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**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# Laurel calls for multi-sector collaboration to fight illegal tobacco

BY [DEXTER BARRO II](#)

Jan 27, 2025 03:09 PM

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A look at a panel forum during the Second International Tobacco Summit (Dexter Barro II/MANILA BULLETIN)

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is committed to address the proliferation of illicit trade in the local tobacco industry, noting its severe impact on government revenues and the livelihood of farmers.

The DA issued this declaration in a speech by Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, delivered by Undersecretary Roger Navarro, during the Second International Tobacco Summit on Monday, Jan. 27.

“Protecting and supporting our local tobacco industry is crucial for the livelihoods it sustains in the countryside and the economic stability it provides,” said Laurel.

“We cannot afford to let the illicit trade undermine our government sectors and the livelihood of our farmers,” he added.

The Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) earlier confirmed that the government is losing up to P100 billion in excise tax collections annually due to illicit trade. Excisable products include alcohol, petroleum, and tobacco, among others.

While he admitted that combating illegal tobacco trade will have “significant hurdles,” Laurel emphasized that a collaboration among policymakers, regulators, and law enforcement is especially vital.

The DA chief said this is viable under Republic Act (RA) No. 12022 or the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, which President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. enacted in September of last year.

“It is imperative for our government to adopt a holistic approach to approach this issue. We urge all stakeholders, public and private sector, to unite in our efforts and to further strengthen our strategies against illicit tobacco trade while supporting and empowering our local farmers,” he explained.

Under the law, illicit operations in agricultural and fishery products such as smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, and cartel operations will now be classified as economic sabotage—a non-bailable offense punishable by life imprisonment.

Laurel said clamping down on illicit trade enables the government to maximize its revenues, particularly those allotted for social service programs.

To recall, excise taxes in the country provide essential funding for key initiatives of the government such as the Universal Health Care (UHC) program.

The agriculture secretary, however, pointed out the Philippines imposes some of the highest excise taxes on tobacco products in the world.

“While excise taxes are designed to protect public health and generate government revenues, they may have inadvertently contributed to the growth of illicit trade which undermines the legitimate tobacco industry and the welfare of our farmers,” he continued.

Several economists have suggested that higher excise tax forces consumers to favor non-taxed tobacco products which are relatively cheaper.

According to the National Tobacco Administration (NTA), illicit trade of tobacco affects approximately 2.2 million Filipinos who are financially dependent on the crop. This includes more than 430,000 farmers, farm workers, and their family members.

The NTA is the organizer of Monday’s event held in Quezon City, featuring policymakers, industry leaders, and government officials.

The agency launched the inaugural summit in 2023 to emphasize the discussion on the campaign against the proliferation of illicit tobacco trade and smuggling.

This year’s event, with the theme “Advancing the Local Tobacco Industry and Combatting Illicit Trade,” was originally scheduled in October 2024 but was postponed due to inclement weather.

<https://mb.com.ph/2025/1/27/da-vows-to-curb-illicit-tobacco-trade>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# US removes coconut from allergen list

[Louella Desiderio](#) - The Philippine Star

January 28, 2025 | 12:00am



In a statement, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said the move would help Philippine coconut exporters to the US as it removes the need for special allergen labeling on coconut-containing packaged foods and supplements.

STAR / File

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippines expects a boost in coconut exports following the US Food and Drug Administration’s removal of coconut from the list of tree nuts classified as major food allergens.

In a statement, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said the move would help Philippine coconut exporters to the US as it removes the need for special allergen labeling on coconut-containing packaged foods and supplements.

The DTI and the Department of Agriculture have been pushing for the removal of coconut from the list of major allergens, with a policy mission conducted in the US in September 2023 to discuss the issue with government experts and counterparts.

Citing data from global market intelligence agency Mintel from 2018 to 2023, DTI Export Marketing Bureau director Bianca Sykimte said there are more than 20,000 product variants that use coconut as an ingredient in the US.

“The delisting of coconut as a major food allergen can boost demand for these products and encourage more producers and consumers to support coconut-based or containing products. This, in turn, will benefit our coconut farmers and exporters,” she said.

She said the development shows the government's commitment to support the growth and development of the coconut sector by addressing key market access and regulatory issues.

Coconut products are among the Philippines' top exports, with shipments to the US alone reaching \$524.92 million from January to October last year, according to Philippine Statistics Authority data.

Industry players welcomed the development.

"The issue on food allergens has been running for decades. Finally removing coconut as a tree nut eliminates one issue against it. This is the result of a joint private-government sector effort. Hopefully, the other market issues will also have their successful conclusion," United Coconut Association of the Philippines executive director Yvonne Agustin said.

Rhoey Lee Dakis, vice president of sales, marketing and export at Peter Paul Philippine Corp., which exports coconut oil to the US, said the decision provides much needed clarity for consumers, manufacturers and the industry.

"This development is a testament to science-based policymaking and reinforces the safety and accessibility of coconut as a versatile and nutritious ingredient. We believe this progress will further strengthen the global coconut industry by removing barriers and offering consumers accurate and reliable information," he said.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2025/01/28/2417294/us-removes-coconut-allergen-list>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Marcos appoints new BFAR director

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

January 28, 2025 | 12:00am



**Elizer Salilig**

STAR / File

MANILA, Philippines — President Marcos has appointed Elizer Salilig as permanent director of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) after the ombudsman upheld the former chief’s dismissal.

Salilig replaced Demosthenes Escoto, dismissed over alleged irregularities in awarding a P2.1-billion contract for vessel monitoring system (VMS) transceivers to a British company in 2018.

The new BFAR director is a career official serving in the fisheries sector for over 34 years.

Starting as a fishery technician in Soccsksargen, Salilig had advanced to aquaculturist I and planning and budget officer overseeing the development and evaluation of key fisheries programs.

Salilig contributed to the implementation of the Fisheries Scholarship Program.

