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## **I. PILIPINO STAR NGAYON:**

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**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# DA mulls selling pork to retailers as producers oppose MSRP

BY [DEXTER BARRO II](#)

Feb 19, 2025 03:04 PM

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## AT A GLANCE

- The Department of Agriculture (DA) is exploring the prospect of buying pork and directly selling the commodity to retailers, allowing the agency to cut through potential layers of profiteering as pork prices continue to rise.

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The Department of Agriculture (DA) is exploring the prospect of buying pork and directly selling the commodity to retailers, allowing the agency to cut through potential layers of profiteering as pork prices continue to rise.

DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel recalled that during his meeting with the pork industry on Tuesday, Feb. 18, the state-run corporation Food Terminal Inc. (FTI) bared this plan to help stabilize prices.

“Plano ng FTI bumili ng pork from our local producer and distribute it to the retailers para mabawasan ‘yung layering and of course, para makita rin ng gobyerno kung ano ba ang detalye ng trade na yan,” Laurel said in a chance interview on Wednesday.

(FTI plans to purchase pork from local producers and distribute it to retailers to reduce layering and, of course, to allow the government to see the details of this trade.)

The FTI, an attached corporation under the DA, is allowed to purchase pork under its mandate of stabilizing the prices of goods.

“We want to use that as leverage in the market if there is indeed some unfair prices around, we will intervene by importing our own kasim (pork shoulder) and pigue (ham) and sell directly to retailers and Kadiwa [stores],” said Laurel.

The development comes after pork producers, traders, and retailers expressed opposition to the proposed maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) on pork.

The DA chief noted that he would abide by this request once the pork industry, as a whole, agrees to offer “better prices” for consumers.

“Kung hindi natin makuha yung tamang presyo (If we cannot obtain the right price), fair to all parties, we may issue an MSRP or a maximum wholesale farmgate price, actually,” he pointed out.

Laurel said the plan to purchase pork, to then sell them, is also still in the air based on the industry’s adjustment of prices.

He added that the government would be forced to intervene, if price reductions are insufficient.

When asked for an estimate of the ideal price for pork, Laurel remained tight-lipped, although he hinted that the ₱250 farmgate price is above what the DA prefers.

Based on the agency’s latest monitoring, imported frozen pork is currently priced at around P250 per kilo, while local pork is sold at over P400 per kilo.

### **Finding the balance**

A potential MSRP on pork was first floated around early this year after reports that profiteering is possibly behind the rise in pork prices.

Laurel himself was quoted as saying that the price cap would be imposed once profiteering is identified to be the culprit.

It appears that this is no longer the case following the secretary’s assertion that the high prices are just part of the “natural course of business.”

He told reporters that the upsurge in prices, from hog raisers to retailers, is a direct consequence of the highly contagious African swine fever (ASF).

“Dati kasing nalugi ang karamihan dahil sa ASF eh, so ngayon ang mga farms gustong bumawi nang kaunti para makapag-repopulate rin naman sila,” the DA chief said.

(Most farms suffered losses before due to ASF, so now they want to recover a bit to help them repopulate.)

“So, we just have to find the right balance. And mukhang willing naman ang mga pork producers (And it looks like pork producers are willing) to go back to their figures, computation of cost and profitability, and come up with a win-win situation for all,” he continued.

In a statement on Tuesday, Laurel announced that pork producers, traders, and retailers have agreed to review their cost structures to help ease the cost for consumers.

The cost imposed by viajeros or traders, in particular, is under review since they are estimated to add ₱80 to the retail price of pork per kilo.

The pork industry is also awaiting the commercial availability of the vaccine against ASF, which is expected to drive prices lower.

The DA’s Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) is anticipating an approval for this vaccine from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) after it yielded positive results.

The vaccine, according to Laurel, will not only lead to repopulation of pork but it will also convince the return of investments in the industry.

[https://mb.com.ph/2025/2/19/da-mulls-selling-pork-to-retailers-as-producers-oppose-msrp#google\\_vignette](https://mb.com.ph/2025/2/19/da-mulls-selling-pork-to-retailers-as-producers-oppose-msrp#google_vignette)

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# Next week: NFA rice available to consumers as rollout begins under food security emergency

BY [DEXTER BARRO II](#)

Feb 19, 2025 01:08 PM

The National Food Authority (NFA) has begun releasing rice stocks to participating local government units (LGUs), which consumers can purchase for as low as ₱33 per kilo, as part of the agency's mandate under the food security emergency on rice.

During a ceremonial turnover on Wednesday, Feb. 19, at the NFA warehouse in Valenzuela City, Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel officially handed over the rice stocks to San Juan City Mayor Francis Zamora, who serves as president of the Metro Manila Council.

Aside from the 17 LGUs in Metro Manila, 50 more LGUs across the country have signified their intent to participate as sellers of NFA rice.

"This is just the beginning. We expect more local government units to participate in this effort, which will benefit not only Filipino consumers but also rice farmers," Laurel said in his speech.

On Feb. 3, [the DA declared a food security emergency on rice](#) as prices of the commodity remain stubbornly high.

Under this, the NFA is authorized to release rice buffer stocks in a bid to stabilize prices.

The NFA, the agency responsible for ensuring rice supply's stability, plans to release around 25,000 metric tons (MT) of rice every month during the emergency.

Since the NFA is restricted from selling rice directly to the public due to the amended Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), the DA will oversee the selling of rice through the state-owned corporation Food Terminal Inc. (FTI).

The FTI, meanwhile, will distribute rice directly to LGUs, as well as the Kadiwa ng Pangulo (KNP) program and other government agencies that want to participate.



**A look at the NFA rice consumers can purchase for as low as ₱33 per kilo (Dexter Barro II/MANILA BULLETIN)**

The rice will be available for ₱33 per kilo, or ₱1,650 per sack, and is suggested to be sold to consumers at ₱35 per kilo.

However, Zamora said San Juan will no longer impose the additional ₱2, noting that the city will not pass the cost of hauling and logistics to consumers.

Camarines Sur second district Rep. LRay Villafuerte, who was also present at the event, said his province will likewise do the same.

The Agriculture Secretary said the selling of the rice would begin next week, which could be as early as Monday.

While each LGU will have its own guidelines in selling rice, Laurel said the ideal maximum kilogram of rice a consumer can buy should be 50 kilos, or one sack of rice.

Additionally, the DA does not oppose the resale of the said rice, provided the price does not exceed the suggested retail price of ₱35 per kilo.

Laurel noted that participating LGUs can order as much stock as they want given the upcoming harvest season.

“Basically, we need to really unload our stocks as fast as possible, kung ano hingiin ng LGU then (whatever the LGU requests), we will release. Then, we will stop at 150,000 tons,” Laurel told reporters.

“Kung mabawasan ang laman ng warehouses...mamimili na kami ng palay ngayon eh, so itutuloy namin ‘yan hanggang maubos ang almost 300,000 tons,” he added.

(If the warehouse stocks decrease... we're already buying unmilled rice now, so we'll continue until we deplete almost 300,000 tons.)

As it stands, the NFA currently holds a buffer stock of approximately 300,000 MT of rice.

With the decongestion of warehouses, the government is set to procure palay from local farmers at ₱23 to ₱30 per kilo.

When asked about potential price reductions from the release of NFA stocks, Laurel said it would depend on the demand strength.

