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November GOCC subsidies up 82%; 11-month total down

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MANILA BULLETIN:

State-owned companies get subsidy boost from government in November

BY DERCO ROSAL
Jan 6, 2025 06:09 AM

Despite a year-long trend of declining government support, state-owned corporations, particularly major non-financial institutions, received a substantial boost in subsidies in November last year

Data from the Bureau of the Treasury (BTr) showed that state subsidies to government-owned and -controlled corporations (GOCCs) surged to P12.23 billion in November 2024.

This record marked a dramatic jump from the P6.73 billion recorded a year ago. It was also slightly higher than the P11.97 billion in October.

GOCC subsidies reached P129.44 billion in the first 11 months of 2024, down from P153.05 billion during the same period in 2023.

The end-November subsidies fell significantly short of the P222.5 billion budget for 2024.

Government financial institutions (GFIs) received P132 million in subsidies this November, a sharp increase from zero a year ago and significantly higher than P15 million in October.

As of end-November, GFIs had received P5.58 billion in subsidies, dramatically increasing from P486 million during the same period last year.

Subsidies to major nonfinancial state-owned firms rose to P11.09 billion in November, from P4.61 billion a year ago and slightly higher than P10.72 billion in October.

This brought the total subsidies for the year to P88.15 billion, up from P71.17 billion as of end-November last year.

Meanwhile, disbursements to other state-owned firms further declined to P1.01 billion from P1.24 billion in October, which plummeted from P10.61 billion in September. This was also lower than the P2.13 billion given in the same month last year.

Subsidies for the first 11 months totaled P35.72 billion, significantly lower than the P81.40 billion recorded in the same period last year. In the previous month, the figure dropped sharply to P34.71 billion from last year’s P79.27 billion.

The National Irrigation Administration (NIA) received the largest portion of November's subsidies, amounting to P6.85 billion, up from P2.52 billion a year ago.

The National Food Authority (NFA) followed with P3.0 billion, having the same amount received in October. Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) ranked third with P900 million.

Completing the top five recipients were National Power Corporation (NPC), which received P248 million, a significant increase from P47 million last year, and the Philippine Children's Medical Center (PCMC), which was allocated P211 million, up from P135 million in 2023.

Last year, subsidies extended to GOCCs cost the national government some P165.53 billion. This amount declined from the previous year's P200.41 billion.

The GOCCs that received substantial portions of the subsidy were Philippine Health Insurance Corp. and NIA, getting P50.7 billion and P40.7 billion, respectively.

https://mb.com.ph/2025/1/6/state-owned-companies-get-subsidy-boost-1

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Tomato costs P20 per piece – DA

Bella Cariaso - The Philippine Star

January 6, 2025 | 12:00am

Based on the monitoring of the DA in Metro Manila markets, a medium-sized tomato costs at least P20.

STAR / File

MANILA, Philippines — The retail price of tomato has increased to P360 per kilo, according to the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Based on the monitoring of the DA in Metro Manila markets, a medium-sized tomato costs at least P20.

One kilo of tomato is more expensive compared to a kilo of chicken priced at P240 per kilo, according to the DA.

“It is almost equivalent to a kilo of pork shoulder sold at P390,” the DA said.

The department said prices of tomato surged amid the damage caused by the successive typhoons that hit the country.

Meanwhile, the retail price of siling labuyo or wild chili further increased to P1,000 per kilo after reaching P900 per kilo few days ago.

Prices of highland vegetables have also increased as carrots reached P300 per kilo; Baguio beans, P200; potato, P220; pechay Baguio, P80; chayote, P80; cauliflower, P300; bell pepper, P900; broccoli, P400, and cabbage, P140.

Local red onions are sold at P170 per kilo; local white onions, P120; imported white onions, P180; imported garlic, P210, and ginger, up to P260 per kilo.

Medium-sized eggs ranged between P7.80 and P9 per piece.

https://www.philstar.com/nation/2025/01/06/2412075/tomato-costs-p20-piece-da

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

EDITORIAL — Discouraging fishing

The Philippine Star

January 6, 2025 | 12:00am

The country is almost completely dependent on imports for its salt and milk requirements. Rice may eventually be added to the list. Several studies in recent years have shown a continuing decline in the number of young Filipinos engaging in rice farming. Apart from threatening domestic rice production, the declining population of rice farmers has contributed to the deterioration of one of the country's top tourist destinations and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Ifugao Rice Terraces.

Now another economic sector is facing a similar dilemma. Data gathered by the Philippine Statistics Authority showed that there has been a decline in the number of youths engaged in fishing. PSA data showed that between 2012 and 2022, more households engaged in fishing, but there was an increase in the number of household members younger than 50 who left fishing for better jobs and livelihood opportunities.

The data came from the PSA's 2022 Census of Agriculture and Fisheries, whose results were released last month. Between 2012 and 2022, the number of households with fishing operators rose by 9.3 percent, from 760,297 to 830,954. But the number of fishing operators under 50 years old went down by 3.6 percent, while those older than 50 increased by 36.4 percent.

An aging population in any sector is generally a cause for concern. A recent Supreme Court ruling upholding a Malabon trial court decision, which favored commercial operators over marginalized fisherfolk can only exacerbate the problem.

The Department of Agriculture and its Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources should have fought tooth and nail for the marginalized fisherfolk. Republic Act 8550, the Philippine Fisheries Code of 1998, as amended by RA 10654 against illegal and unregulated fishing, gave small-scale fishers exclusive access to municipal waters – or inland and marine waters within 15 kilometers from shorelines.