In 2016, Salilig was appointed regional director of the BFAR in Mimaropa.

During his tenure, he spearheaded the Tilapia Intensive Hatchery Production program to strengthen aquaculture production. Salilig also established the country’s first shrimp hatchery in Oriental Mindoro.

Salilig led the modernization of the regional office facility.

In an eight-page order, Ombudsman Samuel Martires dismissed the motions for reconsideration filed by Escoto, former agriculture undersecretary and BFAR national director Eduardo Gongona and British national Simon Tucker of SRT Marine Systems Solutions.

The defendants moved to reverse their graft indictment over alleged anomalies in the VMS project.

Escoto's involvement in a scheme to favor SRT-France and SRT-UK – despite the former's ineligibility to participate in the bidding process – established his probable guilt and liability, the ombudsman said.

The French embassy in the Philippines had declared SRT-France's lack of qualifications due to the absence of manufacturing records or engineering facilities in France.

James Mier Victoriano had filed a complaint after the contract for BFAR's Integrated Marine Environment Monitoring System Project Phase II was awarded to SRT-UK.

### **Fewer farm imports**

Meanwhile, constructing 99 cold storage facilities nationwide will lessen imported farm products as farmers can store their produce, according to peasants' group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag).

Citing onion farmers' experience last year, the group said red onions were not imported as the government saw there were stocks, with bulbs lasting until December.

"If we have more cold storage facilities, local farmers can compete. There is no need to import as cold storage facilities are full," Sinag executive director Jayson Cainglet said yesterday in a radio interview.

A P3-billion initiative to construct 99 cold storage facilities nationwide will be rolled out by the Department of Agriculture.

With cold storage facilities, Cainglet said farmers can negotiate better prices without fear of vegetables possibly rotting.

"Middlemen cannot dictate prices as farmers would have the option to store their products until a better price is offered," he said.

The facilities should be free and operated by farmers' cooperatives, Cainglet said.

Farmers spend at least P300 per bag to avail themselves of cold storage facilities for six months, Cainglet noted.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said the facilities would feature sustainable, cost-efficient designs powered by renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind, alongside electricity from the grid.

### **Solve rice hoarding**

President Marcos should create a national council to address rice smuggling, hoarding and profiteering in the country, a lawmaker said yesterday.

Despite tariff cuts and lower prices in the world market, rice has remained costly for Filipinos, Agricultural Sector Alliance of the Philippines party-list Rep. Nicanor Briones pointed out.

The proposed council, he said, would be comprised of the trade, finance and agriculture departments, as well as the National Economic and Development Authority.



The council shall formulate policies and form a law enforcement group against smugglers, hoarders and profiteers, he noted.

Despite the passage of the Anti-Economic Sabotage Act, no one has been punished yet, Briones said.

Under the law, he noted that agricultural smuggling, hoarding, profiteering and engaging in a cartel are classified as economic sabotage, a non-bailable crime with a penalty of life imprisonment.

Twenty-one containers of smuggled frozen mackerel from China were seized last year by Customs officials at the Manila International Container Port, Briones recalled.

Charges were filed against importer Pacific Sealand Food Corp. A hold departure order must be issued against the owners, Briones said.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/01/28/2417354/marcos-appoints-new-bfar-director>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# DBM allocates P580.5M for tobacco industry development in 2025 budget

By: [Jown Manalo](#) - Reporter / [@jownmanaloINQ](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 09:05 PM January 27, 2025



Budget Secretary Amenah Pangandaman  
—PHOTO FROM DBM

MANILA, Philippines — The National Tobacco Administration (NTA) has received P580.5 million from the P6.326 trillion national budget for fiscal year 2025 to support its Tobacco Industry Development Program, Budget Secretary Amenah Pangandaman revealed during the 2nd International Tobacco Summit on Monday.

“On December 30, 2024, the President signed and approved the P6.326 trillion pesos National Budget for Fiscal Year 2025, which is designed to address our present needs to sustain growth and uplift the lives of generations that are yet to come. That’s why more than half of the national budget is allocated for both social and economic services,” Pangandaman said in a recorded speech.

She emphasized that agriculture remained a government priority, with significant investments made to modernize the sector, particularly the tobacco industry.

“As agriculture remains a government priority, we will invest heavily in modernizing the sector, especially the tobacco industry, to enhance productivity, strengthen budgetary development, and expand farmers’ market access,” she added.

Of the P580.5 million allocation, P100 million was earmarked for the Tobacco Farmers Production Assistance Program, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) secretary bared.

According to Pangandaman, this shall “enhance the global competitiveness of the local tobacco industry through research and development, technological assistance, and production support services and policy development.”

Another P100 million was allocated for the Curing Barn Assistance Project, which supported the construction and repair of curing barns and sheds.

“These programs will also be complemented by initiatives that improve the access of marginalized farmers and migrants of enterprises to financial services, especially to low-interest loans, as our farmers are the backbone of the Philippine agriculture sector,” the DBM secretary noted.

Pangandaman likewise highlighted broader initiatives aimed at helping farmers, such as the Agricultural Credit Program, which received P2.75 billion to provide low-interest loans to small farmers and fisherfolk.

The government also allocated P4.5 billion to the Crop Insurance Program to cover premiums for crops, livestock, fisheries, and non-crop agricultural assets, she added.

The DBM secretary also lauded the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, signed last year, as an essential step in curbing hoarding, smuggling, and other illegal practices.

“Through this law, we will prevent the entry of smuggled tobacco, ensuring that correct duties and taxes are paid while imposing higher penalties,” she emphasized.

Pangandaman also noted that infrastructure projects under the Build-Better-More Program benefited agriculture.

“Nine projects will focus on boosting the agriculture sector, which includes 20 rural development projects, scale-up projects, aimed at improving farmers and fisherfolks’ market access,” she said.

