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Farmers get subsidized access to drone services

The Philippine Star

January 5, 2025 | 12:00am



Taking farming to higher level

MANILA, Philippines — The government is pushing drone technology as a solution that can be adopted by rice farmers to increase their yields and lower production costs.

Thus, the Fertilizer and Pesticide Authority (FPA), together with the Department of Agriculture-National Rice Program (DA-NRP), is promoting precision agriculture through the Drones4Rice project, emphasizing its benefits for rice farmers and the need to regulate drone activities.

The initiative aims to empower rice farmers through subsidized access to drone services, said Glenn Estrada, program director of the DA's Digitalization and Value Chain Development and Masagana Rice Industry Development Programs.

He said beneficiaries would receive vouchers worth P2,000 per hectare for the full droneassisted farming operations, from pre-flight planning, crop establishment, nutrient management and pest and disease control.

"The NRP allotted about P300 million to support the commercial application of drones. It primarily caters to organized groups such as rice clusters, irrigators' associations, farmers' cooperatives and associations, small water irrigation system associations and agrarian reform beneficiaries organizations," Estrada said.

He clarified that while DA-NRP would not purchase drones directly, the program would ensure farmers can access these services through a voucher system.

FPA executive director Julieta Lansangan said the agency would develop protocols and regulate drone use in agriculture, pointing out that drones can be used for terrorism activities.

She added that regulating drone operations in agriculture ensures the safety of users, consumers and the environment, along with the proper application of agricultural inputs.

"With the spraying of pesticides using application drone, there is a need for regulation to see the effectiveness of the product. This also ensures the safety of the user, the applicator, the community, the crops and consumer, the environment. As we go along, we develop new application technology also."

Early this year, the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) and the International Rice Research Institute launched the Drones4Rice project that aims, among others, to standardize protocols for drone applications of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides for rice production in the Philippines. The project also aims to reduce production cost and need for manual labor and, equally important, to attract the youth to farming.

Jasper Tallada, Drones4Rice PhilRice lead, said the utilization of drones in rice farming is rising, and can revolutionize the production of the staple as drones can optimize the application of inputs like seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, which reduces costs. More importantly, drones can reduce the labor and time to apply inputs.

"By utilizing drone technology to optimize inputs, such as seeding rates, farmers could save substantial amounts on production cost. This optimization would also expand the distribution of seeds by expanding areas of coverage, particularly through initiatives like the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund," Tallada said.

"Just imagine, it takes you half a day or a day to seed a hectare, which can easily be done in just 20 minutes by using drones," he added.

Tallada emphasized that by showcasing the technological advancements in agriculture, the project could also help dispel misconceptions about farming being hard, which in turn, will make more young Filipinos get interested in farming.

More women will also gain interest in rice farming and can become drone operators and undertake light drone operations such as seeding and fertilizer application. This, Tallada said, will promote gender inclusivity in agricultural technology adoption.

And to allow more farmers to use drones, the project also aims to establish drone service providers, who can rent out or lease their drones to other farmers.

"We all know that 50 percent of rice production costs is manpower, and if we have service providers that can efficiently and quickly deliver these operations, labor costs would diminish," Tallada said.

The use of drones in rice production was also included in a DA directive on the use of the P22.903-billion financial assistance intended for hybrid seeds, inorganic fertilizers,

biofertilizers and ameliorants through discount vouchers and e-wallets, like the interventions monitoring card.

PhilRice has also seen an increase in the number of companies designing and manufacturing drones, with a big number of them also catering or becoming aware of the needs of farmers and food producers.

"We see this agricultural drone as a trailblazer for the digital transformation of rice production," Tallada said.

The National Tobacco Administration (NTA) has also adopted drone technology to map tobacco plantations.

NTA administrator and CEO Belinda Sanchez said they have embraced drone technology as part of their digitalization program to validate the actual areas planted with tobacco by their farmer-partners.

