintenance of around 158,843 hectares of land.

At the end of the program, it is expected that the country's forest cover has increased by 12 percent from the 2003 level of 7.2 million hectares, with an 85 percent survival rate; an increase of 8 percent in carbon

sequestration, or 36 million tons per year to 38.9 million tons per year; increased water-holding capacity; reduced downstream flooding and soil erosion; and improved environmental services. The NGP is also expected to bring about increased and sustainable supply of forest-based raw materials, increased economic activity in the uplands, and optimized utilization of upland resources.

Other Philippine initiatives in line with the targets and goals of SDG 15 include the establishment of 73 terrestrial protected areas covering an area of more than 1.6 million hectares, according to the 2022 VNR. Official development assistance and public expenditure for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems have also increased by \$218.4 million from \$2,071.19 million to \$2,290.3 million, respectively. The government allocated P464.5 billion in 2023 to address climate change, which was 60.1 percent higher compared to its P289.7 billion allocation in 2022.

Sources: sdgs.un.org, dashboards.sdgindex.org, sustainabledevelopment.un.org, undp.org, naturbasedsolutionsinitiative.org, denr.gov.ph, dbm.gov.ph

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2027321/saving-and-regrowing-whats-left-of-our-forest-cover>

BUSINESS WORLD:

NFA seeks extra P9B for rice procurement

January 22, 2025 | 8:25 pm



PHILIPPINE STAR/MIGUEL DE GUZMAN

THE National Food Authority (NFA) said on Wednesday that it is seeking an additional P9 billion to procure domestically grown rice that it plans to add to its grain reserves this year.

In a statement, the NFA said that the increased funding would allow it to accomplish its buffer stock goals in compliance with Republic Act (RA) No. 12708 or the Agricultural Tariffication Act.

“We were initially allocated a budget of P9 billion for buffer stocking this year, based on the nine-day requirement. But the additional six days will necessitate an extra P9 billion considering that our palay procurement price increased in 2024,” NFA Administrator Larry R. Lacson said.

RA 12708 raised the NFA minimum rice reserve level to 15 days’ demand from the previous nine days.

The law also allocates about P2 billion for NFA rice procurement from rice tariffs in excess of the P30 billion earmarked for the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund.

The NFA said that the national consumption of rice is projected to average 37,000 metric tons (MT) per day.

“The additional six days of reserve will require the NFA to procure approximately 300,000 MT of palay (unmilled rice) from farmers at an estimated price of P23 per kilo,” the agency said.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. said NFA procurement should be equivalent to up to 20% of domestic production or about 4 million MT. The NFA’s current procurement rate is 3% to 4% of the harvest.

“The NFA used to be a market maker — both a buyer and seller of rice. Now it is restricted to buffer stocking and buying rice from rice farmers,” Mr. Laurel added.

“We aim to restore its influence on palay pricing by purchasing more rice, helping to boost farmers’ profitability,” he said.

Additionally, the NFA Council had also approved a resolution allowing the NFA to sell rice stocks to local government units (LGUs) for disaster preparedness.

“The NFA should ideally release around 25,000 MT of rice every month to LGUs without jeopardizing the buffer stock needed to respond to emergencies, calamities, or a national food emergency declaration aimed at stabilizing rice supply and prices,” Mr. Lacson added.

Last week, Mr. Laurel said the Department of Agriculture is proposing to declare a food security emergency focused on rice to enable the NFA to offload 300,000 MT in rice stocks onto the market. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/01/22/648397/nfa-seeks-extra-p9b-for-rice-procurement/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

SRA to support millgate prices by holding raw sugar in reserve

January 22, 2025 | 8:25 pm



BOC - PUBLIC INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE DIVISION (BOC-PIAD)

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said it will undertake a limited voluntary purchasing program for raw sugar to prop up soft millgate prices.

“The target for this voluntary limited-volume purchase of domestically produced raw sugar is to ensure a stable and reasonable farmgate price while maintaining the prevailing level of retail price,” the regulator said in a draft sugar order (SO).

The SRA has reported that millgate price for raw sugar had declined to as little as P2,400 per 50-kilogram bag.

The regulator said the purchasing program will acquire a maximum of 300,000 metric tons (MT).

Raw sugar purchased through the program will be reclassified as “C” or reserve sugar, to be kept from market circulation.

Participants deemed eligible for the purchasing program are farmers, farmer’s groups, farmer’s cooperatives, farmer’s associations, sugar millers/refiners, manufacturers, and beverage makers.

Participants in the SRA’s voluntary purchase program will be eligible to take part in a future round of imports.

SRA Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona said it hopes the draft sugar order can be signed within the month, with the maximum volume subject to change.

During the 2023-2024 crop year, the SRA had implemented a voluntarily purchase program to stabilize farmgate and retail prices. Participants were also eligible for allocations of imported sugar.

Under Sugar Order No. 2, the SRA allowed qualified participants to purchase 300,000 MT of raw sugar to stabilize prices.

Last year, the SRA had approved the import of 200,000 MT of refined sugar to stabilize retail prices.

Separately, the Sugar Council said that the proposed SO will protect farms from price fluctuations during the peak of the harvest.

It added in a statement that Mr. Azcona has reiterated that “there will be no imports until May or June when the harvest is finished.”

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has said that it will postpone any sugar import plans until the middle of the year, as domestic supply is expected to be sufficient.

The SRA projects a 7.2% drop in sugar production from the 1.92 MMT reported during the previous crop year, citing damage sustained during the dry conditions brought about by El Niño.

It added that the move should reduce the volume of available sugar in the domestic market during the harvest months “thus helping stabilize millgate sugar prices.” — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/01/22/648395/sra-to-support-millgate-prices-by-holding-raw-sugar-in-reserve/>

REMATE:

Kaso ng ASF sa Pinas bumaba na nitong Enero 2025

January 22, 2025 18:36



MANILA, Philippines – Lumabas sa pinakabagong ulat ng Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) na bumaba ang bilang ng mga barangay na apektado ng African Swine Fever (ASF) noong Enero.

Hanggang nitong Enero 10, ang mga barangay na nasa red zone, o may aktibong kaso ng ASF, ay bumaba sa 133 sa 34 na lungsod at munisipalidad mula sa 225 barangay noong Disyembre 27, 2024.