“This will help build a more resilient agriculture sector that defends both our farmers and consumers.,” Pangandaman concluded.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2028699/dbm-allocates-p580-5m-for-tobacco-industry-development-in-2025-budget>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# DA: Anti-agri economic sabotage act set to fight illicit tobacco trade

By: [Jown Manalo](#) - Reporter / [@jownmanaloINQ](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 04:04 PM January 27, 2025



The National Tobacco Administration kicks off its International Tobacco Summit at Seda Vertis North Hotel in Quezon City on Monday, January 27, 2025. [INQUIRER.net](#) / JOWN MANALO

MANILA, Philippines — The newly signed Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act is expected to bolster the fight against tobacco smuggling and illicit trade, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said on Monday.

This is amid the global and local proliferation of illicit activities in tobacco products, which the agency considers as hurdles that are “complex and extensive.”

On behalf of Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Undersecretary Roger Navarro emphasized that the law promotes a whole-of-government approach by collaborating with policymakers, regulators, and law enforcement agencies.

“With the AES (Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act) law, we hold every criminal accountable, empowering our enforcement agencies with the tools they need to protect our economy and our farmers,” Tiu Laurel said in a message delivered by Navarro during the 2nd International Tobacco Summit on Monday.

“Ang mga batas na ito ay nagbibigay ng ngipin sa ating mga law enforcement agencies, at ito ay napakahalaga para sa ating lokal na industriya. We cannot afford to let illicit trade undermine our agricultural sector and the livelihoods of our farmers,” he added.

(These laws bolster our law enforcement agencies, which is critical for our local industry. We cannot afford to let illicit trade undermine our agricultural sector and the livelihoods of our farmers.)

He further underscored that the law supports both food and national security, which he described as interconnected.

“This law is not just a set of regulations. It is a turning point for our agricultural sector. It aims to enhance the welfare of our farmers and fisherfolk, aligning perfectly with our President’s thrust to ensure food security for every Filipino,” he said.

“When we support our farmers, we bolster the foundations of our society, and we safeguard the future,” he added.

Tiu Laurel highlighted the significant contribution of the local tobacco industry to the national economy, job creation, and public health funding.

“As of 2021, the total value of tobacco exports, both manufactured and unmanufactured, reached an impressive amount of \$619 million,” he noted.

“This figure highlights the global demand for our tobacco products and, at the same time, emphasizes the vital contribution to our national economy,” he added.

With this, Tiu Laurel called on stakeholders to unite and enhance strategies to combat illicit tobacco trade and safeguard local farmers.

“When we invest in our communities, we strengthen the very fabric of our society,” he stressed.

The Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, signed into law on September 25, 2024, imposes stiffer penalties on smugglers and hoarders of agricultural and fishery products.

Under this law, the DA treats “smuggling and hoarding of agricultural food products as economic sabotage when the value of goods exceeds P10 million.”

Violators face fines five times the value of the smuggled or hoarded products and could face life imprisonment if found guilty.

“Creating cartels and financing smugglers and hoarders will also be considered economic sabotage,” the DA said in a previous statement.

Additionally, the law establishes a minimum retail price for tobacco products in the country as part of its provisions to regulate the industry and combat illicit trade.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2028637/da-anti-agri-economic-sabotage-act-set-to-fight-illicit-tobacco-trade>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Ex-solons hit budget blanks; enrolled budget bill is complete, says Quimbo

By: [Gabriel Pabico Lalu](#) - Reporter / [@GabrielLaluINQ](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 01:15 PM January 27, 2025



Marikina 2nd District Rep. Stella Quimbo (second from left) speaks at a House hearing on Tuesday, Feb. 28, 2023. (File photo from a video on the Facebook page of the House of Representatives)

MANILA, Philippines — Marikina 2nd District Rep. Stella Quimbo has maintained that the enrolled budget bill or the General Appropriations Bill (GAB) submitted for President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s signature was complete.

Her view comes amid questions and concerns from former lawmakers about some blanks in the line items.

Quimbo, in a statement on Monday, clarified that two versions are being discussed — the enrolled bill, or the final version, and the bicameral conference committee report on the disagreeing provisions of the House of Representatives and the Senate version of the budget.

While she did not confirm the existence of blanks in the bicam report, Quimbo said the report allowed the secretariat of both legislative chambers to implement corrections and adjustments.



“I am issuing this statement to reaffirm what has already been clearly stated by the Executive Secretary, the Secretary of the Department of Budget and Management, the Senate President, and the President himself,” Quimbo said.

“The 2025 General Appropriations Act (GAA) is lawful, valid and fully enforceable,” she insisted.

The lawmaker is serving as acting chairperson of the House Committee on Appropriations.

“There are two key points I want to stress for the benefit of all. First, the enrolled General Appropriations Bill is complete, with no blank allocations among its more than 235,000 line items,” Quimbo maintained.

“Second, the Bicameral Report explicitly authorized the technical secretariats of both the Senate and the House of Representatives to implement corrections and adjustments as required,” she explained.

The House member pointed out, “These do not affect the integrity nor the legality of the budget.”

According to Quimbo, all the appropriations were already determined when the lawmakers agreed to ratify the bicam report.

“When the members of the Bicameral Committee signed the report, all appropriations had already been determined and approved. No changes were made,” she recalled.

“The enrolled General Appropriations Bill has been made publicly available, providing the best evidence of its completeness and compliance with due process. Makikita po ng lahat ito. Walang tinatago,” she said.

(Everyone will see it. Nothing is being hidden.)

Quimbo claims the suggestions of irregularity are only politically motivated.

“Any suggestion of impropriety is unfounded and appears to be politically motivated rather than prompted by genuinely substantive concerns. It is unfortunate that an administrative matter is being maliciously misconstrued to create controversy where there is none,” she said.

Former President Rodrigo Duterte and his ally, former appropriations panel head and Davao City 3rd District Rep. Isidro Ungab, first raised concerns about the blank items in the 2025 budget.