“If there’s more supply, the law of supply and demand dictates that this will soften the market price,” he explained.

Earlier, the DA estimated that this could bring reductions in rice prices of ₱3 to ₱5 per kilo.

<https://mb.com.ph/2025/2/19/nfa-starts-rollout-of-rice-under-food-security-emergency-1>

**MANILA BULLETIN:**

# NFA turns over well-milled rice to metro LGUs

BY [PATRICK GARCIA](#)

Feb 19, 2025 11:33 AM



Metro Manila Council (MMC)

President and San Juan City Mayor Francis Zamora received the sacks of well-milled rice from Department of Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr during the ceremonial turn-over of National Food Authority (NFA) rice to Local Government Units (LGU) as part of the Food Security Emergency on Rice on Wednesday, February 19, 2025 at the NFA warehouse in Valenzuela City. Also present during the ceremony were Camarines Sur 2nd district Representative L-Ray Villafuerte, Department of Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel De Mesa, Assistant Secretary Genevieve Guevara, NFA Department Manager Rey Untiveros, PCEO-Food Terminal Joseph Rudolph Lo, and NFA Deputy Administrator Engr. Robert Hermano. (Santi San Juan)

The National Food Authority (NFA) has turned over the first batch of sacks of well-milled rice to select local government units (LGUs) in the country following the declaration of a national food security emergency on rice to stabilize its skyrocketing prices.

The event, which was held at the NFA warehouse in Valenzuela City on Wednesday, Feb. 19, was led by Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., Metro Manila Council (MMC) President and San Juan City Mayor Francis Zamora, Camarines Sur 2nd District Representative L-Ray Villafuerte, and other officials from the DA and NFA.

The NFA said it has sold around 300,000 bags of aging rice to local government units (LGUs) in January, followed by another 400,000 bags of aging rice to be sold this month. Both stocks are part of the 700,000 bags of rice in the agency's storage facilities.

"This is nationwide stocks. Pero ang location naman niyan is NCR (National Capital Region) and nearby NCR [areas]," NFA Administrator Larry Lacson said, explaining that the move is in line with Republic Act No. 12078, which amended RA 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), stating that rice stored for more than two months can now be disposed of before further aging.

"Dahil sa amended RTL, dito po nakasaad na pagtungtong po ng dalawang buwan at isang araw ng aming bigas ay pwede na pong i-dispose bago pa po mag-age. Binigyan po kami ng kapangyarihan para i-dispose (Because of the amended RTL, it is stated that once our rice reaches two months and one day, it can already be disposed of before it ages further. We have been given the authority to dispose of it)," he explained.

The LGUs will then sell the aging NFA rice to their constituents.

### **Sagot Na Namin**

During the event, Zamora said the city government will shoulder the logistical costs of the purchased rice to San Juaneños as part of its efforts to provide financial reprieve to its residents.

He said the affordable rice can be bought for P1,650 per 50 kilos, or P33 per kilo.

"Kami po ay hindi na magpapatong. So, kung nakuha po namin ito for P33 per kilo which is equivalent to P1,650 kada sako, yun na din po ang halaga ng pagbenta namin. Ito ay sapagkat ayaw na din naming maging dagdag pasanin pa ng ating mamamayan. The LGU of San Juan will cover all the costs for the trucking, hauling, logistics, and yung paglipat po from here sa warehouse going to San Juan City (If we purchased the rice for P33 per kilo which is equivalent to P1,650 per sack, then that's also how much we will sell it to San Juaneños. This is because we do not want this to be another burden to our constituents. The LGU of San Juan will cover all the costs for the trucking, hauling, logistics, and all transportation expenses from here at the warehouse going to San Juan City)," Zamora explained.

The mayor said the pre-registration for the first 1,000 sacks of rice to be sold in the city on Monday will start Wednesday, Feb. 19.

<https://mb.com.ph/2025/2/19/nfa-turns-over-well-milled-rice-to-metro-lg-us>



**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Food security emergency: NFA releases rice buffer stocks as prices hit P60 per kilo

[Dominique Nicole Flores](#) - Philstar.com

February 19, 2025 | 7:28pm



This photo shows two workers passing a sack of NFA rice.  
The STAR / Michael Varcas

MANILA, Philippines — With a food security emergency declared, the National Food Authority (NFA) began releasing buffer stocks of rice to local governments on Wednesday, February 19, in a bid to lower prices, which have surged to around P60 per kilo.

The agency plans to release 25,000 metric tons of rice per month from its total stock of 300,000 metric tons, though the Department of Agriculture (DA) said it may increase the volume if necessary.

At this rate, the stock could last up to a year, which LGUs would sell at P33 to P35 per kilogram.

To replenish buffer stocks, which are used as reserves for relief operations and food security emergencies, the NFA will procure from local farmers and cooperatives.

“With the P9 billion allocated by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. for NFA’s rice procurement this year, and the remaining funds from last year’s record purchases, we aim to buy even more palay from farmers,” the agriculture chief said.

In 2024, the NFA bought clean and dry palay at P23 to P30 per kilogram, while wet palay was priced at P17 per kilogram — an increase from the previous range of P16 to P23 per kilogram.

The ceremonial launch of the rice release was held at the National Food Authority (NFA) warehouse in Valenzuela City, where Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. formally handed over supplies to San Juan City Mayor Francisco Javier Zamora.

Zamora, who also serves as president of the Metro Manila Council and co-chairman of the Regional Development Council, helps oversee regional development plans and investment programs.

Metro Manila is among the areas grappling with high rice prices, prompting the Department of Agriculture (DA) to impose a staggered rollback in the maximum suggested retail price on imported rice sold in the region, aiming to bring it down to P49 per kilogram by March.

Since February 15, the price cap was set at P52 per kilogram. The NFA was also allocated 150,000 bags per month for the region.

The DA's [latest price monitoring](#) shows that imported commercial rice retails between P40 and P55 per kilogram, depending on the grade. Meanwhile, local commercial rice is more expensive, ranging from P40 to P60 per kilogram as of February 17.

The food security emergency was a result of the National Price Coordinating Council's (NPCC) resolution [urging](#) the DA to declare the emergency to stabilize rice prices.

However, there are growing calls for the DA to crack down on rice traders and retailers accused of price manipulation through collusion or smuggling, saying the price caps and food security emergency are insufficient to bring down rice prices.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/agriculture/2025/02/19/2422681/food-security-emergency-nfa-releases-rice-buffer-stocks-prices-hit-p60-kilo>

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# NFA starts selling rice to LGUs

[Bella Cariaso](#) - The Philippine Star

February 20, 2025 | 12:00am



This photo shows two workers passing a sack of NFA rice.

The STAR / Michael Varcas

MANILA, Philippines — Amid efforts to bring down rice prices, the National Food Authority (NFA) yesterday started selling its rice stocks to local government units (LGUs) in Metro Manila.

Mayors have been authorized to procure NFA rice at P33 per kilo and resell them to their constituents at P35 per kilo, following the signing of an agreement among Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., Metro Manila Council president Francis Zamora and Camarines Sur Rep. Luis Raymund Villafuerte.

At the Valenzuela warehouse, Tiu Laurel said about 80,000 bags of rice are stored.

Around 150,000 metric tons of rice have been allocated by the NFA to Metro Manila mayors, he noted.