Ang mga apektadong lugar ay nasa walong rehiyon, kabilang ang Cordillera Administrative Region, Ilocos, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Bicol, Central at Eastern Visayas, at Soccsksargen.

Ang mga rehiyon na may pinakamaraming apektadong barangay ay ang North Cotabato, partikular ang Midsayap at Pigkawayan, na may tig-18 apektadong barangay, kasunod ang Kidapawan City na may 15, Matalam na may 13, at Rizal sa Kalinga na may 10.

Ayon sa Department of Agriculture (DA), nakatulong ang mahigpit na pagpapatupad ng mga border checkpoint sa Metro Manila at mga kalapit na lalawigan at ang mga hakbangin ng gobyerno, tulad ng pagbibigay ng 490,000 na doses ng ASF AVAC live vaccines, upang mapigilan ang pagkalat ng ASF at maprotektahan ang industriya ng baboy sa bansa. **RNT**

<https://remate.ph/kaso-ng-asf-sa-pinaz-bumaba-na-nitong-enero-2025/>

REMATE:

5 lugar sa E. Visayas positibo sa red tide

January 22, 2025 09:32



Iniulat ng Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) na ang mga sample ng laman ng shellfish mula sa Leyte, Leyte ay positibo sa nakalalasang red tide, na patuloy na nakaapekto sa limang baybayin sa Eastern Visayas.

Ang mga sample na kinuha ng BFAR ay nagpakita ng paralytic shellfish toxins, dahilan upang isama ang Leyte sa pambansang shellfish bulletin.

Kasama sa pinakabagong bulletin ang apat pang lugar: Daram Island sa Samar, Irong-Irong Bay sa Catbalogan City, Matarinao Bay sa Eastern Samar, at Biliran Island.

Natuklasan din na positibo sa *Pyrodinium bahamense*, isang dinoflagellate na nagpo-produce ng mga toxin ng red tide, ang seawater sa dalawang iba pang bay sa Samar, ang San Pedro Bay at ang baybaying dagat ng Calbayog City.

Naglabas ang BFAR ng babala sa publiko na huwag mangalap, magbenta, at kumain ng shellfish at *Acetes* sp. (kilala rin bilang alamang o hipon) mula sa mga apektadong lugar.

Ang isda, pusit, hipon, at alimango ay ligtas kainin kung sariwa, nahugasan nang maayos, at tinanggal ang kanilang mga internal organs bago lutuin. Nagbigay babala ang BFAR na ang pagkain ng shellfish mula sa mga apektadong lugar ay maaaring magdulot ng paralytic shellfish poisoning, na maaaring magdulot ng kamatayan.

Ang pagbabalik ng red tide ay dulot ng presensya ng mga cyst sa mga baybayin, at ang madalas na ulan ay maaaring magdulot ng runoff ng mga organic materials na nagpapabunga sa mga cysts. *Santi Celario*

<https://remate.ph/5-lugar-sa-e-visayas-positibo-sa-red-tide/>

REMATE:

DA: Ilang NCR stalls nagtitinda pa rin ng imported rice mas mahal sa P58/kg

January 22, 2025 08:30



MANILA, Philippines – Nabuking na may ilang mga nagtitinda ng bigas sa National Capital Region (NCR) na patuloy na nagbebenta ng imported na bigas na mas mataas sa bagong maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) na P58 kada kilo na itinakda ng Department of Agriculture (DA), na ipinatupad noong Lunes.

Napag-alaman na may ilang tindahan na nagbebenta ng imported na bigas sa P60 kada kilo. Ngunit ipinaliwanag ng mga nagtitinda na unti-unti nilang ina-adjust ang presyo.

Aminado ang DA na may ilang mga nagtitinda na nagcha-charge pa rin ng mataas na presyo at pinaalalahanan silang makipag-ayos muli sa kanilang mga supplier.

Ayon kay Agriculture Spokesperson Arnel De Mesa, “Ire-review ito sa loob ng dalawang linggo, ngunit kailangang agad nilang ayusin ang kanilang mga presyo. Hindi na namin tatanggapin ang P60 hanggang P65 kada kilo.”

Hindi pa pinaparusahan ng DA ang mga hindi pa sumusunod, ngunit maglalabas sila ng mga opisyal na alituntunin at magiging mahigpit sa pagpapatupad nito matapos ang itinakdang grace period. Samantala, binantayan din ng DA ang presyo ng baboy na tumaas na sa P450 kada kilo. Ang presyo ng kasim ay nasa P320 hanggang P390, at ang liempo ay nasa P360 hanggang P450. Ang pagtaas ng presyo ay dahil sa kasagsagan ng ASF at mataas na demand noong ika-apat na quarter. **RNT**

<https://remate.ph/da-ilang-ncr-stalls-nagtitinda-pa-rin-ng-imported-rice-mas-mahal-sa-p58-kg/>

ABANTE:

DA binalaan mga pasaway sa P58 MSRP ng bigas

Abante News

- **January 22, 2025**



May na-monitor ang Department of Agriculture at Department of Trade and Industry na nagbebenta ng imported rice na lampas sa maximum suggested retail price na P58 per kilo sa Trabajo Market nang nag-ikot sila sa Maynila kahapon ngunit pinalagpas lang ito ng monitoring team at walang ginawa.

“Although vendors largely complied with the MSRP, the monitoring team still found retailers selling rice above the P58 per kilo limit,” sabi ng DA sa pahayag kahapon. Ayon kay Agriculture Assistant Secretary Genevieve Velicaria-Guevarra, nagsabi ang retailers na ibababa na nila sa P58 per kilo na MSRP ang kanilang benta ngunit inuubos lang nila ang hawak nilang brands na mahal nilang kinuha.