Last Wednesday, Ungab told the Philippine Daily Inquirer that he would challenge the legality of the 2025 GAA before the Supreme Court as there were blanks in the bicam committee report.

Copies of the bicam report showed that the blanks were mostly with Department of Agriculture and Department of Agrarian Reform programs.

The blanks were for allocations for the National Irrigation Authority and the National Food Authority.

This situation supposedly goes against the Constitution’s provision in Article VI, Section 24 which states that all “appropriation, revenue or tariff bills, bills authorizing increase of the public debt, bills of local application, and private bills shall originate exclusively in the House of Representatives.”

Marcos and other administration officials, however, dismissed these allegations, saying that Duterte is lying.

Former lawmakers have urged Quimbo and the bicam members to explain allegations of having blanks in the budget.

Former House Deputy Speaker Erin Tañada challenged Quimbo to speak about the issue, especially after she refused to answer questions from reporters as she was leaving a House panel hearing last Thursday.

Quimbo’s staffers said the lawmaker was rushing to an event after the hearing. Hence, she failed to answer questions.

“Why is Rep. Stella Quimbo afraid to tell the truth if there are blanks in the 2025 Budget? She should know. She is the newly installed Chair of the Committee of Appropriations. She was part of the Bi-Cam. Is she hiding the truth?” Tañada asked in a tweet last Friday.



Former Senator Panfilo “Ping” Lacson (File photo)

Former Senator Ping Lacson, meanwhile, observed that it seems nobody from the present Senate is talking about issues involving the budget.

“The bicam report on the 2025 budget that reportedly contained blank appropriations and was signed by the bicameral conference committee members looks like a repeat of the 2019 General Appropriations Act,” Lacson remembered.

He said this was an instance “when former President Rodrigo Duterte vetoed P95.3 billion upon the then Sotto-led Senate’s strong representation after we discovered anomalous entries in the printed Enrolled Bill that were not reflected in our ratified bicam report.”

“But the big difference now is, it seems nobody among the present senators dared – or cared – to scrutinize the budget documents. Hence, this controversy now brewing,” Lacson lamented.

“The Filipino taxpayers deserve an explanation. An examination of the Enrolled Bill printed by the House of Representatives and comparing it with the Ratified Bicam report will expose those responsible,” the former senator suspected.

Quimbo is the latest to insist that the enrolled budget bill had no blank provisions.

Last Tuesday, Senator Risa Hontiveros said that although she voted against the 2025 budget, she did not see any blanks in the items under the bicam report.

Senate President Francis Escudero also maintained that the bicam report which he signed had no blank items.

Escudero, in an interview last Wednesday, said that Ungab — a former chairperson of the House committee on appropriations — should have known better as he is aware of the budget processes.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2028592/ex-solons-hit-budget-blanks-enrolled-budget-bill-is-complete-says-quimbo>

## **BUSINESS WORLD:**

# **Tobacco leaf production rises 7.45% in 2024**

January 27, 2025 | 9:13 pm



### **PHILSTAR FILE PHOTO**

TOBACCO leaf production increased 7.45% to 45.4 million kilograms in 2024, with more farmers encouraged to plant by export opportunities and local government prodding, according to the National Tobacco Administration (NTA).

NTA Deputy Administrator Nestor C. Casela said on Monday that the output boost was accompanied by a weakening of buying prices for leaf tobacco to P129.04 per kilogram in 2024 from the P137.32 per kilo average reported for 2023.

“Our tobacco became competitive in international markets. Aside from that, local government units’ share (of tobacco taxes) is higher; that’s why they are so motivated to encourage their farmers to plant more,” Mr. Casela told reporters on the sidelines of the International Tobacco Summit.

He added that China, the top producer of tobacco, reduced its production, opening the door for more Philippine tobacco to enter the global market.

Virginia tobacco output rose to 16.79 million kilos from 14.77 million, Native tobacco output increased to 20.98 million kilos from 20.59 million, while Burley tobacco output rose to 7.63 million kilos from 6.89 million.

Philippine Tobacco Growers Association President Saturnino Distor also attributed the increase in production to corn farmers switching to tobacco.

“Corn farmers are having problems with the fall army worms,” Mr. Distor said on the sidelines of the summit.

Fall army worms feed on more than 80 crop species including corn, rice, sorghum, and vegetables.

The NTA also reported that the number of tobacco farmers in 2024 grew to 43,098 from 40,786 tallied the prior year.

Land area planted to tobacco rose to 25,926 hectares from 25,309 hectares a year earlier.

For 2025, the NTA is targeting output of 45.58 million kilos, which if realized would be a 0.4% increase from 2024.

Mr. Distor said the production goal for the year will likely be met due to better climate conditions compared to 2024, when the country faced the impact of El Niño and La Niña. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/01/27/649373/tobacco-leaf-production-rises-7-45-in-2024/>

**BUSINESS WORLD:**

# Angat cold inspection center could start operations by H1

January 27, 2025 | 9:12 pm



**PHILIPPINE STAR/EDD GUMBAN**

THE Department of Agriculture said it is pushing to launch the cold examination facilities in agriculture (CEFA) in Angat, Bulacan before the end of the first half.

“We will try to finish everything by first half,” Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. told reporters.

According to Mr. Laurel, delays in operating the facility were caused by a failed bid in December.

“There was one for an x-ray, laboratory, for other construction. So part of the funds were reverted (to the Treasury). There is a delay because we had to re-bid,” he added.

CEFAs verify whether imported produce is disease-free, amid risks posed by smuggled farm goods that do not undergo inspection.

Imported agri-fishery products typically undergo examination by food regulators overseeing the animal, plant, meat, and fisheries industries.

Mr. Laurel has said that the Angat facility was originally due to be fully operational by February.

The DA signed a memorandum of agreement with Pacific Roadlink Logistics, Inc. to construct the facility in Bulacan.