Of the allocation, Zamora said San Juan will buy around 5,000 MT. The city is eyeing an initial distribution of 1,000 MT on Monday.

Selling NFA rice stocks within a month would be ideal as farmers can take advantage of the buying price of dry palay at P23 per kilo, Tiu Laurel said.

About 67 LGUs have signified their intent to participate in the program, he noted.

For his part, Villafuerte said that at least 25,000 MT of NFA rice will be allocated to Camarines Sur.

Food Terminal Inc. president and CEO Joseph Rudolph Lo said they will ensure speedy processing so LGUs can start selling NFA rice.

## NFA exec sacked

Tiu Laurel yesterday ordered the relief of an NFA general manager in Occidental Mindoro after it was uncovered that some rice stocks in warehouses were stored for two years.

The NFA official will also be administratively charged.

### **'Bukbok' infestation**

Watchdog group Bantay Bigas has criticized the sale of grains infested with rice weevils at Murphy Market in Quezon City.

"The sale of yellowish and bukbok-infested rice at Kadiwa stalls should be criticized. Poor consumers complained about the imported rice with bukbok," Estavillo said yesterday.

Tiu Laurel has ordered a probe into the matter. — **Ramon Efren Lazaro, Jasper Emmanuel Arcalas**

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/02/20/2422791/nfa-starts-selling-rice-lgus>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

## **DA starts releasing NFA rice to dampen prices**

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

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 05:44 AM February 20, 2025



Department of Agriculture Sec. Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr delivers his speech during the Ceremonial Turn-over of National Food Authority (NFA) Rice to Local Government Units (LGU) as part of the Food Security Emergency on Rice on Wednesday, February 19, 2025 at NFA Warehouse in Valenzuela City. —Inquirer photo/Niño Jesus Orbeta

MANILA, Philippines — The Department of Agriculture (DA) started releasing National Food Authority (NFA) rice stocks to local governments on Wednesday, two weeks after declaring a food security emergency to temper rising retail prices.

The DA declared a food security emergency on rice on Feb. 4 to address the “extraordinary” increase in retail prices and ensure the availability of affordable rice for the duration of the emergency declaration, although it previously clarified that there is no shortage of rice.

These stocks will be distributed to local governments through Food Terminal Inc. (FTI) and sold to the public at P35 per kilogram.

During a ceremonial turnover held at the NFA’s warehouse in Valenzuela City, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said the distribution is a “race” as the grains agency needs to unload its stocks “as fast as possible” in time for the harvest season.

With most NFA warehouses filled to the brim, Tiu Laurel expressed hope the grains agency's rice stocks will be disbursed at the soonest possible to free up space for fresh harvests, allowing local farmers to take advantage of the NFA's buying price of P23 to P30 per kg.

"Whatever the LGU asks, whoever comes first, then we will release. Then, we will stop at 150,000 [metric] tons," he said.

"But then, the most likely thing that will happen is if the stock of warehouses is reduced... we are buying palay now, most likely we will continue until 300,000 MT runs out," he added.

According to the NFA, 67 LGUs have signified their interest in distributing NFA rice under the emergency declaration.

For this purpose, the agency allotted 625,000 bags of NFA rice to local government units (LGUs) across the country, according to the DA's Department Circular No. 4 outlining the guidelines for releasing the NFA rice during the food security emergency.

Regions covered by this declaration are the National Capital Region, Caraga, Calabarzon, Bicol, Western Visayas, Central Visayas, Eastern Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, Northern Mindanao, Davao, Soccsksargen and Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

Interested LGUs need to enter into a memorandum of agreement with FTI and provide a purchase order for the quantity and specifications of rice it requires. They also need to send a written request to FTI for withdrawing NFA stocks.

San Juan City Mayor Francis Zamora said they hope to sell initially 5,000 sacks of NFA rice to their constituents as early as next week, adding he is given a go signal from the city council to initiate the procurement process.

"My plan is to have a pre-registration process because we don't want thousands of people suddenly lining up outside the city hall to buy rice," said Zamora, concurrently serving as Metro Manila Council president and Regional Peace and Order Council chair.

For his part, Camarines Sur Rep. Luis Raymund Villafuerte said this initiative is of great help to both farmers and consumers in the province. Camarines Sur's allocation is 25,000 sacks.

"Although [Camarines Sur] is a top six rice producer, the farmers are also consumers. This is a good program to stabilize prices and protect the consumers," Villafuerte said.

The National Price Coordinating Council (NPCC), which includes the DA, recommended this emergency declaration, which is allowed by the amended rice tariffication law to address supply shortages or extraordinary increases in prices.

“The surge in rice prices was triggered by India’s ban on the export of non-basmati rice in August 2023 and heightened global demand due to concerns about low harvests from El Niño in early 2024,” the DA said in a statement on Wednesday.

According to the DA, imported rice prices have not returned to pre-July 2023 levels even if President Marcos slashed rice tariffs to 15 percent in July and global rice prices declined after India lifted its export ban.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2036296/da-starts-releasing-nfa-rice-to-dampen-prices>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Modern post-harvest facilities needed to sustain ‘tamban’ production

By: [Gabriel Pabico Lalu](#) - Reporter / [@GabrielLaluINQ](#)  
[INQUIRER.net](#) / 11:47 PM February 19, 2025

MANILA, Philippines — The government has to equip municipalities with modern post-harvest facilities for the fishing industry—like cold storage facilities—to ensure that production of tamban and other aqua products are sustained, Bicol Saro party-list Rep. Brian Raymund Yamsuan said on Wednesday.

Yamsuan in a statement explained that having a sustained production of tamban would allow the exportation of this fish to the global market, especially since tamban has been included in the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) or “Codex”, an international food standards for fish and fishery products.

This, Yamsuan said, would yield a positive impact on the livelihood of small-scale fisherfolk.

“Post harvest facilities, which are sorely lacking in the fisheries sector, are necessary to prepare for these export opportunities, along with helping small-scale fisherfolk raise their incomes, and create more jobs along the sardine industry’s supply chain,” Yamsuan said.

The lawmaker thanked the Department of Agriculture (DA) and its attached agencies for lobbying for tamban’s inclusion in the Codex.

In a statement on Tuesday, the DA said that tamban or Herring fish can now be exported after it was deemed part of the Codex. According to the DA, the Food and Agriculture Organization and World Health Organization established the CAC to set global food safety standards to protect consumers and ensure fair trade practices.

DA also said that the tamban’s inclusion in the Codex came after six years of advocacy and technical discussions through the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and the National Fisheries Research and Development Institute (NFRDI).

“We acknowledge and thank the efforts of the Department of Agriculture, through the [BFAR] and the [NFRDI], in lobbying for the inclusion of ‘tamban’ in the Codex. This is certainly welcome news for our artisanal fisherfolk,” Yamsuan said.



“The next step is to ensure that ‘tamban’ and other locally grown and caught fish remain competitive products in the export market by providing our fisherfolk with adequate facilities and equipment to preserve the quality of their catch, which, in turn, would allow them to sell these at higher prices,” he added.

According to Yamsuan, he expects the government to maximize the inclusion of tamban in the Codex by providing modern facilities for drying, canning and bottling the fish variety as a sardine product.

“Adding value to their catch by providing them adequate post-harvest facilities is a key factor in helping our small fisherfolk rise above poverty, along with providing support in accessing markets and training them on ensuring the sustainability of our marine resources,” he said.