The Supreme Court, however, went along with the Malabon court's ruling that the access limitation is unconstitutional. The SC ruling effectively allowed commercial operators with their large vessels to fish in municipal waters. The BFAR, under a department headed by a member of a family engaged in large-scale commercial fishing, has announced it is appealing the SC ruling. Regardless of the outcome of the appeal, the case is likely to drive more youths to leave fishing for better livelihood opportunities.

https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2025/01/06/2412093/editorial-discouraging-fishing

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

Agri groups warn vs removal of rice labels

The move of the Department of Agriculture will not bring down rice prices, according to a watchdog and a farmers' group. They insist the government instead address hoarding and profiteering, the root causes of the problem.

By: Gillian Villanueva - @inquirerdotnet

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 05:39 AM January 06, 2025

INQUIRER FILES

The move of the Department of Agriculture (DA) to remove brand labels and premium classifications on imported rice is a "shallow attempt" at addressing price manipulation and will only "deceive" consumers, two groups have claimed.

Cathy Estavillo, spokesperson for rice watch group Bantay Bigas, described the measure as "antifarmer" as it would allow imported rice brands to masquerade as local products.

Compared to local rice, she pointed out that imported grains were inferior in quality.

"This is deception toward the consumers because they will not know where the rice they will be consuming is coming from and this will have an effect on their health, nutrition and family," she argued.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. last month announced the DA's decision to remove brand labels on imported rice.

He said that after conducting market visits, the DA noted that some retailers and traders were using branded imports to “confuse” consumers and justify the high prices of rice. Locally produced rice will be exempt from these rules.

The DA chief also ordered the removal of labels such as “premium” and “special” on imported rice, which are likewise being used to justify high rice prices.

Should traders refuse to follow the new regulations, their permits for rice importation will be withheld.

Band-aid solution

For farmers’ group Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP), however, the measure will not address price manipulation as it fails to solve the “long-standing issues” affecting the rice industry.

“Removing rice labels will not bring down prices or benefit consumers,” said KMP chair Danilo Ramos. “It is a desperate measure that does nothing to address hoarding, profiteering and the broken promise of lowering rice prices to P20 per kilo.”

According to KMP, the DA has failed to effectively regulate and monitor the rice supply chain in the country with its “inability to crack down on rice cartels.”

“Instead of taking decisive actions against these exploitative practices, the DA opts for superficial and band-aid solutions that do not address the root of the problem,” the group’s statement read.

This was echoed by Estavillo, who reiterated that the removal of labels on imported rice will not solve the issue of price manipulation.

“Instead of removing brand labels, we call on the government to junk the rice liberalization law and support the local production of rice as well as the livelihoods of farmers. This will help us achieve national food security and self-sufficiency, and will lower the prices of rice,” Estavillo pointed out.

Collateral damage

KMP also expressed concern over the reported closure of more than 1,000 small-scale rice and corn mills across the country, saying that it highlighted the "devastating" impact of the government's liberal grains import rules.

"The government's policies have made small-scale rice and corn millers collateral damage in its relentless push for liberalization," Ramos noted. "These mill closures are not just statistics. They represent livelihoods lost and communities abandoned in favor of foreign grain suppliers and importers."

A report by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) released last Dec. 28 showed a 6.3-percent decline in the number of barangay across the country that had rice and corn mills to 15,436 in 2023 from 16,476 in 2013.

KMP said in a statement that "since the implementation of the rice liberalization law [in 2019], local millers have struggled to compete with larger corporate players that dominate the market and dictate unfair buying prices."

High import dependence

The rice liberalization law, or Republic Act No. 11203, replaced the quantitative restrictions on rice imports with tariffs. By allowing more private traders to participate in importing rice, the law aims to lower domestic rice prices so that it will be accessible to more Filipinos.

KMP, however, criticized the government's prioritization of rice imports over strengthening local agricultural production, noting that rice import dependency rose to 23 percent in 2022 from 8.1 percent in 2012, based on data from the PSA.

This dependency was "exacerbated" by President Marcos' decision to reduce tariffs on rice imports to 15 percent from 35 percent since July 8 last year.

“Such policies have enabled imported grains to flood the market, siphoning away demand for locally produced palay and corn while putting immense pressure on small farmers and millers,” KMP argued.

“Millers and farmers need to unite in order to fight against importation and liberalization that are threatening local agriculture as well as the livelihoods of all those who depend on this sector,” Ramos said.

https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2021724/agri-groups-warn-vs-removal-of-rice-labels

BUSINESS WORLD:

GOCC subsidies up over 81% in November

January 5, 2025 | 8:38 pm

PHILSTAR FILE PHOTO

SUBSIDIES extended to government-owned and -controlled corporations (GOCCs) rose 81.65% year on year in November, the Bureau of the Treasury (BTr) said.

The BTr reported that budgetary support to GOCCs amounted to P12.23 billion in November.

Month on month, GOCC subsidies rose 2.21%.

State-owned firms receive monthly subsidies from the National Government (NG) to support their daily operations if their revenue is insufficient.

The National Irrigation Authority (NIA) received the top subsidy for November with P6.84 billion, followed by the National Food Authority (NFA) with P3 billion, and the National Electrification Administration (NEA) with P900 million.

The NIA was the top GOCC recipient in the first 11 months.

Receiving at least P200 million in subsidies were the National Power Corp. with P248 million and the Philippine Children's Medical Center with P211 million.

The Philippine Heart Center (P168 million), the National Kidney and Transplant Institute (P163 million), the Social Housing Finance Corp. (P127 million), and the Philippine Coconut Authority (P87 million) rounded out the list.

Receiving less that P100 million were the Light Rail Transit Authority (P72 million), the Lung Center of the Philippines (P70 million), and the Development Academy of the Philippines (P57 million).