"The drone technology demonstrated innovation and efficiency, enhanced NTA's regulatory capacities and ensured fairness in the area validation of the actual tobacco plantations," she said.

With the high-resolution aerial imaging and geospatial analysis captured by drones, the area of the tobacco plantations will accurately measure and become the basis for the computation of the volume of production. — **Artemio Dumlao**

https://www.philstar.com/business/2025/01/05/2411850/farmers-get-subsidized-accessdrone-services

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Looking forward!



Best Practices - Brian Poe Llamanzares - The Philippine Star

January 5, 2025 | 12:00am

Welcome to the New Year! Thankfully, we have gains to build on and much to look forward to for the Philippines in 2025 and beyond. Just a few days ago, the London-based Center for Economics and Business Research opined that the Philippines is projected to be the world's 23rd largest economy by 2039 (from 33rd in 2024). Inflation has finally slowed down to a manageable level, and our economic growth in 2024 is among the highest in Asia. Such studied positive outlook aligns with our AmBisyon Natin 2040 of a Philippines that is a "prosperous, predominantly middle-class society where no one is poor." We're on an "OK" track, but we need to be fast, focused and forward-looking to truly flourish.

What do we have to look forward to? This year, students from the poorest households can continue chasing their dreams rather than be forced to abandon studies due to their families' lack of funds. For instance, the Department of Education's programs for government assistance and subsidies for junior and senior high school students has a formidable P40 billion for deserving indigent students. Learners with disabilities are also not left behind and, in fact, are better equipped through the Alternative Learning System with P634 million. There's also P28.06 billion for basic education facilities, dedicating resources for classrooms, libraries and laboratories for learners across the Philippines from kindergarten, elementary and secondary levels. We should also laud the continued funding and refinement of the DepEd's school-based feeding program (Masustansyang Pagkain Para Sa Batang Pilipino Act of 2018 (RA 11037, co-authored by Senator Grace Poe) that established the country's national feeding program for "undernutrition and nutrient-deficiency among children aged three years up to grade six level." For the academic year 2023-2024, data report our efforts benefitted over 1.5 million children nationwide. We hope it leads to more children with less empty stomachs, with happier moods and who are more eager to learn!

Adding to the public discourse on education prioritization though, salaries of public school teachers should really be drastically increased moving forward. One of Senator Grace Poe's reforms to the education sector is the law she co-authored called "Kabalikat sa Pagtuturo Act" (RA 11997), granting annual financial assistance of up to P10,000 to all public school teachers, to fill the gap.

It's also plain to see that our country needs more strategic railways, roads, seaports, airports, agricultural facilities, hospitals, schools, parks and power plants. In a word, infrastructure. As

keenly underscored by Senator Gatchalian, for example, the 2025 national budget permits us to meet our 100 percent national electrification objective by 2028 and ensures electricity in every home, particularly the Philippines' many far-flung rural areas. It also brings P7.5 billion to the Department of Information and Communication Technology's Free Public Internet Access Program, thereby enhancing our nation's ICT infrastructure, ensuring public schools have free internet and even reaching geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas, and rural marginalized areas. As Senator Grace Poe, co-sponsor of the Free Public WiFi Act (RA 10929), previously asserted, free internet is yet another bridge for equal opportunity for all Filipinos, and particularly beneficial for the youth. Relatedly, we are hopeful for a better year for our farmers and fisherfolk through the Department of Agriculture's programs, including its Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Program with the considerable P126.76 billion, farm-to-market road projects worth P23.24 billion and others like small-scale irrigation and fuel subsidies.

Our national security, of course, provides the stability for any of our successes. It is why we fought for prioritized funding (3rd highest) for the Department of National Defense; our frontliners, intelligence networks and service personnel need all the help they can get.

Finally, we're happy we found ways to dedicate fundings for our furry family members, thereby solidifying support for animal welfare in the amount of P221.75 million. Hopefully, it paves the way to the eventual passage of the Revised Animal Welfare Act (Senator Grace Poe's Senate Bill No. 2458 filed on Oct. 2, 2023).