Aminado ang DA na wala itong pinataw na parusa sa mga nakita nilang lumabag sa MSRP ngunit nagbabala ito na mahigpit nitong ipatutupad ang MSRP oras na mailabas na nito ang regulasyon tungkol dito na nakatakda sa Pebrero. (Eileen Mencias

<https://www.abante.com.ph/2025/01/22/da-binalaan-mga-pasaway-sa-p58-msrp-ng-bigas/>

MANILA STANDARD:

“Sampolan!’ Abby Binay urges crackdown vs rice cartels, smugglers

January 22, 2025, 10:21 am

Makati Mayor and senatorial aspirant Abigail Binay said the government should take more aggressive steps to catch and prosecute those involved in rice cartels and smuggling, emphasizing the need for swift prosecution and visible enforcement to deter price manipulation in the market.

Speaking on Super Radyo DZBB’s *“Ikaw na Ba? The Senatorial Interviews”* on Tuesday, Binay stressed that existing laws should be fully implemented, and offenders held accountable.

“With the many laws we have when it comes to cartels, profiteering, why hasn’t anyone been jailed yet? Even when smugglers are caught, they are not shown publicly. They just say they will blacklist them. But the question is, has anyone been really charged?” Binay said mostly in Tagalog.

“If the government cannot show how serious it is in enforcing the law, then rice cartels or syndicates will continue to brazenly manipulate and control rice prices,” she added.

Binay also welcomed the proposed declaration of a national food security emergency, which she acknowledged could help ease the surge in rice prices. However, she warned that it would only serve as a temporary solution if middlemen in the supply chain are not eliminated.

“Rice prices would go down if the government directly buys rice products from local farmers, without going through middlemen,” she said.

Under the proposal, the National Food Authority (NFA) would procure rice directly from farmers and sell it at lower prices, bypassing profit-driven intermediaries.

The call for direct government intervention comes amid the implementation of the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, signed into law last year by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

The law imposes severe penalties, including life imprisonment, on those caught smuggling or hoarding agricultural products. Violators may also face fines five times the value of the smuggled goods.

<https://manilastandard.net/news/elections-2025/314549400/sampolan-abby-binay-urges-crackdown-vs-rice-cartels-smugglers.html>

THE MANILA TIMES:

NFA: Additional P9B needed for rice buffer

[By Giselle P. Jordan](#)

January 23, 2025

THE National Food Authority (NFA) on Wednesday said that it would need additional funds to pay for an increase in the country's rice buffer stock as mandated by Republic Act 12078 or the amended Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).

NFA Administrator Larry Lacson said a new provision in the amended RTL mandated the agency to have stocks good for 15 days of national consumption, higher than the previous requirement of nine days.

Given the 37,000 metric tons (MT) of average national daily rice consumption, the additional six days will require the agency to procure around 300,000 MT of palay from local farmers at an estimated price of P23 per kilogram.

"We were initially allocated a budget of P9 billion for buffer stocking this year, based on the nine-day requirement. But the additional six days will necessitate an extra P9 billion for palay procurement considering that our palay price procurement per kilo increased in 2024," Lacson said.

Agriculture Secretary and NFA Council Chairman Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said that ideally, the NFA's palay procurement should total 20 percent or approximately 4 million MT of domestic production. This is higher than the current rate of around 3 to 4 percent.

"The NFA used to be a market maker — both a buyer and seller of rice. Now, it is restricted to buffer stocking and buying rice from local rice farmers," Tiu Laurel said.

"We aim to restore its influence on palay pricing by purchasing more local rice, helping to boost Filipino farmers profitability," he added.

On Tuesday, the NFA Council approved a resolution to enable the agency to sell rice to local government units (LGUs) as part of their disaster management efforts.

Lacson said that the NFA should ideally release about 25,000 MT of rice to LGUs monthly without compromising its buffer stocks that are needed for emergencies, calamities or a declaration of national food emergency to stabilize supply and pricing.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/23/business/top-business/nfa-additional-p9b-needed-for-rice-buffer/2043065>

THE MANILA TIMES:

Organic agri hub eyed in Region 2

[By Leander C. Domingo](#)

January 23, 2025

CAGAYAN Valley (Region 2) aims to become a hub for organic agriculture with the Department of Agriculture Regional Field Office 2 (DA-RFO2) taking the lead in the initiative.

DA-RFO2 Executive Director Rose Mary Aquino led a technical team to visit and validate the proposed 15-hectare organic agriculture area in Barangay Villabuena in the town of Santa Maria, Isabela province, on Jan. 15, 2025.

"This milestone marks a significant step toward establishing the region as a hub for organic agriculture," said Aquino, adding that the Santa Maria, Isabela Participatory Guarantee System Inc., led by Annaliza Laggui, has been at the forefront of promoting organic agriculture in the area.

"This will be the agritourism site and the organic agriculture hub of the first district of Isabela," Aquino emphasized, highlighting the potential for the project to drive economic growth and promote environmental stewardship.

Ferdinand Cortez of the DA-RFO2 Regional Agriculture and Fisheries Information Section said that with the support of the local government unit of Santa Maria led by Mayor Hilario Pagautan, the 15-hectare area will be transformed into a thriving organic agriculture hub.

Cortez said the plans include the construction of a multi-span greenhouse, solar-powered irrigation system and poultry facility.

"This integrated farm approach will not only promote sustainable farming practices but also provide a platform for agritourism," he said. Comprising experts from various fields, the DA-RFO2 validation team, which included George Caday, Ricson Baldugo, Ryan Mirasol, Marwin Mariano, Ara Jamaica Bumanglod and Vicson Rivera, among others, was accompanied by the Santa Maria Municipal Agriculturist Herminia Atal.

Cortez said they assessed the site's potential and provided valuable insights to ensure the project's success.

"As the seeds of sustainability are sown in Isabela, a brighter future beckons. This initiative serves as an affirmation of the power of collaboration and the unwavering commitment to environmental stewardship," he said.

Cortez added that as the Cagayan Valley embarks on this journey, "it is certain that the future of organic agriculture in Isabela has never looked brighter."

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/23/business/agribusiness/organic-agri-hub-eyed-in-region-2/2042970>

THE MANILA TIMES:

IRRI, XAG partner to promote digital farming

[By Leander C. Domingo](#)

January 23, 2025

LOS BAÑOS, Laguna — Through digital agriculture and precision farming using drone technology, the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), in collaboration with smart agriculture technology leader XAG, is working on accelerating agricultural innovation in the Philippines.