At least P50 million in subsidies were granted to the Philippine Rubber Research Institute (P55 million), the Cultural Center of the Philippines (P38 million), the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (P21 million), and Aurora Pacific Economic Zone and Freeport Authority (P20 million).

In the P20 million or less category were the People's Television Network, Inc. (P18 million), the Philippine Institute of Traditional and Alternative Health Care (P17 million), and the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (P16 million).

Those granted subsidies below P15 million were the Intercontinental Broadcasting Corp. (IBC-13) (P12 million), the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (P9 million), and the Center for International Trade Expositions and Missions (P9 million).

Also on the subsidy list were the Philippine Tax Academy, the Credit Information Corp., and the Tourism Promotions Board (P5 million each), while the Zamboanga City Special Economic Zone Authority and the Philippine Center for Economic Development received P4 million and P3 million respectively.

GOCCs that did not receive subsidies for the month included PhilHealth, the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority, the Sugar Regulatory Administration, the Power Sector Assets and Liabilities Management Corp., the Philippine Postal Corp., and the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority.

Also receiving no subsidies were the Bases Conversion and Development Authority, the Philippine National Railways, the National Housing Authority, the Small Business Corp., the Philippine Crop Insurance Corp., the Philippine Deposit Insurance Corp., the National Home Mortgage Finance Corp., and the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas.

In the first 11 months, subsidies totaled P129.44 billion, down 15.43% from a year earlier.

During the period, the National Irrigation Administration took in P67.05 billion or 51.80% of the total, followed by PhilHealth (P9.60 billion) and the NFA (P8.26 billion).

In the 11 months, PhilHealth subsidies declined 81.08% from a year earlier.

Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. Chief Economist Michael L. Ricafort said the subsidies reflect the impact of the budget deficit, in the wake of the adverse weather, which put pressure on the National Government (NG) to provide more assistance to calamity zones.

He also cited the preparations for the May 2025 midterm elections, in view of the need to expedite some government projects especially infrastructure and other programs before the election ban sets in.

PhilHealth only received subsidies twice in 2024, in June (P260 million) and September (P9.34 billion).

PhilHealth was allocated zero subsidies in the 2025 budget, signed by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., but reported a P150 billion surplus and P280 billion total reserves as of October. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/01/05/644827/gocc-subsidies-up-over-81-in-november/

BUSINESS WORLD:

China approves more genetically modified crops to boost yields, ensure food security

January 6, 2025 | 12:03 am

REUTERS

BEIJING — China has approved five gene-edited crop varieties and 12 types of genetically modified (GM) soybean, corn and cotton, expanding approvals to boost high-yield crops, reduce import reliance, and ensure food security.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs awarded safety certificates to the 17 crop varieties, according to a document on its website.

The approved gene-edited crops include two soybean varieties, and one each of wheat, corn, and rice.

The approved varieties include seeds from Beijing-based feed group Dabeinong and China National Seed Group, a subsidiary of seeds and pesticides maker Syngenta Group.

Unlike genetic modification, which involves inserting foreign genes into a plant, gene editing alters existing genes to enhance or improve the plant's traits. Some scientists view gene editing as less risky than genetic modification.

China has also authorized the import of an insect-resistant and herbicide-tolerant GM soybean variety from the German chemicals firm BASF exclusively as a processing material, the ministry added.

Over the past year, China has increased approvals for higher-yielding GM corn and soybean seeds to raise domestic production and reduce grain imports.

China mostly imports GM crops such as corn and soybeans for animal feed, while cultivating non-GM varieties for food consumption. Many Chinese consumers remain concerned about the safety of GM food crops.

The safety certificates for the newly approved varieties are valid for five years, starting from Dec. 25, according to the ministry document. — **Reuters**

https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2025/01/06/644735/china-approves-more-genetically-modified-crops-to-boost-yields-ensure-food-security/

BUSINESS WORLD:

Rice importers urged to bring in more 25% broken-grain varieties

January 6, 2025 | 12:04 am

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said rice traders need to set aside a portion of their imports to grain with 25% broken content, citing the need to lower rice prices.

"By importing more rice with 25% broken grains, we can significantly increase the availability of affordable rice options for Filipino consumers," Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. said in a statement on Sunday.

Rice traders typically bring in varieties with only 5% broken grains, which are priced significantly higher compared to the 25% broken grain variety.

According to DA price monitors, as of Jan. 2, a kilogram of well-milled rice fetched P42-P52 per kilo in Metro Manila markets, while regular-milled rice sold for between P38 and P40 per kilo.

The DA has expanded its Rice-for-All rolling stores in public markets across Metro Manila, through the Kadiwa ng Pangulo (KADIWA) program. The Rice-for-All program sells well-milled rice to the general public at P40 per kilo.

To date, 26 KADIWA rolling stores and kiosks are serving consumers in various public markets in the National Capital Region (NCR) and selected Metro Rail Transit and Light Rail Transit stations.

"In addition to the KADIWA rolling stores and kiosks, 40 KADIWA Centers in NCR and Bulacan are also operational. These centers regularly provide basic necessities and prime commodities (BNPCs), Rice-for-All, and P29 rice for vulnerable sectors," the DA added.

The DA is looking to expand its KADIWA network to 1,500 locations by 2028. It is expecting to open 179 KADIWA Centers by the end of the year.

"While the DA is working closely with millers and importers to bring more affordable rice options, we remain dedicated to helping rice farmers increase their productivity and maintain their profitability, "Mr. Laurel added. — **Adrian H. Halili**

https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2025/01/06/644736/rice-importers-urged-to-bring-in-more-25-broken-grain-varieties/

BUSINESS WORLD:

World food price index eases in Dec. pushed lower by sugar

January 6, 2025 | 12:01 am

FREEPIK

ROME — The United Nations' (UN) world food price index dipped in December against November levels, led lower by a drop in international sugar quotations, but still showed a robust gain year-on-year, data showed on Friday.