All of this is not to say that everything is picture perfect for the Philippines. Indeed, several urgent reforms are required now. It includes, among many others, lowering energy costs, building our manufacturing sector, casting off our import dependency, nurturing rapid growth of domestically-located knowledge-intensive industries (e.g., artificial intelligence) and furthering our augmented international trade.

Still, the national budget is around 22 percent of Gross Domestic Product. Though government spending is far-reaching in multiple dimensions, harnessing the private sector's productive powers is key. Our capital markets are now ripe for creative reforms. In 2024, the PSEi closed at 6,528.79. While seemingly a measly 1.2 percent from 2023, it is the first time since 2019 that the index actually logged a year-on-year increase. Such interest-despite-uncertainty should be quickly met with attractive incentives for investment in the Philippine market, whether through special tax breaks, easier ways to do business and more. The Department of Trade and Industry reports that the Board of Investments approved P1.62 trillion, which surpasses the 2024 target of P1.5 trillion, while the Philippine Economic Zone Authority recorded P214.7 billion in approved investments, thus exceeding the target of P200 billion. Uncertainty in the global markets has destabilized the flow of capital from conventional hotspots. If transformative reforms are swiftly introduced and implemented here, we can establish the Philippines as a safe haven for foreign direct investments and private capital.

We are still far from our long-term aim of a comfortable life for every Filipino. Many Filipinos still suffer every day. However, 2025 brings with it a new hope that more progress will be achieved for our country and our future.

https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2025/01/05/2411862/looking-forward

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Local agriculture sector upbeat even in the aftermath of 'perfect storm'

By: Jordeene B. Lagare - @inquirerdotnet Philippine Daily Inquirer / 02:10 AM January 05, 2025



A NEW SEASON BEGINS A farm worker operates a hand tractor to prepare a rice paddy for planting in Pulilan, Bulacan. —INQUIRER FILE PHOTOS

MANILA, Philippines — The year 2024 was a difficult time for the Philippine agriculture sector as it grappled with a wide range of challenges — from adverse weather conditions to the continued prevalence of animal diseases.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. says the past year "has not been too good" for the farm sector following a "perfect storm" of difficulties that tested not only the resilience of the agency but also the determination of farmers and fishers to continue producing food for the populace.

"I would say this is a depressing year for [the] agriculture sector in a sense," Tiu Laurel says in an interview.

"As I said before, this is the year that everything that could possibly happen has happened. From El Niño to La Niña to the series of typhoons and volcanic eruptions plus the ASF (African swine fever) and now there's a brewing bird flu," he tells reporters.

Tiu Laurel, who has been leading the agency for over a year, contended with several challenges that undermined the sector's growth. From the confluence of El Niño-induced drought and successive storms, the farm sector incurred more than P10 billion in losses as of writing, with rice among the most affected subsectors in 2024. The ASF continues to impact the swine sector five years after the initial outbreak in 2019, resulting in lower income and hog output.

The poultry industry, which has yet to fully recover from bird flu, is hobbling over low demand and an oversupply of chicken and eggs. The eruption of Mt. Kanlaon in December threatened the sugarcane industry even as the El Niño phenomenon delayed harvests. And now there's the looming La Niña.

This key sector produced P397.43 billion worth of goods in the July to September period, a contraction of 3.7 percent from P412.7 billion in the same quarter a year earlier, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority's report. Except for poultry, all commodity groups registered decreases.

This is the second consecutive decline in the sector's quarterly output in 2024 after clocking in a slight increase of 0.2 percent in the first-quarter reading of the statistics agency.

Both the Department of Agriculture (DA) and industry stakeholders attributed the agriculture sector's sluggish performance to factors such as the combined effects of El Niño and "La Niña-like" conditions, extreme weather and the lingering effects of ASF.



Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.

The Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. (Pcafi), a group that represents different segments of the country's agriculture sector, says they expect domestic farm production to have declined by 0.8 to 0.9 percent in 2024 following an expansion the year before.