The Angat facility was intended to be used as a laboratory, and for rendering and waste disposal.

The DA had been allocated P2.3 billion in 2023 for the construction of CEFA facilities. The funding was reduced to P1.2 billion in 2024 after International Container Terminal Services, Inc. offered to host most of the facilities in ports that it operates.

Mr. Laurel had said that the additional CEFAs in Manila, Subic in Zambales, Davao, and General Santos are due to be operational by September. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/01/27/649370/angat-cold-inspection-center-could-start-operations-by-h1/>



## **BUSINESS WORLD:**

# **PUM tapped to develop coco fiber products**

January 27, 2025 | 9:11 pm



THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has partnered with Dutch organization PUM Netherlands to develop high-value products from coconut husk in Davao.

In a statement on Monday, DTI said that PUM Netherlands has helped 25 coconut-based enterprises and coconut farmers in the region.

“Composed of volunteer senior business advisors, PUM Netherlands has been facilitating several capacity-building and product development initiatives,” the DTI said.

“Their expertise has already benefited around 25 DTI Coconut Farmers Industry Development Plan (CFIDP)-assisted coconut-based enterprises and coconut farmers in the Davao Region,” it added.

According to DTI Regional Director Romeo L. Castañaga, the partnership with the Dutch organization has led to the development of new products such as substrate and growing media out of coconut husk.

These new products, said Mr. Castañaga, are in significant demand in Europe.

The Davao Region is among the top producers of coconut, ranking fourth in terms of areas planted to coconut. It accounts for 13% of national output.

The DTI said that the coconut industry still faces challenges, including low income, low productivity, inadequate technology, low utilization of coconuts and by-products, and lack of new and high-value products.

“We have noted several challenges when venturing into producing and promoting coconut products for horticultural purposes. These range from market access and expansion to technology and innovation and laboratory facilities,” Mr. Castañaga said.

DTI Region 11 has assisted 800 coconut farmers through the CFIDP.

“DTI will focus its support on services related to research, marketing, and market promotion,” it said.

“For this new year, DTI Davao will conduct coconut husk mapping in the region to assess supply. This effort will also include an industry study to identify potential markets for these husk-derived products,” it added.  
— **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/01/27/649368/pum-tapped-to-develop-coco-fiber-products/>

**BUSINESS WORLD:**

# Tobacco industry backs pause in raising excise tax rates

January 27, 2025 | 9:07 pm



**BW FILE PHOTO**

THE tobacco industry said it supports a pause in excise tax rate hikes and called for more efficient utilization of local governments' national tax allotments (NTA).

“If they think this moratorium will help the industry, I think it’s worth trying if it works in other countries. Anyway, we’re losing income. Why don’t we try it here?,” National Tobacco Administration (NTA) Administrator and Chief Executive Officer Belinda S. Sanchez told *BusinessWorld* on Monday on the sidelines of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Tobacco Agricultural Summit

She was referring to House Bill 11279, which proposes to suspend the annual 5% increase in tobacco until 2026, replacing it with 6% adjustments every two years starting in 2027. The bill also aims to deter smuggling.

Asked about the likelihood of the bill passing, Ms. Sanchez said: “I don’t know. A lot of people are blocking it. Hopefully, it will continue.”

In a speech at the summit, she said that the continuing proliferation of illegal tobacco is causing a decline in government revenue.

“This reduction in funds limits the resources available for essential public services, particularly universal healthcare. Moreover, proceeds from illegal tobacco sales are often linked to organized crime, further threatening national security,” Ms. Sanchez said.

“We need to have a pause and then because we’re not making the Filipino safer because they’re still smoking, except they’re smoking cheaper and more harmful products,” Winston Uy, president of Universal Leaf Philippines, Inc. said at a forum during the summit.

Mr. Uy said higher tax rates could encourage the resort to illegal tobacco products, leading to lower tax collection to fund health services.

Bienvenido S. Oplas Jr., president of the Minimal Government Thinkers, said the Laffer curve applies to tobacco, to the effect that higher tax rates lower overall revenue.

He also said that the optimal tax rate based on the tobacco excise tax is P50 per pack.

“Reliance on alcohol-tobacco taxation to fund the Universal Health Care is wrong. It is doublespeak to ask people to avoid alcohol-tobacco then (raising billions) from smokers and drinkers to fund the health establishment,” he said.

He called for “zero earmarking of ‘sin taxes’ for universal healthcare,” he added.

Nestor Casela, Deputy Administrator for Operations at the National Tobacco Administration, called on the Bureau of Internal Revenue, Bureau of Customs, and Philippine Economic Zone Authority to harmonize guidelines for the economic zone locators trading in agricultural and tobacco products.

He also called on the Department of Budget and Management to regularize the release of funds for technical and marketing support.

Meanwhile, the advocacy group Sin Tax Coalition urged Finance Secretary Ralph G. Recto “to fulfill his mandate of efficiently managing the government’s financial resources by rejecting the proposal to lower tobacco taxes.”

The group estimated that the National Government will potentially lose P27.5 billion in revenue between 2026 and 2030. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/01/27/649364/tobacco-industry-backs-pause-in-raising-excise-tax-rates/>

## **BUSINESS MIRROR:**

# **Launch of Cefa in Angat delayed**

- Ada Pelonia
- January 28, 2025



The opening of the Cold Examination Facility in Agriculture (Cefa) in Angat, Bulacan slated this January has been stalled as bidding for its equipment was declared a failure, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

“The failure of bidding was declared last December. This covers X-ray machines, the laboratory and construction. So, part of the funds was reverted (to the Bureau of the Treasury),” Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. told reporters in a recent interview.

Laurel said, however, that the Cefa in Bulacan would start operations within the first half of this year.

“The Cefa in Angat will push through. There’s a delay because we have to rebid (the contract for the equipment). But definitely, we will try to finish everything, hopefully by the first half.”