With this, IRRI and XAG signed a memorandum of understanding validating the application of smart agriculture technologies in rice-based cropping systems through experimentation and research.

Through its Philippine partner Agridom, XAG has donated agricultural drones to IRRI to support its mission of advancing precision agriculture and sustainable farming practices. Agridom is a pioneer in the introduction of XAG agricultural drones in the Philippines bringing cutting-edge technology to local farmers and institutions.

Agridom's collaboration with IRRI demonstrates its unwavering commitment to driving agricultural innovation and empowering the sector with tools that enhance productivity and sustainability.

Engineer Steve Klassen, IRRI senior scientist and Digital Agriculture and Precision Farming lead, explained that drones have been increasingly used for high throughput phenotyping, crop monitoring, improving agricultural productivity and supporting precision farming.

"By providing efficient tools for crop monitoring, precision input application and data-driven decision-making, drones provide the potential to significantly reduce costs and increase yields, optimizing resource use and minimizing environmental impact," Klassen said.

He added that the drones could rapidly provide measurements of traits related to growth, yield and stress adaptation, and "this technology is particularly valuable to smallholder farmers who must improve their productivity and reduce production costs to be competitive and stay in business in response to climate change, labor shortages and higher input costs."

Pointing out that drone adoption in the Philippines is hindered by limited access to technology, lack of standard protocols, financial resources and regulatory constraints, he said overcoming these

challenges needs a "comprehensive approach that involves targeted training, guidelines for best practices, financial incentives and supportive government policies."

Klassen's team is also working with the Philippine Department of Agriculture-National Program, Philippine Rice Research Institute and their allied bureaus on the Drones4Rice Project "to streamline and standardize drone protocols for applying seeds, fertilizers and pesticides in the Philippines."

The drones donated by Agridom will support the ongoing Drones4Rice project and other IRRI initiatives on sustainable farming and digital acceleration.

Wei Tong, XAG head of international business, said IRRI is a key research and technology partner in the Philippines, and through this effort, they hope to contribute to the country's agricultural competitiveness through drone-based technologies.

"XAG's agricultural drones can be applied to various precision farming scenarios, specifically but not limited to direct seeding, pesticide spraying, fertilizer operation and remote sensing. We hope to expand our engagements abroad to strengthen global food security and tackle climate change, as rice is the primary staple food that feeds over half of the world's population," Tong said.

Meanwhile, XAG is also a member of the IRRI-led Direct Seeded Rice Consortium promoting direct seeding methods in rice cultivation by developing technologies and training farmers to adopt sustainable farming practices.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/23/business/agribusiness/irri-xag-partner-to-promote-digital-farming/2042958>

THE MANILA TIMES:

SM Foundation graduate now a farmer-trainer

January 23, 2025

RICKY Valdez, the youngest graduate of the 2013 SM Foundation's Kabalikat sa Kabuhayan (KSK) Farming Program batch in Cauayan, Isabela, is determined to show the younger generation that they are also the future of farming.

Over a decade after finishing the program, he continues to make an impact, now as a farmer-trainer of KSK Batches 382-385 in Tuguegarao.



icky Valdez (wearing mask), a graduate of the 2013 SM Foundation's Kabalikat sa Kabuhayan Farming Program, trains farmers in Tuguegarao. SM PHOTO

Born to farmer parents, Valdez grew up appreciating the value of agriculture. Even before joining the KSK program, he was already active in a youth organization that promoted agriculture, food production and healthy eating among the younger generation.

When he joined KSK in 2013, he eagerly immersed himself in hands-on activities and lectures. Even if he was the youngest among his batchmates, he used the time on his hands to learn as much as he could.

"As a graduate of KSK, I experienced how excellent the objective of the program is. The participants really learn, and not only on knowledge but also on the whole. Knowledge, skills and attitude is what the program develops," he said in Filipino.

Valdez calls KSK the triggering force of his career in agriculture. This also built up his mission to bring agriculture closer to communities, especially to the youth, prompting him to finish his degree in agriculture and develop an integrated farm.

Through his farm, he shares knowledge and skills with his community by offering seedlings and conducting basic lectures to visitors. Students now visit his farm to collect seedlings, later returning with photos of their sprouting plants and seeking his advice on cultivation techniques.

Continuing the cycle

Aside from opening his farm to the public, Valdez welcomed another opportunity to share the knowledge he gained by becoming a KSK trainer.

He recently conducted SM Foundation's farmer's training program for 100 KSK farmers in Tuguegarao.

Valdez said the program stands out for its collaborative approach, bringing together partner organizations — including the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Agriculture, among others — to help ensure the farmer-students develop sustainable livelihoods that will boost their income and improve their quality of life.

"My aim as a KSK trainer is for the trainees to learn more than what I know. I saw that what we taught through the SM Foundation will be used to increase their income, especially on farming," Valdez said.

A step closer to fulfilling Valdez's hope for his students, the recent graduates in Tuguegarao were supported by DSWD through a total seed capital of P1.5 million, with each farmers' association receiving P375,000 to jump-start their farming businesses.

Each batch successfully formed their own farmers' association.

The young farmer hopes that his journey — from being a KSK student to becoming a farmer and trainer — will inspire younger generations to see farming as a source of hope and a fulfilling way of life.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/23/business/agribusiness/sm-foundation-graduate-now-a-farmer-trainer/2042963>

THE MANILA TIMES:

AJAD releases new studies on sustainability

By [Leander C. Domingo](#)

January 23, 2025

THE latest issue of the Asian Journal of Agriculture and Development (AJAD), an international journal published by the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca), has seven new studies and a book review on global food prices, sustainable food system, food security, value chain, income diversification, and hunger and poverty.

One of paper is titled "Unveiling Socioeconomic Factors Shaping Global Food Prices and Security: A Machine Learning Approach" where Prof. Shan Shan of Zhejiang University in China said that harnessing machine learning techniques and understanding socioeconomic variables are necessary "to help policymakers make informed decisions on improving global food prices and security."

In an article titled "Developing a Framework for Edible Flower Conservation in the Mekong Region," researchers from Thailand,



China, Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam developed a framework for conservation strategies of edible flowers. This collaboration by Pongsakorn Suppakittpaisarna of Thailand's Chiang Mai University and his co-authors centers on community engagement to balance cultural heritage preservation with environmental sustainability to safeguard Mekong's unique botanical and cultural identity.