The index, compiled by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to track the most globally traded food commodities, fell to 127 points last month from a slightly revised 127.6 in November.

The November figure was previously put at 127.5.

The December value was up 6.7% from 12 months previously, yet remained 20.7% below the all-time high reached in March 2022, FAO said.

For 2024 as a whole, the index averaged 122, 2.1% lower than the 2023 value, offsetting significant decreases in quotations for cereals and sugar with smaller increases in prices for vegetable oils, dairy and meats. — **Reuters**

https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2025/01/06/644846/world-food-price-index-eases-in-dec-pushed-lower-by-sugar/

BUSINESS WORLD:

Indian sugar output down 15.5% as cane yields fall

January 6, 2025 | 12:02 am

REUTERS

MUMBAI — Indian mills have produced 9.54 million metric tons of sugar since the season began on Oct. 1, down 15.5% year on year, an industry association said, as cane yields fell in the three biggest producing states.

Lower output in the world's second-largest sugar producer could eliminate the possibility of India allowing exports during the season ending in September 2025, supporting global sugar prices.

Sugar production in the western state of Maharashtra fell 21.5% from a year earlier in the first three months of the season to 3 million tons, while output in neighboring Karnataka fell 18.1% to 2 million tons, the Indian Sugar and Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA) said in a statement.

Production in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh fell 4.5% from a year earlier to 3.28 million tons, the ISMA said.

By the end of December, 493 sugar mills had started crushing operations, compared to 512 a year earlier, it said.

Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Uttar Pradesh account for more than 80% of the country's total sugar production, with lower cane yields in these states prompting trade houses to reduce their output estimates for the 2024/25 season.

Cane yields in Maharashtra and Karnataka have fallen due to last year's drought, while in Uttar Pradesh, red rot disease has reduced yields, said a senior industry official, who declined to be named.

“The production is lower than our expectations. Exports now look difficult in the current season,” the official said.

The sugar industry seeks 2 million tons of exports, while the government says it may allow limited exports, if any surplus remains after ethanol needs are met. — **Reuters**

https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2025/01/06/644733/indian-sugar-output-down-15-5-as-cane-yields-fall/

BUSINESS WORLD:

France reports new outbreak of bird flu, losing disease-free status

January 6, 2025 | 12:01 am

REUTERS

PARIS — France has confirmed bird flu outbreaks on two poultry farms, just days after being officially declared free of the virus, the agriculture ministry said.

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), commonly called bird flu, has spread across Europe in a seasonal wave linked to migrating birds, though the impact has been less severe than in the US, where flock losses have led to record egg prices and the virus has been transmitted to cattle and humans.

French authorities confirmed the new cases on two farms in Normandy on Dec. 27 and Dec. 28, the ministry said in a statement.

"As a direct consequence of these outbreaks, France loses its HPAI-free status that it had just regained on Dec. 15," it said.

Disease-free status for bird flu means no farm outbreaks have been reported for at least a month. The classification can allow trade restrictions from importing countries to be lifted.

France has credited a vaccination program, launched a year ago, for curbing the spread of bird flu compared with previous seasons. The plan has focused on farmed ducks, notably reared for foie gras pate and seen as particularly vulnerable to bird flu.

The country nonetheless remains on high alert for the virus given continued risks of contamination from migrating birds, the ministry said.

In a separate notification to the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), the French authorities detailed that the outbreaks occurred on farms with 25,000 and 540 poultry birds, respectively, with the entire flocks culled as a safety measure.

Elsewhere in Europe, Germany detected a new bird flu case on a poultry farm in Bavaria, with the 16,000-strong flock also slaughtered, according to a notification to WOAH. — **Reuters**

https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2025/01/06/644732/france-reports-new-outbreak-of-bird-flu-losing-disease-free-status/

THE MANILA TIMES:

Baguio pushes hydroponic farming in villages

 

By Gaby B. Keith

January 6, 2025

BAGUIO CITY — A hydroponic semi-greenhouse in Aurora Hill South Central barangay shows so much promise that Mayor Benjamin Magalong says it will be replicated in other villages in the Summer Capital soon.

The project is a joint venture of the city government through the City Veterinary and Agriculture Office (CVAO) under City Veterinarian Silardo Bested and the barangay led by barangay captain Levy Lloyd Orcales.

"This is a good agricultural practice worth propagating in other barangay," said Magalong.

"It is in line with our thrust to transition into smart and sustainable agriculture," the mayor added.

Hydroponic farming is a "method of growing plants in a water-based nutrient solution instead of soil."

Bested said the project was funded by the barangay and implemented with the assistance of CVAO.

https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/06/regions/baguio-pushes-hydroponic-farming-in-villages/2030508?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAAR30JJngWRBvXjIJZRCYIBycVAiP6X8Vs4VTu8AM3cgkIC5gw0WQ6u1uvCU_aem_6pN9nsE5FYoN0ijKQ0uPJQ

THE MANILA TIMES:

GOCC subsidies hit P12.23B in Nov

By Niña Myka Pauline Arceo

January 6, 2025

SUBSIDIES to government-owned and -controlled corporations (GOCCs) in November 2024 totaled P12.23 billion, higher than the P11.97 billion in October, as well as November 2023's P6.73 billion, the Bureau of the Treasury reported.

However, the GOCCs' year-to-date funding of P129.44 billion was lower than the P153.05 billion in January-November 2023.

Government financial institutions (GFIs) received P132 million in November 2024, up from zero in 2023 and P15 million in October 2024.