Yamsuan, chairperson of the House committee on aquaculture and fisheries resources, said that tamban and other local sardine fish are usually found in over the municipal waters of the Zamboanga peninsula, Bicol region, and Northern Mindanao.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2036354/modern-post-harvest-facilities-needed-to-sustain-tamban-production>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Court junks ex-BFAR execs' bid to quash VMS graft case

By: [Kurt Dela Peña](#) - Content Researcher Writer / [@inquirerdotnet](#)  
INQUIRER.net / 12:14 PM February 19, 2025



VMS composite image from INQUIRER file photos

MANILA, Philippines—A Regional Trial Court (RTC) in Cainta, Rizal dismissed on Feb. 7 the motions to quash filed by two former officials of the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR) and a businessman who are charged with violating the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act.

Judge Don Ace Mariano Alagar of Branch 141 of the Cainta RTC said in a six-page resolution on Feb. 7 that the graft charges—two counts under Section 3(e) and one count each under Sections 3(g) and 3(j) of Republic Act (RA) 3019—should proceed to trial after finding no legal basis for dismissal.

Eduardo Gongona and Demosthenes Escoto, who both served as BFAR national director, previously asked the court to dismiss the charges, asserting that the Ombudsman took nearly three years to file the case—beyond the two-year limit for complex cases set under OMB Administrative Order (AO) No. 1 of 2020.

But the RTC said the Office of the Ombudsman, which filed the cases, did not commit inordinate delay in its investigation, rejecting the claim of the two former BFAR executives that their right to a speedy disposition of cases was violated.

“As the case was complex and involved voluminous records, the OMB completed the preliminary investigation, including resolutions on the motions for reconsideration, within 24 months as provided in OMB AO No. 1 of 2020,” the resolution stated.

The court pointed out, too, that Gongona and Escoto failed to assert their right to a speedy disposition of the case, saying that “they must file the appropriate motion upon the lapse of the statutory or procedural periods [...] otherwise, they are deemed to have waived their right to speedy disposition of the case.”

With the motions denied, the arraignment and pre-trial of the two former BFAR executives, as well as UK-based SRT Marine Systems CEO Simon Tucker, are set for February 26, allowing the prosecution to present evidence on the alleged irregular awarding of the Vessel Monitoring System contract.

Looking back, the cases stemmed from allegations that Gongona, Escoto, and Tucker conspired in 2018 to award a P2.09-billion VMS contract to SRT-UK, despite the company’s prior disqualification from a French-funded bidding process.

The original project, backed by a P1.6-billion French government loan, required bidders to be French or in a joint venture with a French firm. However, the French Ministry of Finance later disqualified SRT-France, a subsidiary of SRT-UK, citing British ownership and lack of operational facilities in France.

But rather than rebidding the project, Philippine officials restructured the deal, secured local funding, and expanded the contract to P2.09 billion, compelling the government to procure 5,000 vessel tracking devices, up from the originally planned 3,736 units, increasing costs and government obligations.

The court also found no indication that the complaint was politically motivated or maliciously prosecuted.

“There is no allegation in the pleadings of accused-movants before the OMB and their motions to quash that the prosecution of this case was politically motivated or prosecuted for malice or both,” the ruling stated.

Last month, Gongona and Escoto each posted bail worth P360,000.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2036105/court-junks-ex-bfar-execs-bid-to-quash-vms-graft-case>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

## **DA: Local fish Tamban can now be exported**

By: [Jown Manalo](#) - Reporter / [@jownmanaloINQ](#)  
INQUIRER.net / 04:42 PM February 19, 2025



Herring fish, or Tamban, to be distributed to poor families affected by the enhanced community quarantine amid the Covid-19 in Sorsogon province in March 2020. Photo from the local government of Casiguran, Sorsogon.

MANILA, Philippines — The local fish Tamban, or Herring fish, can now be exported after being included in the Codex Alimentarius Commission’s (CAC) international food standards for fish and fishery products, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said.

In a statement, the DA explained that the Food and Agriculture Organization and World Health Organization established the CAC to set global food safety standards to protect consumers and ensure fair trade practices.

“This is welcome news for the local fishery industry, a major export earner for the Philippines. This should stimulate new investments in the sector and create new jobs,” Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said in a statement on Tuesday.

According to the DA, Tamban’s inclusion in the codex was the result of six years of advocacy and technical discussions through the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and the National Fisheries Research and Development Institute (NFRDI).

Ulysses Montojo, chairperson of NFRDI’s Subcommittee on Fish and Fishery Products, led the initiative to complete the technical requirements for Tamban, or *Sardinella lemuru*.

“The study, supported by a P17 million funding from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and the Department of Agriculture’s Bureau of Agricultural Research, fulfilled the technical criteria necessary for the species’ inclusion in the Codex,” the DA said.

Tamban, a sardine species native to the Eastern Indian Ocean and Western Pacific, faced export restrictions in European markets, according to the DA.

“Between 2016 and 2017, several European Union (EU) countries rejected imports of canned sardines labeled as *Sardinella lemuru*, citing its non-inclusion in the EU’s Codex Standard for Canned Sardines and Sardine-Type Products,” the DA said.

The rejection led to the loss of hundreds of metric tons of exports, underscoring the need to update the codex, the DA noted.

The agency said the effort to include Tamban in the codex standard began in 2018, following encouragement from the EU Fisheries Agency.

“After years of technical reviews and deliberations, the Codex Committee on Fish and Fishery Products approved the inclusion in 2024, highlighting the species’ comparable sensory qualities to other sardine species and the sustainability of its fish stocks,” the DA added.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2036183/da-local-fish-tamban-can-now-be-exported>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# **Binay: Strict law enforcement key to stopping smugglers, hoarders**

By: [Jan Escosio](#) - Reporter / [@JEPOI04](#)  
[INQUIRER.net](#) / 04:54 PM February 19, 2025



Mayor Abby Binay in a press conference together with other Alyansa candidates.

MANILA, Philippines – Mayor Abby Binay, in a press conference on Tuesday, emphasized the urgent need for stricter enforcement of laws targeting hoarding, smuggling, and profiteering.

Discussing the senatorial slate of Alyansa para sa Bagong Pilipinas, Binay argued that the core issue lies not in legislative gaps but in the inadequate implementation of existing laws.

“There is no shortage of legislation,” Binay stated. “What we lack is effective enforcement. To date, we have not heard of any smugglers being jailed or penalized for manipulating rice prices.” She identified the rising cost of rice as directly linked to the activities of these criminals and insisted on the necessity of aggressive law enforcement measures.

Binay further highlighted the critical roles of the Department of Agriculture and the Bureau of Customs in ensuring that offenders are prosecuted and imprisoned. “We need examples set through arrests and convictions to deter others. Reports often focus on initial arrests but fade afterward, leaving these cases unresolved,” she remarked.

The mayor also called upon the media to actively monitor and report on ongoing cases, stating, “Public awareness can drive accountability. We must keep these issues visible until perpetrators are convicted.”

Under Republic Act 12022, the Anti-Agricultural Sabotage Act, those guilty of agricultural smuggling, hoarding, or profiteering face severe penalties, including life imprisonment and hefty fines, emphasizing the government’s commitment to combating economic sabotage in the agricultural sector.