A paper titled "Antioxidant Dietary Fiber from the Bran of Five Philippine Pigmented Rice Varieties" states that all the bran samples from five Philippine pigmented rice varieties are potential sources of antioxidants, which are beneficial for health. In the study, Prof. Jennifer Fronteras and her co-authors found that the

Calatrava rice variety showed the highest total dietary fiber, including the highest antioxidant property that can be potentially used as nutraceuticals or a source of nutritious food.

In another paper titled "Assessing Handling Practices and Loss Factors in the Pineapple Value Chain in Camarines Norte, Philippines," Arjay Gerance of Thailand's Kasetsart University and L'Institut Agro Montpellier in France, and his co-authors showed critical loss points at various stages of the pineapple value chain from preharvesting to postharvesting. They said government intervention will improve standardization and regulatory practices which include preharvest treatments, improving infrastructure and road networks, and market access.

Meanwhile, the paper titled "Effects of Farm Income Diversification and Labor Out-Migration on Rice Household Productivity in Indonesia," the authors called for interventions that would increase farm productivity in the face of lower labor use on the farms. In this study, Prof. Masako Morioka of Obihiro University, Japan, and her co-authors showed that farmers' income from outside of agriculture did not compensate for the loss that impacted agricultural productivity because of the labor shift.

For its part, the paper by Mahar Mangahas, chairman emeritus of the Social Weather Station (SWS), and his co-author Christine Belle Torres, titled "The SWS Surveys of Philippine Hunger, 1998–2024" showed that hunger has been volatile for decades and there is no long-term decline in rates. The authors provide a peek at the great wealth of information available to the public from the SWS series of scientific national surveys about human well-being in general, not only hunger. The paper also included related topics on poverty, food poverty, poverty thresholds and food poverty thresholds.

Lastly, a book review by Prof. Julieta Delos Reyes of the University of the Philippines Los Baños finds "Food Economics: Agriculture, Nutrition and Health" helpful in simplifying complex economic theories. Delos Reyes recommends the book for those averse to numbers but want to fully understand economic concepts related to everyday choices.

AJAD welcomes articles all year round through <https://ajad.searca.org>. It publishes articles resulting from empirical, policy-oriented or institutional development studies, as well as articles of perspectives on agriculture and development, political economy of rural development and trade issues.

All the new and past papers published in AJAD are available from the same site for free, while print copies are also available through subscription.

Cielito Habito, professor of economics at the Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines and director of the Ateneo Center for Economic Research and Development, leads the editorial board.

Habito is a former Cabinet member of the Philippine government, having served as socioeconomic planning secretary and director general of the National Economic and Development Authority.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/23/business/agribusiness/ajad-releases-new-studies-on-sustainability/2042968>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

NFA seeks more funds for increasing its buffer stock

Ada Pelonia

January 23, 2025

THE National Food Authority (NFA) is seeking more funds to increase its buffer stock as mandated by the amended Rice Tariffication Law.

Under the amended RTL, the grains agency should now maintain a buffer stock enough to cover 15 days of national rice consumption from the previous nine-day requirement.

The NFA explained that with an average of 37,000 metric tons (MT) of national rice consumption daily, the additional six days of reserve would require the agency to procure roughly 300,000 MT of palay from local farmers at around P23 per kilo.

According to NFA Administrator Larry Lacson, the initial allocation of P9 billion for palay procurement this year should be doubled to achieve its new buffer stocking requirement.

“We were initially allocated a budget of P9 billion for buffer stocking this year, based on the 9-day requirement. But the additional 6 days will necessitate an extra P9 billion for palay procurement, considering that our palay price procurement per kilo increased in 2024, Lacson said in a statement.

The amended RTL also earmarks P2 billion for the NFA rice procurement from rice tariffs that would exceed the P30 billion allocated to the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF).

For Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., who also chairs the NFA Council, the grains agency’s palay procurement should “ideally” account for up to 20 percent of the country’s total domestic production—around 4 million metric tons (MMT)—compared to the current rate of about 3 to 4 percent.

“The NFA used to be a market maker—both a buyer and seller of rice. Now it is restricted to buffer stocking and buying rice from local rice farmers,” Laurel said.

“We aim to restore its influence on palay pricing by purchasing more local rice, helping to boost Filipino farmers profitability,” he added.

Meanwhile, the NFA Council approved on Tuesday a resolution allowing the grains agency to sell rice to local government units (LGUs) for disaster preparedness.

Lacson noted that the NFA should “ideally” release around 25,000 MT of rice monthly to LGUs without jeopardizing the buffer stock needed to respond to emergencies, calamities, or a national food emergency declaration aimed at stabilizing rice supply and prices.

He said the revenue would be used for personnel’s salary, operating expenses, and palay procurement.

“[Gagamitin ito] pang sueldo ng mga personnel at for operating expenses, pambili ng palay [This will be used for salaries of personnel, operating expenses and for palay purchase],” Lacson told the BusinessMirror on Wednesday.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/23/nfa-seeks-more-funds-for-increasing-its-buffer-stock/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

Weak enforcement flagged in robust illicit tobacco trade

Reine Juvierre S. Alberto and Jovee Marie N. de la Cruz
January 22, 2025

ALTHOUGH a proposed “track and trace” system is seen to plug tax leakages, this would be better combatted with stringent enforcement to further prevent illicit tobacco trade.

At the Senate Committee on Ways and Means hearing on Wednesday, Senator Sherwin T. Gatchalian said the illicit tobacco trade continues to thrive in the Philippines due to the low conviction rate of criminals.

This comes after the Bureau of Customs (BOC) filed 62 cases against smugglers of illicit cigarettes from 2018 to 2024, with a dutiable value of P2.255 billion.

Of the 62 cases filed, only one has been convicted, according to Assistant Commissioner Atty. Vincent Philip Maronilla.

Meanwhile, of the 29 cases the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) has filed with the Department of Justice (DOJ) with an estimated tax liability of P9.9 billion, no one has been convicted yet.