Last year, the DA said funding for the Cefa project was originally pegged at P2.3 billion in 2023 but this was reduced to P1.2 billion in 2024 because of the International Container Terminal Services Inc.’s (ICTSI) offer to host most of the facilities at local ports which the listed company operates.

Meanwhile, Laurel also said a Cefa would also rise in Subic, Manila, and General Santos.

The agency noted that while the Cefas in Angat and General Santos City would only have DA-funded laboratories, comprehensive facilities are planned for major ports and fish ports.

These include the Manila International Container Terminal, Subic Bay International Corporation, Davao International Container Terminal, Manila South Harbor, New Cebu International Container Port, Batangas International Port, Navotas Fish Port, Iloilo International Container Port, and Misamis Oriental.

According to DA, transboundary animal diseases and persistent agricultural smuggling have “highlighted the need to operationalize ‘first border’ control measures.”

This would ensure food safety and prevent the entry of plant pests and economically significant terrestrial and aquatic animal diseases.

The Cefa, which will house “state-of-the-art testing laboratories,” aims to strengthen the country’s capability to conduct first border inspections, improve its examination of containerized agricultural commodities, and prevent smuggling.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/28/launch-of-cefa-in-angat-delayed/>

## **BUSINESS MIRROR:**

# **PHL tobacco output grows 7.5% on demand hike, perks**

- **Ada Pelonia**
- **January 28, 2025**



RISING global demand and incentives from excise tax fueled the rebound in the country's tobacco output in 2024, according to the National Tobacco Administration (NTA).

NTA Deputy Administrator for Operations Nestor Casela said tobacco production last year grew by 7.46 percent to 45.40 million kilograms from 42.25 million kilograms in 2023.

"Philippine tobacco became competitive in international markets," Casela told reporters during the International Tobacco Summit in Quezon City on Monday.

He explained that this was spurred by China, the world's leading tobacco producer, reducing its volume of production which resulted in a tight supply worldwide.

In his presentation, Casela noted that global prices rose, which made the Philippines "very competitive in price and quality."

"Due to the interplay of demand and supply, there was a great demand for tobacco last year [since] China reduced its production of tobacco, that's why our Philippine tobacco became competitive and resulted in much higher prices."

He said the average buying price of local leaf tobacco stood at P129 per kilo in 2024.

Furthermore, Casela noted that the increase in output was also caused by local government units (LGUs) prompting farmers to plant more, given the incentive stipulated under the Republic Act (RA) 7171.

“The local government units are so motivated in convincing their farmers to plant more because it means that if there’s bigger volume they produce, their share from the [law] is higher,” he said.

Under the law, 15 percent of the collection from excise taxes on locally manufactured Virginia type of cigarettes will be allocated to the beneficiary provinces pro rata according to the volume of production.

Meanwhile, Casela also said that the agency attached to the Department of Agriculture (DA) forecasts the country’s tobacco output in 2025 to reach 45.58 million kilos.

According to Philippine Tobacco Growers Association (PTGA) President Saturnino Distor, the NTA’s projection could materialize this year.

“It’s possible to reach that level [due to] improved technology plus the support of the NTA and our buyer firms,” Distor told reporters in Filipino.

He noted that the average output in Pangasinan is 2,600 kilos per hectare while some areas reached as high as 4,000 kilos per hectare.

Distor also noted that the number of tobacco farmers grew as corn planters struggled to deal with fall armyworms which prompted them to shift to planting tobacco instead.

“Corn is currently facing a problem with the fall armyworm [...] in San Fabian, more farmers have shifted to planting tobacco due to the problem with these pests,” Distor said.

In an earlier report, the DA said fall armyworms have damaged P57 million worth of corn crops in Western Visayas pegged at 734 metric tons (MT).

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/28/phl-tobacco-output-grows7-5-on-demand-hike-perks/>



**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# PH tobacco output seen growing

[By Giselle P. Jordan](#)

**January 28, 2025**

LOCAL production of leaf tobacco is expected to increase in 2025, the National Tobacco Administration (NTA) said at the 2nd International Tobacco Summit in Quezon City on Monday.

Data showed that in 2023, the Philippines' total leaf tobacco production was 42,248.52 metric tons (MT). In 2024 it grew to 45,401.14 MT. For crop year 2025, production is forecast to reach 45,579.84 MT.

PhilTobacco Growers Association (PTGA) president Saturnino Distor said it is, indeed, possible to have a bigger production volume this year, citing the shift of some farmers to tobacco farming due to the encouragement of local government units (LGUs), among other factors.

As of 2024, there were 14,390 farmers of Virginia tobacco; 6,001 farmers of Burley; and 22,707 farmers of the Native variety.

However, production areas for the Virginia tobacco in 2024 lessened to 9,853 hectares (ha) from 2023's 10,031 ha.

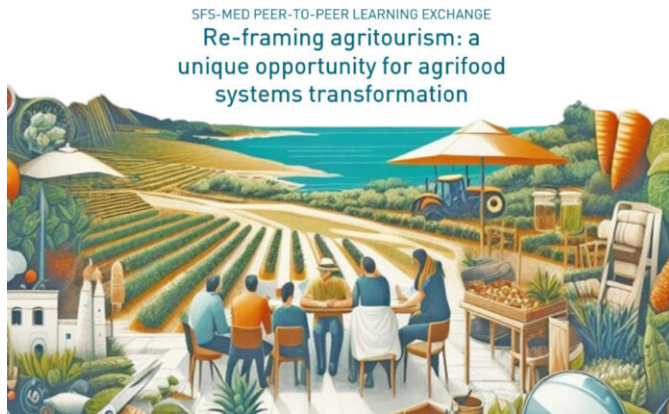
On the other hand, the Burley variety had more farming land in 2024 at 2,978 ha than the previous year's 2,722 ha. Which was also the case with the Native variety, whose area in 2024 was 13,095 ha compared to 2023's 12,056 ha.