"The sector might end on a negative note," Pcafi president Danilo Fausto says in an informal gathering with the media. "It's bleak for the agricultural sector."

Even then—following a year marked by weather disturbances, animal diseases and elevated food prices—the agriculture department and industry stakeholders are upbeat about the agriculture sector's prospects in 2025. This, despite anticipating some of the challenges to remain this year.

"All in all, there's good reason to be optimistic in increased production for the agriculture sector in 2025 either equal or better than 2023 level, since we will expect lesser effects on crops from climate change due to absence of El Niño and La Niña that damaged our agriculture sector in 2024," Fausto tells the Inquirer in a Viber message.

Amid the expected decrease in its budget allocation in 2025, Tiu Laurel says the DA is more than ready to face adversities that could stand in the way of unlocking the industry's full potential.

"We look forward to 2025. La Niña and El Niño will be over by then, but of course the regular storms will be coming back to us," the agriculture chief says.

"We're hoping we will break the record palay output of 20.06 million metric tons (MT) this year," he says, adding the country is assured of 6 million MT of rice buffer stock for the next few months.

The DA recognizes that the biggest challenge in the farm sector will be bringing down the retail price of rice in 2025 even if it has managed to stabilize prices of other major agricultural products.

Both the agency and industry groups are anticipating the commercial rollout of ASF vaccines to spur the recovery of the swine industry. As of writing, the DA is implementing the government-controlled vaccination drive in certain areas using the AVAC live vaccines from Vietnam.

"We hope the FDA will approve the vaccine already," Rosendo So, chair of agricultural group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura, says in a press briefing. "If the result of the vaccine trials are good, hog raisers will start cultivating pigs again."

The DA says it has implemented several policy changes primarily focused on the importation of rice and other commodities, as part of broader efforts to curb smuggling.

Additionally, the agency expects the enactment of Republic Act No. 12078 which amends the Rice Tariffication Law to increase funds aimed at improving farmers' income and competitiveness.

These are complemented with official loans and grants provided to the sector to carry out projects in the pipeline such as solar irrigation and cold storage facilities.

https://business.inquirer.net/499849/local-agriculture-sector-upbeat-even-in-theaftermath-of-perfect-storm

BUSINESS WORLD:

Rice traders capturing tariff cut savings

January 5, 2025 | 8:39 pm



PHILIPPINE STAR/KRIZ JOHN ROSALES

By Adrian H. Halili, Reporter

AS DROUGHT and typhoons continue to disrupt rice production, the need to lower the price paid by the public for the staple grain remains pressing, with the government resorting to lowering the tariffs on imported rice to 15% from 35% until 2028. But who exactly is capturing the benefits of the lowered tariffs?

"Traders are capturing the value of cheap tariffs. They may be affected by supply issues from rice exporting countries, but once imported rice is available from these sources, traders directly and immediately benefit from lower tariffs," Roy S. Kempis, director of the Center for Business Innovation at Angeles University, said via Viber.

However, farmers and industry groups have remained wary and cautioned about the influx of imported rice and the impact on domestic production when much of the value is cornered elsewhere in the supply chain.

Federation of Free Farmers National Manager Raul Q. Montemayor has said that the beneficiaries of lower tariffs are mainly importers, wholesalers and retailers.

In June, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. signed Executive Order (EO) No. 62 which lowered tariffs on imported rice.

"The tariff savings on rice are not being passed on to the public. All of these indicate that business sense informs many traders as well as retailers to increase prices jointly while keeping the same amount of rice in the market," Leonardo A. Lanzona, an economics professor at the Ateneo De Manila, said via Facebook chat.

Former Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar said lower tariffs could bring down prices in the long run.

"At present although there is a little drop in rice prices, over time it will definitely lower prices eventually," Mr. Dar said via text message.

"The importers and traders are not flooding the market, hence there is little decrease in rice prices. They are ones that benefitted most in the lowering of tariffs instead consumers. The reduction in rice prices should have been insignificant," he added.