Binay concluded with a strong message: “Simply blacklisting businesses involved in such crimes is insufficient; serious violations warrant lifelong imprisonment.”

<https://www.inquirer.net/429492/binay-strict-law-enforcement-key-to-stopping-smugglers-hoarders/>

## **BUSINESS WORLD:**

# **First batch of NFA rice released to San Juan City**

February 19, 2025 | 8:23 pm



**PHILIPPINE STAR/MIGUEL DE GUZMAN**

THE National Food Authority (NFA) on Wednesday began releasing rice stocks to local government units (LGUs) in response to the declaration of a food security emergency.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. handed over rice to San Juan City Mayor Francisco Javier Zamora in a ceremony at an NFA's warehouse in Valenzuela City.

Mr. Zamora heads the Metro Manila Council.

Aside from Metro Manila, 50 more LGUs have expressed their intent to participate in the program, the DA said. "We expect more local government units to participate in this effort, which will benefit not only consumers but also rice farmers," according to Mr. Laurel, who chairs the NFA Council.

The NFA seeks to release 25,000 metric tons (MT) of rice every month during the emergency.

The DA will oversee the selling of rice through state-owned Food Terminal, Inc. (FTI), since the amended Rice Tariffication Law bars the NFA from selling rice directly to the public.

The rice emergency declaration authorizes the FTI to distribute rice directly to LGUs, as well as to government-subsidized markets and participating government agencies.

"With the P9 billion allocated by President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. for NFA's rice procurement this year, and the remaining funds from last year's record purchases, we aim to buy even more palay (unmilled rice) from farmers," Mr. Laurel said.

He said the NFA's disposal of stocks will clear the way for storing the upcoming harvest.

The rice will be available for P33 per kilo, or P1,650 per sack, with a suggested retail price of P35 per kilo.

Mr. Laurel said rice sales via LGU channels could commence by Monday.

The DA does not oppose the resale of the NFA rice, but the price should not exceed the suggested retail price of P35 per kilo, Mr. Laurel added.

LGUs can order as much rice as they want as the upcoming harvest is likely to replenish NFA stocks.

"Basically, we need to really unload our stocks as fast as possible," he said. "Whatever the LGU requests, we will release. Then, we will stop at 150,000 tons." — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/02/19/654411/first-batch-of-nfa-rice-released-to-san-juan-city/>



## BUSINESS WORLD:

# Agri dep't finalizing MAV allocation for pork

February 20, 2025 | 12:33 am



**A MEAT VENDOR waits for customers at a market in Manila. — PHILIPPINE STAR/EDD GUMBAN**

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) is finalizing the minimum access volume (MAV) quota for pork imports this month amid pressure from meat importers and traders.

“The general direction for MAV will be 55,000 metric tons (MT), although not yet finalized,” Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. said on the sidelines of an event in Valenzuela City.

Of the 55,000 MT, Mr. Laurel said 30,000 MT will be allocated for meat processors and 10,000 MT will be “equally distributed” among traders.

The DA will be given an allocation of 15,000 MT to address any potential spike in pork prices.

Under Executive Order No. 50, pork tariffs are at 15% for shipments within the MAV and 25% for those exceeding the quota.

Meat traders have been calling on the DA to issue the MAV allocation for 2025 as soon as possible to avoid supply disruptions. They claimed that the MAV quotas should have been released in the first week of January.

In a Viber message to *BusinessWorld*, Meat Importers and Traders Association (MITA) President Jess C. Cham said the DA is tweaking the MAV guidelines to favor processors over traders, a move that the group called a “2-class distinction.”

“It is unfair and unjust to licensees who are not processors,” he said.

“They have acquired quota legally and fairly following the MAV guidelines. Other sectors will be deprived of affordable pork and rendered uncompetitive.”

In a letter addressed to Mr. Laurel, the MITA expressed concern that the quotas for the MAV have not been distributed. The group noted that last year, the full pork quota was only released in September.

“We do not think the outcome was good for the consumers or the economy,” it said.

MITA also opposed a proposed amendment to the guidelines that only processors would be eligible to file an application either as a regular licensee or entrant.

Under the amendment, public and private entities may also qualify to secure license for the purpose of participating in the government’s food security programs.

The existing guidelines state there are only “licensees” and new entrants, and the only way to retain and acquire quota is by the licensees’ utilization or performance.

“The reemergence of ‘class distinctions’ is obviously contrary to existing guidelines and very problematic — classifying the licensees only as trader or processor,” MITA said.

“What about the producers and commercial food service providers? What are they entitled to?”

MITA noted that a two-class distinction is “very shallow and superficial.”

“After nearly three decades of MAV, the licensees have developed and established their unique characteristics. They are no longer confined to the four classes of the initial year. We now see the emergence of licensees with meat shops, meat cutting plants, cold storage facilities and logistics, serving across different trade channels and not merely confined to any solitary one,” it added.

MITA said licensees have acquired and retained quota in accordance with the guidelines.

“Hence any reallocation not in accordance with current guidelines is in fact an ‘appropriation’ and that is unfair and unjust,” it said, adding that the move will affect small processors who are unable to import and will render them uncompetitive against the larger establishments that have access to MAV.

“Some meat processors have also engaged in meat trading, while others have established meat trading companies. While MDM (mechanically deboned meat) is the major poultry item, there are ‘processors’ that currently import chicken meat that are used in food service,” MITA said.

“Will these processors be deprived of quota as well? How about rice, corn, sugar, and coffee? Or will this rule apply only to pork, making it a ‘special’ commodity?”

MITA said taking away MAV quotas from all licensees except processors will deprive direct consumers of affordable pork and poultry meat.

“Currently MAV pork and poultry are sold in wet markets, supermarkets, meat shops, restaurants, and canteens. They can easily be sold in the Kadiwa stores too.”

National Federation of Hog Farmers, Inc. (NatFed) Vice-Chairman Alfred Ng said Mr. Laurel’s MAV pronouncement was discussed during a meeting with stakeholders on Tuesday.

“Giving more to the processors is a prudent move because they are directly involved in the manufacturing of our processed meats,” he said in a Viber message.

“Before, more was taken by the traders who enjoyed the much lower tariffs with not much risks unlike processors who have facility and machine investments,” he added.

British Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines Executive Director Chris Nelson welcomed the expected issuance of the MAV allocation.

“But what I would say is we want to see a smooth issuing. We would want that the MAV be issued as before, and that we have supply coming to the country,” he said in a Viber call.

He said the original system has benefited both the United Kingdom and the Philippines.

The Philippines is still the United Kingdom’s second-largest export market for pork.

Pork prices have surged in the country, prompting the DA to consider the imposition of a maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) for the commodity.

The DA has said the reasonable price for pork is P380 per kilo, given that the farmgate price is at P250 plus a profit margin of P100.

Mr. Laurel said the DA is eyeing to buy pork from producers and to sell the commodity directly to retailers to avoid any “layering.”

The government “will be forced to intervene” if pork prices remain high, he noted.

“I am skeptical about DA directly engaging in the sale of pork to lower prices,” Federation of Free Farmers National Director Raul Q. Montemayor said in a Viber message.

He noted DA’s role is to ensure that the market runs smoothly and is not distorted by profiteers and price manipulators.