From January to November 2024, GFIs received P5.58 billion, up from P486 million in the same period last year.

Appropriations to major nonfinancial state firms increased to P11.09 billion, higher than the P4.61 billion in 2023 and P10.72 billion in October 2024. Total appropriations amounted to P88.15 billion, an increase from the P71.15 billion as of end-November 2023.

On the other hand, disbursements to other state-owned firms dropped to P1.02 billion in November 2024 from P2.13 billion in 2023 and P1.24 billion in October 2024. There was also a decline in the January to November 2024 period to P35.72 billion from P81.39 billion in 2023.

Topping the list of GOCCs was the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) with P6.84 billion in subsidies, up from P2.52 billion in 2023.

The National Food Authority (NFA) followed with P3.0 billion, up from P1.67 billion. Third was the National Electrification Administration (NEA) with P900 million from P2.24 billion.

Rounding it up were the National Power Corp. at P248 million, up from P47 billion, and the Philippine Children's Medical Center at P211 million from P135 million.

https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/01/06/business/top-business/gocc-subsidies-hit-p1223b-in-nov/2030573?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAAR1lj_TwIO0ffzZTtixOwxXQyrvNirratXZc9uOZfP7SeqKm2wgxYEZpu8M_aem_b1fKhFe3IoFct3vzG1zqrw

BUSINESS MIRROR:

Aklan's piña handloom weaving: An intangible international treasure

The NCCA calendar features the different steps and stages in making the textile—from cultivating the pineapples and extracting the fibers to weaving the fine threads using the handloom and transmitting the knowledge and skills within the community, with photographs by Gerald Marcfred Dillera and texts by Roel Hoang Manipon, who also conceptualized and designed the calendar.

l craftsmanship and an articulation of native aesthetics. It is a distinct cultural marker for the Philippines and a living heritage that is held in high esteem worldwide.

On December 5, 2023, because of its importance in demonstrating the diversity of cultures and creative expressions of the country as well as of the world, the piña was inscribed on the Unesco Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity together with 44 other intangible cultural heritage elements from around the world.

"Aklan piña handloom weaving is the fifth intangible cultural heritage [ICH] element from the Philippines to be inscribed in the Unesco ICH lists. The others ICH in the Unesco Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity are the *hudhud* chants of the Ifugao, and the *punnuk* tug-of-war, the culmination of the Huwah post-harvest celebration, also of the Ifugao; and the Darangen epic chanting of the Meranaw," explained journalist, cultural researcher and publication designer Roel Hoang Manipon, who was involved in the Unesco nomination process.

The *buklog* ritual of the Subanen was inscribed in the separate List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. On the other hand, NCCA's flagship program of transmitting traditional knowledge and skill, the School of Living Traditions, was selected to be included in the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices.

FROM PINYA BISAYA TO PIÑA FASHION

Piña weaving emerged during the Spanish colonial period (1565 to 1898). Today, it is still alive in Aklan municipalities—Altavas, Balete, Banga, Batan, Buruanga, Kalibo, Lezo, Libacao, Madalag, Makato, Malay, Malinao, Nabas, Numancia, and Tangalan.

Historically, production was concentrated in the barangays of Old Buswang and New Buswang in Kalibo, but the practice has since spread to the provinces of Antique, Capiz, Leyte, Camarines Sur, and Palawan.

It is considered as a family and community heritage, with the knowledge and skill being passed on in traditional ways and through assistance from the School of Living Traditions of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, and the Philippine Fiber Industry Development Authority.

According to the exhaustive research by Manipon, the production of the piña starts with the cultivation of the Red Spanish pineapple cultivar, locally called *pinya Bisaya*:

After 18 to 24 months, the leaves of the pineapple plants are deemed mature enough to be harvested. Fibers are then extracted from the leaves. Using a shard of porcelain, the scraper removes the epidermis of the leaf, extracting the rough fiber, called "*bastos*." To extract the finer and more valued "*liniwan*," a coconut shell is run across the inner layer.

After several more steps, the fibers are then ready for weaving. The weavers usually work at home, on a wooded upright pedal loom with two or four foot-operated bamboo treadles in a space in the house designated for weaving.

The common patterns used are the *ringgue* (lace weave), *pili* (inlaid weave), and *tablero* (checkered pattern), or a combination of these.

"Highly prized because of its beauty and the tedious process to make it, the piña is used as prime material in formal attire such as the terno and the barong Tagalog as well as in finery and other objects, often embroidered or painted on, becoming a vessel for another creative expression. Piña products are often passed on as heirloom pieces," Manipon noted.

HABOE NGA PIÑA

Continuing its cherished tradition of making calendars that promote our culture and heritage as well as being informative, the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) features the practice of weaving the piña of Aklan in the 2025 edition.

Highlighted in the calendar are the different steps and stages in making the piña textile—from cultivating the pineapples and extracting the fibers to weaving the fine threads using the handloom and transmitting the knowledge and skills within the community. The photographs are by Gerald Marcfred Dillera and the texts are by Manipon, who also conceptualized and designed the calendar.

"The alignment of several factors led to the nomination of the practice of piña weaving to the Unesco Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. First, the practice and its products are of cultural importance to the country. The textile is nationally recognized and highly regarded, despite piña weaving being the most recently developed textile-making craft in the country, emerging only during the Spanish colonial period and using an introduced plant that has become naturalized," said Manipon.

A second factor is the communities' and culture bearers' intention to be inscribed in the Unesco list. Another important factor is there are concrete measures being developed to safeguard the practice.

These safeguarding duties are collaborations among the communities, the local government, non-government organizations and cultural groups, and the national government through the NCCA and other cultural agencies. In fact, the NCCA has been supporting a School of Living Traditions on piña weaving in Balete, Aklan, for several years now.