“Kung wala namang nakukulong, walang natatakot. Kung walang natatakot, tuloy-tuloy ang ligaya [If no one is put in jail, then no one is afraid. If no one is afraid, the fun continues],” Gatchalian said.

The lawmaker directed the Department of Finance (DOF), the head of the two main tax-collecting agencies, to look at the process of improving enforcement and conviction rates.

“Even if we improve the ‘track and trace’ system, even though we put the LGUs to action [but] if we don’t get a conviction, then it’s nothing. They will just be scot-free,” Gatchalian said.

The DOF has proposed a tracking and tracing system for the manufacturing, importation, storage, removal, distribution, and sale of tobacco products, cigars, cigarettes, heated tobacco products, vapor products and novel tobacco products to combat tax evasion and protect consumers.

The system is still being procured by the BIR through a public-private partnership.

AER weighs in

Action for Economic Reforms Researcher Adolfo Jose Montesa said that instead of doing away with tobacco taxes or decreasing tobacco taxes, the way to address illicit trade is through better enforcement.

The House Committee on Ways and Means filed House Bill No. 11279 to temporarily suspend the 5 percent annual tax rate hike on cigarettes and other tobacco products until 2026.

The proposed legislation sparked reactions from the health sector, as this would impact the funding for universal health care coverage that is largely funded by sin taxes.

Montesa said sin taxes have generated significant revenues, increasing by 400 percent the budget of the Department of Health and the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation in the previous years.

Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (Seatca) Executive Director Ulysses Dorotheo said countries with low excise taxes have high illicit trade, while other jurisdictions with high tobacco tax rates were able to keep illicit trade at low levels with effective law enforcement.

“The industry across the world has consistently argued that illicit trade is caused by tobacco tax increases, and time and again, the evidence has proven the industry wrong,” Dorotheo said.

Tax policy reforms

Moreover, Montesa cited a study from De La Salle University in 2021, saying that the way to address illicit trade is to have ongoing tax policy reforms, which should be taken as part of a comprehensive program to lower cigarette consumption in the country.

“It’s a sign that we have weak enforcement and tax collection if there is a prevalence of illicit trade. And in some cases, the presence of a robust illicit market can even lead to increased corruption and criminal activity,” Montesa said.

As such, the AER recommended better enforcement, with strengthened coordination between the BIR and the BOC along with local government units that have intelligence on what is happening on the ground.

Projections showed the government would lose P240.3 billion in excise tax collections over the next three years due to rampant illicit tobacco trade and misdeclaration of vapor products.

Sin tax hikes to proceed

Meanwhile, the Sin Tax Coalition has welcomed the decision of the leadership of the House of Representatives to halt deliberations on House Bill 11279, which seeks a temporary suspension of annual tax hikes on cigarettes and other tobacco products.

In a statement, the coalition praised the decision to cancel discussions on what it termed the “Sin Tax Sabotage Bill,” acknowledging the efforts of lawmakers for listening to health advocates and heeding public opinion.

The coalition emphasized the potential dangers of lowering tobacco taxes, asserting that it would lead to a decline in excise tax revenues, which fund crucial healthcare programs; a rise in the number of smokers; and an increase in smoking-related illnesses and deaths.

“The voice of many sectors is loud and clear: this bill will sabotage the gains of the Sin Tax Reform Law and worsen public health outcomes,” the coalition stated.

The group also encouraged the administration to align with the House’s decision and uphold the integrity of sin taxes.

It also called on the Department of Finance to fulfill the department’s mandate of protecting financial integrity and revenue collection.

The proposed amendment to the National Internal Revenue Code would suspend scheduled annual tax hikes on cigarettes, heated tobacco, and vapor products for 2026. Under the proposal, the tax rates would resume their regular increments starting in January 2027, increasing by 4 percent to 5 percent triennially or every three years thereafter.

The bill was filed following growing concerns over a surge in the illicit tobacco trade, which is estimated to have cost the government up to P129 billion in the past three years.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/22/weak-enforcement-flagged-in-robust-illicit-tobacco-trade/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

US FDA removes coconut from food allergen list–PCA

Ada Pelonia

January 22, 2025

The exclusion of coconut as a major food allergen eases trade barriers for coconut-based products in the US market, according to the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA).

This, after the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) removed coconut from the list of tree nuts under its revised allergen labeling guidance. Tree nuts are classified by the federal agency as a major food allergen.

According to the agency, the FDA’s decision impacts allergen labeling under the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004 (FALCPA), “which previously had a broad and sometimes contested interpretation of ‘tree nut.’”

“Coconut’s exclusion as a tree nut alleviates significant trade challenges for coconut-based products in the US market,” the PCA said in a statement.

The agency noted that consumers and the coconut industry stand to benefit from this move.

“For consumers, this means fewer misleading allergen labels on coconut products. While individuals allergic to tree nuts often assume they must avoid coconuts, the FDA’s clarification sets the record straight,” it said.

Furthermore, the agency said this marked the lifting of a ‘labeling stigma’ that has long hindered the market potential of coconut-based products for the industry.

“Brands and manufacturers can now market coconut items without the burden of misclassification that has long stifled consumer confidence and international trade, potentially leading to increased demand and innovation in coconut-derived goods,” it added.

Meanwhile, the PCA noted that coconut stakeholders worldwide could begin exploring new opportunities, particularly in markets previously hindered by allergen-related restrictions.

“With allergen-related trade barriers lifted, the road ahead is lined with potential for expanded markets and creative product innovations; it signals a new era where coconut’s true nature can shine as a vital contributor to the global food and agricultural landscape,” it added.

With this, the agency said it would ensure that the Philippines’ coconut farmers will benefit from the FDA’s move.

“The PCA is committed to harnessing this momentum, ensuring that every Filipino coconut farmer, processor, and entrepreneur benefits from this milestone.”

“We will continue our mission to march the Philippine coconut industry to unparalleled peaks, unlocking new possibilities for growth, innovation, and prosperity.”

The Philippines is one of the leading coconut-producing countries worldwide. The tropical fruit is also among the country’s top agricultural export commodities.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/22/us-fda-removes-coconut-from-food-allergen-list-pca/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

Government readies program to prop up sugar prices

Ada Pelonia

January 22, 2025

The Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) may issue a sugar order for the second round of its voluntary purchase program, which aims to boost the domestic price of the sweetener, by the end of January.