“They have powers under the Price Act and the Anti-Economic Sabotage Law to run after these criminals,” he said. “If there is excessive layering, why not find a way to reduce these layers without having to buy and sell pork directly?” — **K.A.T. Atienza**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/top-stories/2025/02/20/654427/agri-dept-finalizing-mav-allocation-for-pork/>

**REMATE:**

# Taunang 3-buwang fishing ban sa Visayan Sea 'di sapat – BFAR

February 19, 2025 18:25



Sinabi ng Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) na hindi sapat ang taunang tatlong-buwang fishing ban upang mapanatili ang kasaganaan ng Visayan Sea bilang pangisdaan.

Natapos ang ban noong Pebrero 15 upang bigyang-daan ang pagdami ng herring, mackerel, at sardinas, ngunit iginiit ni BFAR-6 Regional Director Remia Aparri na kailangan ng karagdagang mga hakbang para sa pangmatagalang pagpaparami ng isda.

Nagpulong sa Concepcion, Iloilo noong Pebrero 18 upang talakayin ang mga estratehiya.

Wala namang nahuling lumabag sa closed season, ngunit iginiit ng BFAR ang mas mahigpit na pagpapatupad laban sa “hulbot-hulbot” o Danish Seine fishing, isang mapanirang pamamaraan sa mga coral reef.

Mahirap ipatupad ang regulasyon dahil sa lawak ng sakop ng Visayan Sea, kaya’t kinakailangan ang koordinasyon ng PNP Maritime Group, Philippine Coast Guard, at mga LGU sea patrol.

Hinihikayat din ng BFAR ang mas pinaigting na pagbabantay sa marine protected areas. *Santi Celario*  
<https://remate.ph/taunang-3-buwang-fishing-ban-sa-visayan-sea-di-sapat-bfar/>

**REMATE:**

# NFA nagpamahagi na ng mga bigas sa gitna ng Food Security Emergency

February 19, 2025 12:00



NAG-IKOT na sa warehouse ng NFA sa Valenzuela si Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. kasama si San Juan City Mayor Francis Zamora matapos ang ceremonial turnover ng NFA rice stocks na ibebenta sa mga LGU kasunod ng deklarasyon ng National Food Security Emergency sa bigas.



Nasa 25,000 metric tons kada buwan ang target na ilabas ng NFA, pero pwede pang tumaas kung kinakailangan.

Ayon kay DA Secretary Tiu Laurel, may P9 bilyong pondo ang NFA ngayong taon upang bumili ng palay mula sa mga magsasaka para mapatatag ang suplay ng mga bigas. *EDGAR RABULAN*

<https://remate.ph/nfa-nagpamahagi-na-ng-mga-bigas-sa-gitna-ng-food-securtiy-emergency/>

**REMATE:**

# Diplomatic protest sa ‘reckless’ maneuver Tsina chopper sa BFAR plane ihahain ng Pinas

February 19, 2025 10:04



MANILA, Philippines – NAKAUMANG na maghain ng diplomatic protest ang Pilipinas sa “reckless” maneuvers ng isang Chinese military helicopter malapit sa magaan na sasakyang panghimpapawid ng Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) na nasa routine patrol sa Bajo de Masinloc.

Sa isang kalatas, sinabi ng National Maritime Council (NMC) na lumipad at umali-aligid ang Chinese People’s Liberation Army-Navy Harbin Z-9 helicopter kasing-lapit, o may tatlong metro ang lapit sa Cessna ng BFAR sa Bajo de Masinloc, araw ng Martes.

“This blatantly hazardous action endangered the safety of the pilots and passengers onboard. It demonstrated a lack of regard for internationally accepted norms on good airmanship and flight safety,” ang sinabi ng NMC.

Ayon sa NMC, hindi maikakaila na ang Pilipinas ay mayroong soberanya at hurisdiksyon sa Bajo de Masinloc.

Kilala rin bilang Scarborough Shoal at Panatag Shoal, ang Bajo de Masinloc ay matatagpuan sa 124 nautical miles mula Zambales at nasa loob ng exclusive economic zone (EEZ) ng Pilipinas.

“China’s illegal, coercive, and aggressive behavior will not deter the Philippines from continuing the conduct of its routine maritime operations in accordance with its sovereignty over the shoal,” ang tinuran ng NMC.

Giit ng NMC, hindi magpapatnag ang Pilipinas sa tungkulin nito na pangalagaan at ipagtanggol ang maritime interests nito sa shoal, alinsunod sa Republic Act 12064 o Philippine Maritime Zones Act and international law, partikular na ang UNCLOS at ang 2016 South China Sea Arbitral Award.

“The Philippine Government will also issue a formal diplomatic protest on this grave incident,” ang sinabi ng NMC.

“The Philippines is committed to the rule of law and will always uphold international law. We urge China to respect international law, engage in responsible state behavior, pursue peaceful settlement of disputes, and refrain from actions that undermine regional peace and stability,” dagdag na pahayag nito. *Kris Jose*

<https://remate.ph/diplomatic-protest-sa-reckless-maneuver-tsina-chopper-sa-bfar-plane-ihahain-ng-pinas/>

**REMATE:**

# Commercial vaxx vs ASF posible sa Abril

February 19, 2025 08:02



MANILA – Inaasahang maaaprubahan sa Abril ang komersyal na pagbabakuna laban sa African swine fever (ASF), ayon sa Department of Agriculture (DA).

Ayon kay DA Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa, inaasahan nilang magkakaroon ng commercial approval para sa AVAC vaccine mula Vietnam sa unang linggo ng Abril.

Mahigpit itong babantayan ng FDA at Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI).

Samantala, nagpapatuloy ang gobyerno sa pagbabakuna sa piling lugar, kung saan 490,000 doses ang target na iturok.

Iniulat ng BAI na bumaba na sa 68 barangay ang apektado ng ASF, mula 534 noong Oktubre 2024.

Unang isinagawa ang ASF vaccination drive noong Agosto 2024 sa Lobo, Batangas, gamit ang 10,000 AVAC doses mula sa emergency procurement. *Santi Celario*

<https://remate.ph/commercial-vaxx-vs-asf-posible-sa-abril/>



**MANILA STANDARD:**

## NFA rice rollout



By Andrew Rabulan

February 20, 2025, 1:00 am

**Department of Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. leads the inspection and ceremonial turnover of rice stocks of the National Food Authority to select local government units (LGUs) yesterday at the NFA warehouse in Brgy. Malanday, Valenzuela City.**

<https://manilastandard.net/gallery/314559824/nfa-rice-rollout.html>

**MANILA STANDARD:**

# Binay eyes stronger drive vs. rice cartels, smugglers

By Joel E. Zurbano

February 19, 2025, 10:20 pm

**SENATORIAL** candidate and Makati City Mayor Abigail Binay has called for stricter enforcement of laws against hoarding, smuggling, and profiteering, saying the problem lies not in the lack of legislation but in the poor implementation of existing laws.

“There is no shortage of legislation; the issue is always with implementation. We haven’t heard of any rice smugglers being jailed or punished, or of anyone manipulating rice prices,” said Binay who is running for senator in the midterm elections under the Alyansa para sa Bagong Pilipinas formed by President Marcos.

She reiterated her call for more aggressive measures to identify, apprehend, and prosecute those involved in rice cartels and smuggling, which are largely responsible for the soaring prices of rice and other agricultural products.

Binay suggested that agencies such as the Department of Agriculture and the Bureau of Customs should prioritize these cases to ensure that offenders are caught and punished.