Piña weaving is limited to a small area, thus it is easier to document the extent and status of the practice, as well as to implement safeguarding measures and projects.

"A wide range of people and workers—farmers, scrapers, knotters, warpers, weavers and also traders and designers—are bound together by piña textile making, a livelihood passed on to younger members of the communities, nurturing a sense of belonging, mutual respect and interdependence among practitioners and bearers," added Manipon.

"All workers and stakeholders were involved and encouraged to be involved in the [Unesco list] nomination process. The culture bearers and practitioners were on the forefront of the efforts. The designers involved were local designers who are part of the weaving communities—the weavers who created the textile patterns, the local embroiderers, etc.," Manipon said. "Fashion designers come from the local communities such as Anna India Legaspi, who paint-designs on piña textile, and the son of master weaver Raquel Eliserio, Carlo Eliserio."

https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/06/aklans-pina-handloom-weaving-an-intangible-international-treasure/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAAR1lj_TwIO0ffzZTtixOwxXQyrvNirratXZc9uOZfP7SeqKm2wgxYEZpu8M_aem_b1fKhFe3IoFct3vzG1zqrw

BUSINESS MIRROR:

Meat products more expensive in 2024–FAO report

- **BusinessMirror**
- **January 6, 20251**

Prices of meat products were higher last year as production could not keep with robust demand from key meat-importing countries, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

FAO said its Meat Price Index averaged 117.2 points in 2024, up 3.1 points or 2.7 percent from 2023.

"[Robust demand] sustained higher average prices for bovine, ovine, and poultry meats, while average pig meat prices declined, prompted by subdued import demand, particularly from China," it said.

In December alone, FAO said the index averaged 119 points, up 0.5 points (0.4 percent) from November, marking a rebound after three months of consecutive declines.

"At this level, the index stood 7.9 points [7.1 percent] above its corresponding value a year ago. The increase was primarily driven by higher bovine meat prices, resulting from strong global demand coupled with production constraints due to routine end-of-year maintenance shutdowns at processing plants in major exporting countries," it said.

"Likewise, international ovine meat prices rose, underpinned by reduced slaughter availability in Australia following improved pasture conditions from recent rainfall, which encouraged higher livestock retention, combined with sustained global demand."

By contrast, FAO said pig meat prices declined, underpinned by weaker-than-expected consumer demand in the European Union ahead of the winter holidays. Meanwhile, poultry meat prices registered a slight decline due to ample export supplies from Brazil.

Also registering an increase last year was FAO's All Rice Price Index, which averaged 133.1 points, up 0.8 percent from 2023 and representing a 16-year nominal high.

“Indica quotations underpinned this annual increase, as strong import demand from some countries in Asia and reduced competition among exporters kept them elevated during the first nine months of 2024.”

The FAO Food Price Index, which tracks monthly changes in the international prices of a set of globally-traded food commodities, averaged 127.0 points in December, down 0.5 percent from November and up 6.7 percent from December 2023.

For 2024 as a whole, the index recorded 122.0 points, 2.1 percent lower than the average value in 2023, offsetting significant decreases in quotations for cereals and sugar with smaller but not insignificant increases in prices for vegetable oils, dairy, and meats.

The FAO Cereal Price Index in December was relatively unchanged from November and 9.3 percent below its year-earlier level, as a marginal uptick in maize quotations offset a drop in those for wheat. For 2024 as a whole, the FAO Cereal Price Index averaged 113.5 points, down 13.3 percent from the 2023 level, marking a second annual decline from the 2022 record level.

The FAO Vegetable Oil Price Index in December declined by 0.5 percent from November though still 33.5 percent higher than its year-earlier level. For 2024 as a whole, the FAO Vegetable Oil Price Index averaged 9.4 percent higher than in 2023 amid tightening global supplies.

https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/06/meat-products-more-expensive-in-2024-fao-report/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAAR1leZK64mvJHlOOJtogR-SJ6Eu_Xn-IyAa9soIUIaGF5JzyVfLLP2Pz2yg_aem_WcgZ7uw6taPeeS96UPpnMQ

BUSINESS MIRROR:

Rice from Vietnam, Thailand costlier in 2024

- **Ada Pelonia**
- **January 6, 2025**

Vietnamese rice prices rose in 2024, with the average annual quotation of the 5 percent broken variety increasing to over $550 per metric ton (MT), according to the World Bank.

Figures from the World Bank showed that the average price of Vietnam's 5 percent broken rice grew by 6.45 percent to $557.5 per MT last year from $523.7 per MT in 2023.

Thailand rice prices also registered an uptick, with the 5 percent broken rice variety rising by 6.27 percent to $588.4 per MT in 2024 from $553.7 per MT in the previous year.

The average quotation of the 25 percent broken variety also inched up by 4.92 percent to $559.1 per MT last year from $532.9 per MT in 2023.

Vietnam and Thailand are the Philippines' two largest suppliers of imported rice, with shipments from both countries accounting for over 4 million metric tons (MMT), based on data from the Bureau of Plant Industry.

The Philippines' rice import arrivals have reached a record-high 4.6 MMT as of December 26, latest government data showed.

World Bank figures also indicated that the average quotation of corn, another important grain for the Philippines, plunged by nearly a quarter or 24.57 percent to $190.6 per MT in 2024 from $252.7 per MT in the previous year.

In a report last October 2024, the institution said prices of staple crops like corn "trended lower overall" last year, owing to "solid harvests and favorable growing conditions."

Meanwhile, data from the World Bank also indicated that the average prices of coffee varieties like arabica and robusta recorded growths.