SRA Administrator Pablo Luis Azcona said the agency is now finalizing the SO for the program which involves the purchase of raw sugar at a premium.

The government previously allowed the purchase of 300,000 MT of raw sugar last year.

“Hopefully in a week or two [the order will be finalized],” Azcona told the BusinessMirror on Wednesday.

The SRA chief, however, said the government is still determining the volume of raw sugar that it will allow for the second round.

Under the draft SO 2, a copy of which was obtained by reporters, the SRA said it deemed it necessary to adopt another round of its voluntary purchase program “to maintain an optimum supply of sugar available for domestic consumption while ensuring reasonable and stable prices.”

Meanwhile, the agency said the raw sugar purchased by eligible participants would be temporarily classified as “C” (reserved sugar).

In return for purchasing raw sugar at a premium on a first-come-first-served basis, eligible participants would be prioritized in the government’s future import programs.

This would be done based on the raw sugar volume purchased by traders, at a ratio of 2 (locally produced raw sugar purchased): 1 (imported sugar).

Azcona had floated the idea of implementing another round of the program as part of efforts to arrest the slide in millgate prices of the commodity.

“We’re studying what we did last year and finding ways to improve it. [We want to] make sure that anybody can participate in the program as long as they have a domestic trading license,” he told reporters in a previous interview.

He said the program would “make the playing field a lot more level and fair.”

The prevailing prices of sugar ranged from P75 to P83 per kilo, based on the latest government price monitoring report.

Accessible credit

Meanwhile, the SRA said sugarcane farmers stand to gain from expedited loan approval under the streamlined process of its credit program.

The SRA, together with the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the LandBank of the Philippines signed last month the revised implementing rules and regulations of the Sugar Industry Development Act’s (SIDA) Socialized Credit Program (SCP).

Azcona said farmers, particularly those from remote areas, would now be given the opportunity to access credit.

“As a farmer myself, I know that when we need something, we need it immediately. We cannot afford to wait months as we’ve experienced in the past where help arrives late,” he said in a statement.

The revised guidelines cover the inclusion of credit conduits within its program coverage, reorganization of the program fund into trusts, and expansion of general obligations, policies, and guidelines.

For credit conduits, a basic lending policy within the IRR was created for its credentials and functions. Following SRA and LandBank accreditation, planters associations may lend credit at an interest rate not exceeding 6 percent to accommodate operational expenses.

The waiving of credit investigation and background information (CI/BI) was also revised, which changed the standard of investigation from loan amounts to land area. Individual sugarcane

farmers and block farm members with a maximum of five hectares would now be waived from CI/BI.

Other financial revisions of basic lending policies, such as the frequency of reporting and lower interest rates for common service centers, have also been approved to improve the process for beneficiaries.

The new guidelines also include individual block farm members, extending the newly expedited process to new beneficiaries and accommodating other production costs that may not be covered by the starting capital extended through the agency's block farming program.

"The revised IRR opens the credit window to individual sugar farmers, block farms, credit conduits, common service centers, and women organizations engaged with the sugarcane farming," Senator Cynthia Villar said.

She added that this would provide stakeholders' access to financing that would allow them to improve productivity.

For SRA Board Member Ma. Mitzi Mangwang, who also chairs the SCP, stories from sugarcane farmers serve as a "nudge of their part in helping planters' livelihood."

"The stories of our beneficiaries are our motivation. They remind us of the critical role we play in supporting their livelihoods and ensuring the future of the sugarcane industry and the signing of the revised IRR is a significant step forward," Mangwang said.

SRA said the revised SCP would be presented in a convention this year to orient mill districts and other stakeholders to the new policies.

It added that a roadshow within sugar regions would also be implemented to improve transparency and services.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/22/government-readies-program-to-prop-up-sugar-prices/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

NFA seeks more funds for increasing its buffer stock

Ada Pelonia

January 23, 2025

THE National Food Authority (NFA) is seeking more funds to increase its buffer stock as mandated by the amended Rice Tariffication Law.

Under the amended RTL, the grains agency should now maintain a buffer stock enough to cover 15 days of national rice consumption from the previous nine-day requirement.

The NFA explained that with an average of 37,000 metric tons (MT) of national rice consumption daily, the additional six days of reserve would require the agency to procure roughly 300,000 MT of palay from local farmers at around P23 per kilo.

According to NFA Administrator Larry Lacson, the initial allocation of P9 billion for palay procurement this year should be doubled to achieve its new buffer stocking requirement.

“We were initially allocated a budget of P9 billion for buffer stocking this year, based on the 9-day requirement. But the additional 6 days will necessitate an extra P9 billion for palay procurement, considering that our palay price procurement per kilo increased in 2024, Lacson said in a statement.

The amended RTL also earmarks P2 billion for the NFA rice procurement from rice tariffs that would exceed the P30 billion allocated to the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF).

For Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., who also chairs the NFA Council, the grains agency’s palay procurement should “ideally” account for up to 20 percent of the country’s total domestic production—around 4 million metric tons (MMT)—compared to the current rate of about 3 to 4 percent.

“The NFA used to be a market maker—both a buyer and seller of rice. Now it is restricted to buffer stocking and buying rice from local rice farmers,” Laurel said.

“We aim to restore its influence on palay pricing by purchasing more local rice, helping to boost Filipino farmers profitability,” he added.

Meanwhile, the NFA Council approved on Tuesday a resolution allowing the grains agency to sell rice to local government units (LGUs) for disaster preparedness.

Lacson noted that the NFA should “ideally” release around 25,000 MT of rice monthly to LGUs without jeopardizing the buffer stock needed to respond to emergencies, calamities, or a national food emergency declaration aimed at stabilizing rice supply and prices.

He said the revenue would be used for personnel’s salary, operating expenses, and palay procurement.