She also highlighted the role of the media in the successful prosecution of smugglers, hoarders, and profiteers.

“I believe we would see better outcomes if the media closely monitored how these cases are handled by government prosecutors and the appropriate courts, providing regular updates to the public. We need to keep these cases in the public eye until the offenders are convicted and sent to prison,” Binay said.

“It is not sufficient to blacklist the businesses involved in the rice cartel and other syndicates manipulating prices. Our laws clearly indicate that these are serious crimes that warrant life imprisonment,” she added.

Under Republic Act 12022, known as the “Anti-Agricultural Sabotage Act,” a person who commits any of the acts enumerated in Sections 7, 8, 9, and 10 of the Act may face life imprisonment and a fine five times the value of the agricultural and fishery products involved. These acts include agricultural smuggling, hoarding, profiteering, and engaging in cartels, all of which are categorized as economic sabotage under the law.

<https://manilastandard.net/news/elections-2025/314559684/binay-eyes-stronger-drive-vs-rice-cartels-smugglers.html>

**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# Rice price drops but meat, fish costs rise

**February 20, 2025**

THE average retail price of rice dropped a bit to P54.18 per kilogram (kg) in the first phase of this month (Feb. 1 to 5) from P54.63/kg in the second phase, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

This was also lower than the P54.81/kg in the first phase of January. The price of regular-milled rice also decreased, while that of special rice increased.

Meanwhile, the average retail price of meat generally rose in the first phase of February, compared to the second phase of the previous month (Jan. 15 to 17).

Fresh pork kasim, for instance, retailed at P354.74/kg from P344.01/kg and P342.29/kg in the first phase of January.

However, there was a reduction in chicken egg prices.

Bangus sold for P223.48/kg in the first phase of February, from P220.53/kg in the second phase of January, and P221.35/kg in the first phase.

The retail price of galunggong and tilapia also went up compared to the second phase of January. Tomatoes sold lower at P109.94/kg in the first phase of February from P158.67/kg in the second phase of January. It was also lower than the P189.69/kg in the first phase of January.

Red onions, on the other hand, were more expensive at P162.69/kg in February, compared to the P153.70/kg retail in the second phase of this month, and the P149.72/kg in the first phase of January.

Meanwhile, imported garlic and Hawaiian ginger both sold at lower prices, with Hawaiian ginger down by almost P5.00 from its second phase of January levels.

A kilogram of calamansi retailed at P86.63 in the first phase of January, higher than the P81.61/kg in the second phase.

Prices of three other commodities — cooking oil, brown sugar and refined sugar — also spiked. Refined sugar sold for P85.68/kg in the first phase of February, higher than the P84.25/kg and P84.89/kg in the second and first phases of January, respectively.

Giselle P. Jordan

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/02/20/business/top-business/rice-price-drops-but-meat-fish-costs-rise/2058659>

**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# **Biochar promoted for sustainable agri**

**By Leander C. Domingo**

**February 20, 2025**

A GOVERNMENT entity and a private company will promote biochar to make agriculture sustainable in Nueva Ecija and other areas.

Collaborating to integrate biochar for sustainable agriculture are the Philippine Carabao Center at Central Luzon State University (PCC-CLSU) and Alcom Carbon Markets Philippines Inc.

Ericson de la Cruz, PCC-CLSU director, led the discussion in a recent convergence meeting alongside key representatives from Alcom and unit/section heads from PCC-CLSU, demonstrating a strong commitment to advancing sustainable agricultural solutions.

"This partnership marks a crucial step toward integrating climate-smart technologies into the dairy industry, ultimately benefiting farmers, livestock and the environment," PCC-CLSU said.

According to PCC-CLSU, the collaboration aims to explore the potential of biochar as a biofertilizer and feed additive.

"This is to enhance soil health, livestock nutrition and overall agricultural productivity with a particular emphasis on improving dairy buffalo farming practices for institutional herds and small-hold dairy farmers," PCC-CLSU said.

An independent carbon project developer, Alcom is committed to advancing sustainable and circular economies through innovative carbon sequestration initiatives.

It also specializes in developing carbon credit projects that not only mitigate climate change but also create practical, high-impact solutions for the agriculture sector.

Alcom said it seeks to integrate biochar into farming systems, offering long-term benefits such as improved soil fertility, enhanced feed efficiency and increased resilience to environmental stressors.

It added that this can be done by working with organizations like PCC-CLSU.

The meeting was also a vital platform for knowledge exchange, fostering discussions on how biochar applications can contribute to more sustainable and profitable dairy buffalo farming.

The PCC-CLSU said that biochar as a soil amendment can improve water retention and nutrient availability, boosting forage and feed production for buffaloes.

It added that biochar's use as a feed additive has been shown to enhance digestion and overall animal health, potentially improving milk yield and meat quality.

"These innovations could significantly uplift the livelihoods of small-hold dairy farmers by reducing production costs, increasing profitability and ensuring sustainable agricultural practices," PCC-CLSU said.

**Formalizing a strategic partnership, PCC-CLSU and Alcom signed a memorandum of understanding on Feb. 6, 2025, marking a significant step toward advancing research on the applications of biochar in livestock nutrition and sustainable agriculture.**

"This partnership initiative focuses on studying the potential benefits of biochar as a feed additive to enhance the digestive efficiency and overall health of livestock, particularly water buffaloes," PCC-CLSU said.

It added that the partnership aims to explore biochar's role as a biofertilizer when combined with carabao dung, promoting improved soil fertility and agricultural sustainability.

"By leveraging scientific research and field applications, the study seeks to contribute to more efficient waste management, carbon sequestration and climate-smart farming practices," PCC-CLSU said.

It reiterated that the partnership aligns with both institutions' goals of promoting sustainable livestock management, improving soil health and driving climate resilience in Philippine agriculture.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/02/20/business/agribusiness/biochar-promoted-for-sustainable-agri/2058634>

**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# Searca equips 'Bahay ni Maria' with food gardening knowledge

**By Leander C. Domingo**

**February 20, 2025**

THE Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca) has trained staff members of Bahay ni Maria in Calamba, Laguna, on edible gardening that will augment the food supply of the home for abandoned elderly persons and children with special needs.



hoto shows representatives from the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture training staff members of Bahay ni Maria in Calamba on edible gardening. SEARCA PHOTO

A total of 13 staff members of the home were trained by the Partnerships Unit (PU) and Research and Thought Leadership Department (RTLTD) of Searca.

Searca Director Glenn Gregorio said the initiative is part of the center's ongoing community relations partnership with the Rotary Club of Calamba.

Addressing the trainees, Sharon Malaiba, Searca Partnership Unit head, said the center is committed to promoting food and nutrition security.

"Together with the Rotary Club of Calamba, we will assist you in creating an edible garden that will serve as a source of readily available fresh and nutritious produce for the residents of Bahay ni Maria," she said.

Malaiba added that the hands-on training, provision of planting materials and continuous support show a real commitment to making a lasting impact for those under the care of Bahay ni Maria.

Anna Gale Vallez, Searca RTLD program specialist, led the training session.

Vallez said the Bahay ni Maria staff members also gained practical knowledge in producing organic plant growth solutions such as fermented plant and fruit juices.

"They also learned the basics of hydroponics and that we will evaluate the progress of their training outputs after a few weeks," she added.