Arabica prices jumped by 23.79 percent to $5.62 per kilo last year from $4.54 per kilo in 2023, while the average quotation for the robusta variety surged by 67.68 percent to $4.41 per kilo in 2024 from $2.63 in the previous year.

The average quotation of cocoa also skyrocketed by 123.48 percent to $7.33 per kilo last year from $3.28 per kilo in 2023.

In the same report, the World Bank noted that weather- and disease-related shocks and trade restrictions caused prices for cocoa, coffee, and rice to reach "historic highs" last year.

It added that this underscored "sources of supply volatility that could prove endemic to an era of climate change and trade fragmentation."

The average price of coconut oil, the top farm export of the Philippines, surged by 41.30 percent to $1,519 per MT in 2024 from $1,075 per MT in the previous year.

Preliminary data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showed that coconut oil exports posted a 68.1-percent growth rate in the January to October 2024 period, reaching $1.68 billion.

Image credits: Nonie Reyes

https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/06/rice-from-vietnam-thailand-costlier-in-2024/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAAR30JJngWRBvXjIJZRCYIBycVAiP6X8Vs4VTu8AM3cgkIC5gw0WQ6u1uvCU_aem_6pN9nsE5FYoN0ijKQ0uPJQ

BUSINESS MIRROR:

SC ruling favoring commercial fishing draws flak

- **Jonathan L. Mayuga**
- **January 6, 2025**

POCKETS of protests to big rallies are expected to greet the New Year with fishermen's groups threatening to storm the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) over a Supreme Court ruling that favors commercial fishing firms on municipal fishing grounds.

The Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya), a national alliance of small fishermen's organizations, said its members will troop to the DA next week to protest the ruling allowing commercial fishing vessels to operate within the 15-kilometer municipal waters.

Pamalakaya Vice Chairman Ronnel Arambulo said in a statement more than million registered small or subsistence fishermen and their families stand to be affected by the SC ruling which will now allow commercial fishing vessels with the capacity to catch huge volumes of fish to catch fish in deep portions of the municipal fishing grounds.

The Philippine Fisheries Code of 1998 (RA 8550) defines the capacity of commercial fishing vessels by their gross tonnage (GT) as follows:

• Small-scale: 3.1–20 GT

• Medium-scale: 20.1–150 GT

• Large-scale: More than 150 GT

Commercial fishing vessels are used for fishing outside municipal waters, which are more than 15 kilometers from the shoreline.

On December 19, 2024, the Supreme Court upheld a 2023 decision by the Regional Trial Court (RTC) in Malabon that allowed the Mercidar Fishing Corporation to fish in municipal waters.

The decision invalidated the Fisheries Code's section on municipal government jurisdiction over commercial fishing and struck down the ban on commercial fishing in waters less than seven fathoms deep.

It became a summary decision as the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG) missed the filing deadline for a motion for reconsideration.

Commercial fishing vessels that can haul at least three tons of fish in one expedition can seriously outcompete small fishers whose capacity is very limited to catch commercially viable fish. Some fishermen claim to bring home only as much as five kilos a day, just enough to put food on the table and cover the cost of gasoline for their motorized bancas.

To register their dismay over the decision, Pamalakaya vowed to hold the DA accountable for its “failure” to uphold the preferential rights of small fishermen to their traditional fishing grounds.

Arambulo said fishermen from several areas in Manila Bay, La Union and Cebu are set to join the protest in Quezon City.

The group earlier warned that the municipal fisheries output in the first quarter of the year might “fall significantly” once the controversial ruling issued by the SC’s First Division takes effect.

In the third quarter last year, the total volume of the municipal fisheries production was estimated at 196.13 thousand metric tons, or 20.3 percent of the entire fisheries production in the said quarter.

Arambulo said as if the decline in fisheries production over the years is not enough, another serious threat to municipal fisheries production now looms because of the SC decision.

“Instead of strengthening the capacity of small fishermen to contribute to overall food production, it [SC order] is further weakening their capacity because of the prevailing unfair fisheries rules and regulation,” Arambulo said.

He added that Pamalakaya will challenge the ruling by gathering petitions from the affected municipal fishermen and by working with the local governments that share the same opposition.

The group also blamed the heads of the DA and Bfar for their alleged inaction over the pressing issue that stands to affect over two million small fishermen in the country.

https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/06/sc-ruling-favoring-commercial-fishing-draws-flak/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAAR0VgltrKm_tGKLsk3S4vztUo_ceIS7RpJT7YjuXdbOMWDS1LJHC5f-5Hvk_aem_XZTcPQ6wnSprum5K85hE8w

BUSINESS MIRROR:

November GOCC subsidies up 82%; 11-month total down

- **Reine Juvierre S. Alberto**
- **January 6, 2025**

BUDGETARY support to government-owned and -controlled corporations (GOCCs) surged by over 80 percent in November 2024 but dropped by 15 percent over the 11-month period year-on-year, data from the Bureau of the Treasury (BTr) showed.

Subsidies to state-run firms increased by 81.64 percent to P12.232 billion in November 2024 from P6.734 billion during the same month a year ago. This was also 2.20 percent higher than the P11.968-billion subsidies in October 2024.

However, GOCCs were given lesser budgetary support from January to November 2024. Subsidies during the 11-month period amounted to P129.442 billion, 15.42 percent lower than the P153.050 billion a year ago.

Rizal Commercial Banking Corporation Chief Economist Michael L. Ricafort told the BusinessMirror this is due to the national government's tight fiscal space amid a series of typhoons that required calamity-related assistance.

Meanwhile, the spike in subsidies in November "could be partly attributed to the increased disbursement/utilization of budget after some government underspending earlier in 2024, especially in the third quarter of 2024," Ricafort said.