“[Gagamitin ito] pang sueldo ng mga personnel at for operating expenses, pambili ng palay [This will be used for salaries of personnel, operating expenses and for palay purchase], ” Lacson told the BusinessMirror on Wednesday.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/23/nfa-seeks-more-funds-for-increasing-its-buffer-stock/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

Rice inflation risks high, BSP cautioned

Cai U. Ordinario
January 22, 2025



Newly delivered rice from Regions 2 and 3 is stored at a National Food Authority (NFA) warehouse in Valenzuela on Monday, January 20, 2025. The Department of Agriculture is poised to declare a food security emergency to address persistently high rice prices. The declaration would allow NFA to release 300,000 metric tons of rice from buffer stocks to stabilize prices while replenishing these reserves with locally produced rice to support Filipino farmers. However, the emergency declaration could fan rice inflation, a former central bank deputy governor has warned.

A FORMER Deputy Governor of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) has offered a word of caution on the central bank's plans to further ease monetary policy, saying that the "precarious rice situation" will not lead to slower inflation this year.

In his latest economic brief, Diwa Guinigundo, currently the Country Analyst for Global Source Partners, said rice prices, which carry an 8.9 percent weight in the Consumer Price Index (CPI), have the ability to cause inflation to spike again.

Given that the country is one of, if not the world's largest rice importer, the weak peso and "creeping fuel price increases" could lead to more expensive rice in the country. These, Guinigundo said, may lead to faster inflation this year.

"Such a precarious rice situation does not promise bright prospects for domestic inflation," Guinigundo said. "The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas would have to be careful in issuing forward guidance that commits itself to more rate reductions in the next meetings of the Monetary Board."

Guinigundo said the "precarious rice situation" stemmed from the Department of Agriculture's declaration that it will declare a food security emergency for rice.

This will lead to the release of 300,000 metric tons of rice stocks from warehouses of the National Food Authority (See: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/17/food-security-emergency-to-let-nfa-sell-rice-buffer-stock/>).

The reason for this is despite the reduction in rice tariffs, prices of the country's food staple may remain elevated because of unresolved supply side issues.

Inflation projection

Guinigundo said given these challenges, it is unlikely that inflation will be kept within the 2 to 4 percent inflation target. The BSP's risk-adjusted inflation rate now stands at 3.4 percent in 2025 and 3.7 percent in 2026.

"The problem remains because agricultural policy to stabilize prices of key commodities continue to focus on market dynamics rather than on production and agricultural productivity," Guinigundo said.

In his view, allowing the NFA to sell rice through government-run Kadiwa centers which retail rice directly to consumers is not sustainable.

This is because the rice to be sold is only a fraction of the rice available in the market. The 300,000 metric tons of rice from NFA warehouses will have a "minimal impact, if at all."

He also noted that NFA's planned 500,000 bags represent only 25,000 tons or about 66 percent of the country's rice consumption in one day.

“Lower selling price means the government would have to subsidize in order to keep rice prices lower and closer to the campaign promise to bring it down to P28 per kilo. But broken rice, the cheapest variety, retails at P58 per kilo based on suggested retail price [SRP],” Guinigundo said.

DA’s dilemma

Earlier, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. issued the statement about the food security emergency after the National Price Coordinating Council (NPCC) approved a resolution urging the DA to declare one, as retail rice prices remained high despite declining global rice costs and tariff reductions.

Laurel noted that the grains agency is in a pickle, with 300,000 metric tons (MT) of rice stored in its warehouses.

He added that if stocks were released from the grains agency, these would be sold to local government units (LGUs), the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the Philippine National Police (PNP), and other government agencies.

By February, Laurel noted that they aim to offer the rice stocks to LGUs and other agencies at P36 per kilo, which the latter could sell to the public at P38 per kilo. By March, however, he said they intend to sell it at P33 per kilo, which the agencies could sell at P35 per kilo.

Image credits: [Nonoy Lacza](#)

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/22/rice-inflation-risks-high-bsp-cautioned/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

NTA: Defend local industry from smuggled tobacco, vapes

Ada Pelonia

January 22, 2025

The National Tobacco Administration (NTA) is calling for “unified actions” that will shield the local industry from the ill effects of the illicit trade of tobacco and vape products.

NTA Administrator Belinda Sanchez said comprehensive regulatory initiatives would mitigate the impact of illicit trade and ensure a secure environment for the tobacco industry.

Such measures include strengthened national policies, enhanced regional cooperation, improved enforcement mechanisms, and increased public awareness.

“The illicit tobacco trade is a significant challenge, adversely impacting government revenues, public health, national security, and the livelihoods of the Filipino farmers,” Sanchez said in a statement.

The NTA said it has observed the high prevalence of illicit tobacco trade in Central Luzon and the rampant proliferation of illegal cigarettes in Mindanao, based on its latest monitoring.

“Many of the cigarettes that were previously confiscated were smuggled, illicit whites with no tax stamps, no graphic health warnings, and unregistered brands.”

Citing the 2023 Euromonitor Report’s estimates, the agency said the rising trend of the illicit tobacco trade and vape products contributed to the decline of legal tobacco products by 35.2 percent from Calendar Years (CYs) 2019 to 2023.

Furthermore, the agency said the national government was deprived of the excise tax collection of P109 billion compared to the projected collection of P244 billion for CY 2023.

Citing estimates from the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), NTA said the illicit tobacco trade’s occurrence has caused a gradual decrease in revenue collection by the national government as it incurred a loss of up to P100 billion annually.

Meanwhile, the NTA noted that it has conducted various communication campaign activities such as distributing posters, webinars, forum, and an audio-video presentation on social media and its radio program to increase awareness of the ill effects of tobacco smuggling.

Currently, the agency said 2.2 million Filipinos are financially dependent on tobacco including over 430,000 farmers, farm workers, and their family members.

Rampant illicit tobacco trade and misdeclaration of vapor products are projected to cost the government P240.3 billion in excise tax leakages over the next three years. (*See: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/10/illicit-tobacco-trade-vapor-fraud-spell-p240-b-tax-loss/>*)

Data from the BIR, as estimated by the OSSTG Ways and Means Committee, showed the government will lose P171.95 billion and P5.94 billion, respectively, due to the illicit trade of cigarettes and heated tobacco products.

The misdeclaration of vape products is also expected to affect collections, resulting in a P62.52-billion shortfall.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/22/nta-defend-local-industry-from-smuggled-tobacco-vapes/>