The Department of Agriculture has said that the tariff cuts on imported rice could lower grain prices by about P5 to P7 per kilogram at retail.

University of Asia and the Pacific Center for Food and Agribusiness Executive Director Marie Annette Galvez-Dacul said via Viber that the goal of dropping rice prices to the expected range has not been fully realized.

That range is estimated at P44-49 per kilo, assuming P34 per kilo landed cost, Ms. Dacul added.

As of Dec. 11, the average price of imported well-milled rice was P40 to P52 per kilogram, lower than the P42 to P53 range a month prior, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. has said that the full impact of the lowered tariffs will be felt by January.

"If international rice prices continue to ease, the peso remains stable, and tariffs stay low, we would most likely see the price of well-milled rice decline further in the coming months," Mr. Laurel said in a recent statement.

The government's intent in lowering tariffs has been for the savings to reflect in retail prices, thereby dampening growth in inflation, of which food makes up the largest component.

Inflation accelerated to 2.5% in November from 2.3% a month prior, amid increasing prices of vegetables, meat and fish, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority.

Food inflation at the national level accelerated to 3.5% in November from 3% a month earlier.

On the other hand, rice inflation slowed to 5.1% from 9.6% in September. However, it remained the top contributor to inflation, accounting for 17.7% to the overall consumer price index.

In response to persistently high rice prices, the DA expanded the Rice-for-All program to more outlets, with the aim of supplying well-milled rice at P40 per kilo.

The Philippines imports rice and other agricultural commodities to address gaps in domestic production and to tame food prices.

According to the US Department of Agriculture, the Philippines is the world's top rice importer, projected to ship in about 5.4 million metric tons (MMT) of rice next year amid increasing demand and lowered tariffs.

In its December Grain: World Markets and Trade report, the USDA said 2025 imports will be driven by expectations of a smaller rice crop.

On the sidelines of a House of Representatives hearing, Mr. Laurel said the tariff regime on rice is subject to review.

"If after four months rice prices remain elevated then we would have to maintain (tariffs). The next review is in February, then after that June," he added, noting that EO 62 provides for a review to account for possible changes in global prices and supply.

Mr. Laurel has said that the DA would propose to raise rice import tariffs once retail prices fall to about P42-P45 per kilo.

"Putting the tariff back to 35% will not lead to higher prices but will only reduce traders' profits, and it will increase tariff collections that are supposed to go to farmers," Mr. Montemayor added.

TARIFFSFUNDLOCALRICEPRODUCTIONThe government funds rice industry modernization programs from import tariff collections, with tariffssupporting the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF).

Mr. Montemayor said that the expanded RCEF has yet to address specific problems or needs of farmers in particular locations.

"Farmers must be given the freedom to choose the variety of seed, brand of machinery, types of fertilizer and other assistance provided. We have to monitor whether these interventions actually increase yield, profitability and competitiveness," he added.

RCEF is intended to boost rice production and support farmers through the distribution of farm machinery, seed, training, and financial assistance. It is funded by import tariffs, as authorized by the Rice Tariffication Law of 2019 or Republic Act No. 11203.

The President has signed Republic Act 12078, amending the Agricultural Tariffication Act, which tripled the annual allocation of RCEF to P30 billion and extended the fund's term until 2031.

Mr. Laurel has said that the full impact of the increased funding for RCEF will be felt by 2026.

Weather-related occurrences continue to affect production, keeping the Philippines reliant on imports.

According to DA estimates, palay or unmilled rice production for 2024 will fall to 19.3 MMT due to the dry conditions brought by El Niño and the various typhoons during latter part of the year.

"With all the natural disasters and the potential reduction of palay production this year, we need to sustain lower tariffs. There is no alternative. If you remove this lower tariff now then you will see rice prices spiral," Mr. Dar said.

He added that the Philippines needs long-term solutions to improve rice production.