Meanwhile, the average buying price of locally produced leaf tobacco has been on a downward trend since its peak of P137.32 per kilogram (kg) in 2023. It fell to P129.04/kg in 2024, and is expected to drop further to P99.78/kg this year.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/28/business/top-business/ph-tobacco-output-seen-growing/2045183>

**MANILA STANDARD:**

# Harnessing the potential of agritourism in the countryside



By **FAO News**

**January 27, 2025, 6:40 pm**

*Conclusion*

The project provided trainings, facilitated dialogues between national and local representatives and lent expertise to stakeholders from various sectors to strengthen agritourism and enhance rural livelihoods.

“Until this year, my parents ran their business all on their own. We didn’t know this kind of help was available. Now we are more hopeful and more open to learning from other organizations,” recounts Fabja Lile.

Earlier, their family received training from the Rural Association Support Program (RASP), a local NGO participating in FAO’s SFS-MED project.

“They helped us not just with material things, like building a greenhouse so we can grow vegetables year-round, they also helped expand our minds,” Fabje adds.

The World Bank estimates that urban production in Albania is around 11 times greater than rural production, while the population living in cities is only 1.3 times that living in the countryside. This is due to constraints such as insufficient infrastructure. Another challenge in rural areas—where the majority of cultivated land is made up of small family farms—is an inadequate labor force, as many young people migrate to cities or other countries in search of better economic opportunities.

Moreover, the ageing rural population struggles to keep up with technological innovations and changing consumer preferences.

Despite agri-entrepreneurs modernizing production practices, locally grown products still often do not meet the safety and quality standards and the demands of the market.

In identifying these key areas of the rural-urban gap, Albania set a vision for increasing prosperity through collective efforts in all the inter-related sectors surrounding agritourism.

To help achieve this vision, FAO's SFS-MED project convened farmers, agritourism entrepreneurs, micro-finance institutions, culinary schools and other individuals in the agritourism industry to come together in an inclusive space, encouraging collaboration.

A key realization was the need to equip local youth with skills to become agrifood innovators of the future.

"The younger generation has the right attitude to implement better business models, but they lack experience and financing opportunities to start businesses," comments Eldi Ceco, dialogue participant and head of the ABA Centre, a consulting and advisory business for farmers.

Helping young people foster their skills and find opportunities in the agritourism sector will not only bring new ideas and innovations for Albania but will offer young people an alternative to migrating for better economic opportunities.

Subsequently, the SFS-MED project also brought agritourism entrepreneurs together with agronomists, the local NGO, RASP, and a seed bank to promote partnerships and farm business networks. From these various connections, businesses received training on sustainable farming practices, including reduced water and pesticide use, organic composting and drip irrigation.

The Lile family was able to increase the visibility of their business through labelling and showcasing their products in fairs. They also learned agritourism best practices from the SFS-MED organized study tour to Puglia, a southern region of Italy.

This study tour showcased how their Italian counterparts combine organic farming with tourism, offering traditional cuisine based on locally sourced ingredients. It was chance for Albanian agritourism entrepreneurs to observe, learn and engage with the local Italian agritourism entrepreneurs.

Overall, the SFS-MED activities boosted smallholder farmers and agri-entrepreneurs in harnessing the growing demands of tourism in Albania in a way that helped them adopt sustainable farming methods, improve business practices and leverage shared learning to produce safer, higher quality products. **FAO News**

<https://manilastandard.net/spotlight/environmental-and-sustainability/314551346/harnessing-the-potential-of-agritourism-in-the-countryside-2.html>

**REMATE:**

# DA namuhunan ng P3B para makapagtayo ng cold storage facilities sa buong bansa

January 27, 2025 12:00



MANILA, Philippines- Magtatayo ang Department of Agriculture (DA) ng 99 cold storage facilities simula sa susunod na taon para palawakin ang ‘shelf life’ ng mga prutas, gulay at high-value crops, tiyakin ang suplay at katatagan ng presyo.

Sinabi ni Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. na ang pasilidad ay pagaganahin ng renewable energy sources gaya ng ‘solar at wind’, tiyakin na episyente at tiyakin ang ‘environmentally friendly operations.’

Winika pa ni Tiu Laurel na ang refrigerated warehouses ay isa ring hybrid infrastructures na maaaring paganahin ng elektrisad mula renewable energy sources at iyong sinu-suplayan sa pamamagitan ng grid.

“This approach not only addresses immediate agricultural needs but also aligns with broader environmental goals,” ang sinabi ni Tiu Laurel.

Sa kabilang dako, naglaan ang DA ng P3 billion para sa proyekto para bawasan ang pagkalugi ng mga magsasaka at palakasin ang food security.

Karamihan naman ng maliliit na pasilidad ay inaasahan na magsisimula ang operasyon ngayong taon. “By improving the cold chain infrastructure, we will strengthen the agricultural sector, reduce farm losses, extend the shelf life of agricultural products, stabilize supply and prices, and ensure food security,” ang sinabi ni Tiu Laurel.

Ang proyekto ay bahagi ng komprehensibong logistics master plan na dinisenyo ng DA sa pamamagitan ng Agriculture and Fisheries Logistics Office (AFLO) sa pamumuno ni Agriculture Assistant Secretary for Logistics, Daniel Alfonso Atayde.

Ang plano ay sumasaklaw hindi lamang sa cold storage facilities kundi para sa development ng ‘robust road network, agricultural seaports, at isang integrated cold chain network’ para i-streamline ang distribusyon ng agricultural products sa buong bansa.

Matatandang, inaprubahan ni Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. ang paggamit ng P1.5 billion na unprogrammed funds noong 2024 para simulan ang development ng cold storage network, na may panibagong P1.5 billion na kasama sa 2025 General Appropriations Act.