Election-related spending ahead of the 2025 midterm elections may have also caused the higher subsidies, as some government infrastructure projects and other programs need to be expedited before the election ban, according to Ricafort.

Non-financial firms get top load

Of the subsidies extended in November 2024, major non-financial government corporations cornered the highest amount with P11.088 billion.

More than half of the allocation, or P6.836 billion, was given to the National Irrigation Administration (NIA). The National Food Authority (NFA) also received P3 billion while the National Electrification Administration obtained P900 million.

About P1.012 billion was extended to other government corporations, such as the Philippine Children's Medical Center (P211 million), Philippine Heart Center (P168 million) and National Kidney Transplant Institute (P163 million).

Meanwhile, government financial institutions received P132 million, of which P127 million and P5 million were secured by the Social Housing Finance Corporation and Credit Information Corporation, respectively.

Over the 11-month period, the highest subsidy amount among the 44 state-run firms went to the NIA with P67.049 billion, followed by the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) at P9.599 billion and NFA with P8.250 billion.

In 2023, PhilHealth obtained the highest subsidy worth P50.746 billion out of the total P163.535 billion.

However, this year, the state-run health insurer will not be receiving any budgetary support from the national government after the congressional Bicameral Conference Committee for the 2025 budget bill removed its subsidy.

Government officials argued that PhilHealth has "adequate" reserve funds to continue the payment of members' health benefits and even improve its benefit packages.

PhilHealth said its reserve funds are worth P281 billion while its surplus funds amounted to P150 billion as of October 2024. Its investment portfolio, meanwhile, reached P489 billion as of November 2024.

Based on the 2025 General Appropriations Act, state-run corporations will receive P127.427 billion as budgetary support this year. This went down by 32.30 percent from P188.229 billion in 2024.

"GOCC subsidies would be a function of the latest 2025 national budget dynamics such as vetoed items and other budget exclusions that could result in some reduction in the coming months of 2025," Ricafort said.

Firms that generate more income and operate efficiently would require less financial assistance from the national government while those with lower profitability would need more subsidies, especially as they are fulfilling mandates that serve the general public, he added.

https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/06/november-gocc-subsidies-up-82-11-month-total-down/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAAR0wEDnTroNL70DIAgfeasuu_l4r7bNccWWIm3SwUXm-6q5GbtQRqiHylTc_aem_cJLikcnxHFO40IM5LJ8B4g

ABANTE TONITE:

Grupo ng magsasaka dinikdik DA: `Agri chief puro gimik sa bigas'

ABANTE TONITE

- January 5, 2025

Tinawag ng isang grupo ng magsasaka na mababaw at puro gimik lang ang ginagawang mga hakbang ng tanggapan ni Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. para tugunan ang problema sa presyo ng bigas sa bansa.

Para sa Kilusang magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP), pawang "band-aid solution" lang ang naiisip gawin ng DA tulad ng pagtanggal sa brand label at premium classification ng mga imported na bigas gayundin ang planong pagbebenta umano ng "Sulit Rice" at "Nutri Rice" sa murang halaga lamang.

Ayon kay KMP Chairperson Danilo Ramos, isang desperadong hakbang ang mga ginagawa ng pamahalaan na hindi naman natutugunan ang problema sa hoarding, profiteering, at cartel ng bigas.

"Hindi labeling ang problema, kundi ang kawalan ng aksyon laban sa rice cartel, hoarders at profiteers. Mismong ang patakaran ng gobyerno sa importasyon ang nagbigay ng kapangyarihan sa kartel at importer," sabi ni Ramos sa inilabas na pahayag ng grupo.

Giit ng KMP na hindi bababa ang presyo ng bigas kahit tanggalin ang brand labels nito. Nanawagan ang grupo sa pamahalaan na magpatupad umano ng mga tunay na solusyon sa sumisirit na presyo ng bigas.

Dismayado ang grupo dahil sa ganitong sistema aniya pinapatay ang mga magsasaka.

“The DA’s import-driven approach is a death sentence for Filipino rice farmers,” ani Ramos.

Tinukuran pa ni Ramos ang pahayag ng watchdog group na Bantay Bigas laban sa sobrang pagsandal ng gobyerno sa imported na bigas at mga programang tulad ng “Sulit Rice” at “Nutri Rice” sa mga Kadiwa center na hindi sagot sa mga dahilan ng pagsirit ng presyo nito sa mga pamilihan.

Hirit ni Ramos na dapat i-subsidize ang mga magsasaka sa halip na mag-import ng bigas at siguraduhin ang pangmatagalang seguridad sa pagkain na abot-kaya ng mga Pilipino.

“This is where the DA should focus, not on gimmicks like Sulit Rice and Nutri Rice,” pahayag pa ng grupo.

Base sa pahayag ng DA, plano nitong tanggalin ang brand label ng mga imported rices dahil nagagamit umano ito sa manipulasyon ng presyo ng bigas.

“After conducting a series of market visits, we now have reason to believe that some retailers and traders are intentionally confusing Filipino consumers with branded imports to justify the high prices of rice,” sabi ng DA chief.

Ilulunsad umano ng DA ngayong 2025 ang murang bigas na tinawag nitong “Sulit” at “Nutri” rice sa mga Kadiwa center para mas maraming Pilipino ang makinabang.

https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2025/01/05/grupo-ng-magsasaka-dinikdik-da-agri-chief-puro-gimik-sa-bigas/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAAR0wEDnTroNL70DIAgfeasuu_l4r7bNccWWIm3SwUXm-6q5GbtQRqiHylTc_aem_cJLikcnxHFO40IM5LJ8B4g