"We need to (utilize) 1.3 million hectares of unirrigated land... in an accelerated manner. (With proper irrigation investment), we can start planting rice earlier to avoid the typhoon months," he said.

Among the DA's flagship projects is the construction of solar powered irrigation systems, which are projected to add about 180,000 hectares to the stock of irrigated farmland.

"Technological solutions applied in a big way will boost productivity and income of small farmers," Mr. Dar said.

https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/01/05/644832/rice-traders-capturingtariff-cut-savings/

THE MANILA TIMES:

World food prices dip 2% in 2024

By Agence France-Presse

January 5, 2025

PARIS — World food commodity prices declined by 2.1 percent in 2024 compared to the previous year, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said on Friday, but they remain considerably higher than before the Covid-19 pandemic.

FAO's overall Food Price Index averaged 122.0 points 2.6 points or 2.1 percent lower than the average value in 2023.

However, food prices increased over the course of the year, with the index climbing from 117.6 points in January to 127.0 in December.

The index rose 6.7 percent from December 2023 to 2024, with meat, dairy and food oils accounting for the increase.

The United Nations' food agency tracks monthly and global changes in the international prices of a set of globally traded commodities.

Food prices also remain considerably higher roughly 26 percent than they were five years ago.

The disruption to global trade during the Covid-19 pandemic initially saw food prices dip but they later climbed higher amid the surge in inflation as the global economy rebounded.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 sent them spiking to records, since both nations are major wheat exporters, but efforts to ensure shipments were not blocked led to prices easing lower until the beginning of 2024.

The dip in the average value for the index between 2023 and 2024 was mainly due to falls in cereals and sugar prices.

Cereals dropped 13.3 compared to 2023, and the FAO's sugar price index fell 13.2 percent.

The decreases were offset in part by a 9.4-percent rise in the vegetable oil price index.

https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/05/business/top-business/world-food-prices-dip-2in-

2024/2030317?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAAR30JJngWRBvXjIJZRCYIBycVAi P6X8Vs4VTu8AM3cgkIC5gw0WQ6u1uvCU_aem_6pN9nsE5FYoN0ijKQ0uPJQ

PILIPINO STAR NGAYON:

DA, Pakistan palalakasin pa kalakalan sa agriculture products

Angie dela Cruz - Pilipino Star Ngayon

January 5, 2025 | 12:00am



Photos show farmers harvesting their plot of land in Rosario, La Union on October 4, 2024.

STAR / Andy Zapata

MANILA, Philippines — Kapit bisig ang Pilipinas at Pakistan para higit pang mapalakas ang kalakalan sa produktong agrikultura ng dalawang magkaibigang bansa.

Nakapaloob sa pagtutulungan ng dalawang bansa ang pagkakaroon ng pinal na kasunduan hinggil sa alokasyon ng Southeast Asian nations ng tinatayang isang milyong metriko tonelada ng bigas upang punan ang taunang import requirement ng bansa na pangunahing pagkain.

Unang nakipagkita si Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. kay Pakistani Ambassador to Manila Dr. Imtiaz Kazi noong December 16 upang tingnan ang mga pangunahing oportunidad ng kalakalan sa agrikultura.

Ang Pakistan ang ikatlong pinakamalaking supplier ng bigas sa Pilipinas, bukod sa Vietnam at Thailand.

Ipinangako ng Pakistan ang isang milyong metriko tonelada ng bigas kada taon na kanilang isusuplay sa Pilipinas sa angkop na presyo na hudyat ng strategic partnership na maaaring humubog ng rice import dynamics.

Inaasahan na sa June 2025 ay seselyuhan ng dalawang bansa ang partnership hinggil dito.

https://www.philstar.com/pilipino-star-ngayon/bansa/2025/01/05/2411909/da-pakistanpalalakasin-pa-kalakalan-sa-agricultureproducts?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAAR3nlo_DIzB6lHvESCWgHiL43VrhjhuZFezLUaBG6lxWz0otYO7Oc7ARuE_aem_a2srGZCpo2qViY8yTzQvfg