Ang unprogrammed funds ay gagamitin para magtayo ng 65 small o modular chiller-type cold storage facilities sa buong bansa at malaking cold storage facility sa Camarines Sur.

May dalawang karagdagang malaking pasilidad ang pinlano, isa sa San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, at isa pa para sa Cabanatuan, Nueva Ecija, na 31 modular units sa buong bansa.

“These investments will collectively enhance the country’s capacity for preserving perishable goods, ultimately benefiting both farmers and consumers. Construction of the large storage facilities is expected to take around 18-22 months after awarding the contract,” ayon sa ulat.

“Each facility will have a capacity of 2,800 to 3,500 pallet positions, depending on the products. The DA will oversee and manage these mega-cold storage facilities in cooperation with local government units, farmers’ cooperatives, and associations to ensure efficient operations and community involvement,” anito pa. Sa kabilang dako, ang modular refrigerated warehouses ay may sukat na 40-foot container van. May kapasidad ito na pito hanggang 15 metric tons, depende sa agricultural products na itatabi.

Ang mga bodega ay inaasahan na magiging operational sa loob ng tatlong buwan ng konstruksyon, pinahihintulutan ang mabilis na pagpapahusay ng cold storage capabilities sa buong bansa. **Kris Jose**

<https://remate.ph/da-namuhunan-ng-p3b-para-makapagtayo-ng-cold-storage-facilities-sa-buong-bansa/>

**REMATE:**

# Grupo ng magsasaka kay PBBM: National Economic Sabotage Act Council itatag

January 27, 2025 10:15



MANILA, Philippines- Nanawagan ang sektor ng agrikultura kay Pangulong Ferdinand Marcos Jr na kailangan nang pagpulungan sa lalong madaling panahon ang pagbuo ng National Economic Sabotage Act Council upang masampolan na ang mga nasa likod ng smuggling, hoarding at profiteering.

Sa pulong balitaan, sinabi ni AGAP Partylist Representative at Pork Producers Federation of the Philippines (PPFP) chairperson Nick Briones na kailangan nang bumuo ng council para magkaroon ng polisiya, masiguro na magkaroon ng enforcement group at maging mabilis ang implementasyon ng Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act.

Binigyang-diin ni Briones, hanggang ngayon ay wala pa rin umanong aksyon ang mga ahensya ng pamahalan na bubuo ng council kabilang ang DTI, NEDA, DOF at DA.

Ito aniya ang kahilingan ng lahat ng magsasaka, magbababoy sa buong bansa at ang pamilyang Pilipino na matagal nang nahihirapan dahil may mga nagsasamantala lalo na sa presyo ng bigas.

Giit ni Briones, mahalaga na maitatag ang konseho dahil sila ang maglalalatag ng polisiya at bubuo ng enforcement group para mahuli, makasuhan at mapanagot ang smugglers, hoarders at profitters.

Kailangan din aniya na matutukan ng Pangulo ang isyu upang hindi mabalewala ang naging banta nito laban sa mga smugglers kung saan atasan na umano sana niya ang nararapat na mga ahensya na kumilos para mapalakas ang nasabing batas.

Matatandaan na naharang kamakailan ng Bureau of Customs (BOC) amg pagpasok ng 21 containers ng smuggled frozen mackarel galing sa China sa Manila International Container Port (MICP).

Samantala, dahil sa pagiging kinatawan ng mga sektor ng magsasaka, muling umangat sa mga survey ang AGAP para sa May 2025 elections.

Sa 157 na kalahok na partylist, ito ay umangat sa no. 11 sa Tangere at OCTA survey habang ika-14 naman sa huling Social Weather Survey.

Sinabi ni Briones na maaring napatanto ng mga Pilipino na mayroon talagang sektor na sumusuporta sa mga magsasaka, magbababoy, at magmamanok. **Jocelyn Tabangcura-Domenden**

<https://remate.ph/grupo-ng-magsasaka-kay-pbbm-national-economic-sabotage-act-council-itatag/>

**REMATE:**

# Mga pananim sa Benguet nag-yelo

January 27, 2025 08:05



MANILA, Philippines- Sa pagkakatala ng pinakamababang temperatura sa Benguet mula nang mag-umpisa ang Northeast Monsoon o Amihan season, nabalot ang mga pananim sa bayan ng Atok sa frost o andap, dahilan upang aksyunan ito ng mga magsasaka.

Batay sa ulat nitong Linggo, pinipisitan ng mga magsasaka ng tubig ang kanilang mga pananim upang maiwasan ang pinsalang dulot ng andap.

Iniulat ng weather service PAGASA na ang temperatura sa La Trinidad, Benguet ay bumulusok sa 9.4 degrees Celsius, pinakamababa ngayong Amihan season. **RNT/SA**

<https://remate.ph/mga-pananim-sa-benguet-nag-yelo/>



**ABANTE TONITE:**

# **DA hihimayin tapyas-taripa sa imported rice**

ABANTE TONITE

- **January 27, 2025**



Pag-aaralan ng Department of Agriculture (DA) sa darating na buwan ng Marso kung mananatili o magbabago ang halaga ng taripa na ipinapataw sa mga imported na bigas.

Ito ang ibinahagi ni DA Assistant Secretary Joycel Panlilio sa programang “Bardagulan sa Radyo” ng DWAR Abante Radyo kung saan tinalakay ang isyu sa ipinapataw na taripa sa mga imported na bigas.

Matatandaang binawasan at naging 15% na lang ang dating 35% na taripa sa mga imported na bigas ngunit hindi pa rin bumaba ang presyo nito sa mga palengke.

Ang patuloy na taas-presyo ng bigas ang nagtutulak sa pagdeklara ng food security emergency sa bigas.

Ngunit hinihintay pa ng DA ang pormal na rekomendasyon para magdeklara ng food security emergency.

<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2025/01/27/da-hihimayin-tapyas-taripa-sa-imported-rice/>