Joseph Matthew Hedreyda, Searca PU senior associate for events and visitors, said that the event is "a great way to support the staff members of Bahay ni Maria while benefiting the residents in the long run."

"By teaching them practical gardening skills like making organic fertilizers and setting up hydroponics, Searca gives them the tools they need to grow their food and become more self-sufficient," Hedreyda said.

Marie Sosoban of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Fatima, on behalf of the Bahay ni Maria, received from Searca planting guides and materials, seedlings and gardening supplies.

Searca said other activities in establishing Bahay ni Maria's edible garden include the construction of a greenhouse for seedlings and planting materials.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/02/20/business/agribusiness/searca-equips-bahay-ni-maria-with-food-gardening-knowledge/2058633>

**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# La Union, Pangasinan farmers get machines

**By The Manila Times**  
**February 20, 2025**

THIRTY-TWO farmers cooperatives and associations, and local government units from La Union and Pangasinan received 35 units of various agricultural machines worth P71.6 million under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF)-Mechanization Program on Feb. 18 at the Philippine Center for Postharvest Development and Mechanization (PHilMech) headquarters in Muñoz, Nueva Ecija.



Thirty-two farmers' groups and local government units from La Union and Pangasinan benefit from the latest distribution of farm machines under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund-Mechanization Program. PHILMECH PHOTO

The machines distributed included 23 units of double drum rice combine harvesters and 12 units of four-wheel tractors with implements such as rotavators, disc plows and front loaders.

PHilMech Director Joel Dator graced the ceremony and provided the recipients with information about phase two of the RCEF-Mechanization Program, which will have a funding of P9 billion per year. Under the first phase, the annual funding was P5 billion per year.

For her part, Lilia Gregorio, chairperson of Barangay San Vicente Farmers and Irrigators Association of Alaminos City, said they are fortunate to be one of the recipients of the farm machines distributed under the program. It is the second time for her group to receive agricultural equipment under the RCEF-Mechanization Program.

"Firstly, we would like to thank PHilMech, as this is the second time we received equipment under the program. We first received a riding-type mechanical transplanter that we studied first and are now utilizing. And now, we are blessed to receive a four-wheel tractor," she said in Filipino.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/02/20/business/agribusiness/la-union-pangasinan-farmers-get-machines/2058632>



**THE MANILA TIMES:**

## **Two coops celebrate PhilGAP milestones**

**By The Manila Times**

**February 20, 2025**

**RICE farmers in Laguna made their first harvest from their farms accredited under the Philippine Good Agricultural Practices (PhilGAP).**



Rice farms certified under the Philippine Good Agricultural Practices can command better prices because of their higher quality. PHILRICE PHOTO

This, as the Calamba Farmers' RiceBIZ Sustainable Livelihood Program Association and the Antonio Luna Cluster collectively harvested 400 sacks of rice, which were sold at a price P0.50 per kilogram, higher than those offered by traders.

Their harvest are branded as GAPproved rice.

Sharen Rivas, RiceBIS coordinator at Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) office in Agusan, said PhilGAP-approved rice has been well-received by catering services for its excellent quality.

"Customers have praised its delicious taste with the added benefit of not spoiling easily. Harvests from RiceBIS farmers are purchased by the Federation of Cabadbaran Irrigators and Farmers Association Inc. and processed into GAPproved rice," PhilRice said.

"PhilGAP is a certification program designed to ensure the safety and quality of agricultural products, including vegetables, rice and fruits. By obtaining a PhilGAP certificate, a farm can demonstrate its adherence to international standards of quality and safety," it added.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/02/20/business/agribusiness/two-coops-celebrate-philgap-milestones/2058630>

**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# LGUs receive emergency rice supply

**By Giselle P. Jordan**

**February 20, 2025**

**(UPDATE)** THE Department of Agriculture (DA), through the National Food Authority (NFA), released rice stocks to local government units (LGUs) on Wednesday in line with the government's declaration of a food security emergency on rice.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. led the turnover rite at an NFA warehouse in Valenzuela City with San Juan City Mayor Francis Zamora, president of the Metro Manila Council.

"This is just the beginning. We expect more local government units to participate in this effort, which will benefit not only Filipino consumers but also rice farmers," said Tiu Laurel, chairman of the NFA Council.



IN SACKS Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu-Laurel (second from left) turns over sacks of well milled rice from the National Food Authority (NFA) to Metro Manila Council (MMC) President and San Juan City Mayor Francis Zamora (third from left) in a ceremony at the NFA warehouse in Valenzuela City on Feb. 19, 2025. The release of the staple is part of the government's program on Food Security Emergency on Rice. Also present were Camarines Sur 2nd district Rep. L-Ray Villafuerte, Agriculture Assistant Secretaries Arnel De Mesa, and Genevieve Guevara; NFA

Department Manager Rey Untiveros, Food Terminal President and CEO Joseph Rudolph Lo and NFA Deputy Administrator Robert Hermano. PHOTO BY ISMAEL DE JUAN.

He added that the NFA plans to release 25,000 metric tons of rice monthly during the food security emergency, noting the volume could be increased as needed.

"With the P9 billion allocated by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. for NFA's rice procurement this year and the remaining funds from last year's record purchases, we aim to buy even more palay (unmilled rice) from farmers," Tiu Laurel added



Metro Manila Council (MMC) President and San Juan City Mayor Francis Zamora receives sacks of well milled rice from Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr during the ceremonial turnover by the National Food Authority (NFA) to local government units (LGU) as part of the Food Security Emergency on Rice at the NFA Warehouse in Valenzuela City on Feb. 19, 2025. Also present during the ceremony were Camarines Sur 2nd District Rep. L-Ray Villafuerte, Agriculture Assistant Secretaries Arnel De Mesa and Genevieve Guevara, NFA Department Manager Rey Untiveros, President and CEO-Food Terminal Joseph Rudolph Lo and NFA Deputy Administrator Robert Hermano. PHOTOS BY ISMAEL DE JUAN

The DA declared a food security emergency on rice on Feb. 3 as recommended by the National Price Coordinating Council.

The surge in prices of rice, it said, was caused by India's ban on non-basmati rice export in August 2023 and the rise in global demand due to anticipated low harvests triggered by the El Niño phenomenon in early 2024.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/02/20/news/national/lgus-receive-emergency-rice-supply/2058159>

**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# **Baguio to send farmers for seasonal work in SKorea**

**By Gaby B. Keith**

**February 20, 2025**

**BAGUIO CITY** — The City Veterinary and Agriculture Office (CVAO), Public Employment Services Office (PESO), and other concerned offices are currently conducting a recruitment and selection process of agricultural workers who will be sent to Taebaek City, South Korea, as part of a Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) between Baguio City and Taebaek.

The program aims to provide opportunities for local farmers to gain additional income and skills through an international internship program, including strengthening agricultural ties and cooperation with the Republic of Korea, particularly its sister city, Taebaek.

Male and female 25-50 years old at the time of application are qualified.

However, they must be residents of Baguio City for at least one year; must have work experience in agriculture; can speak and understand English; willing to undergo classes on the Korean language, culture and tradition; physically and mentally fit; and have no criminal record.

CVAO senior agriculturist Marcelina Tabelin said those who will be selected will be deployed to Taebaek on the second week of April and will work there for 90 days or five months.

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) to attract foreign seasonal workers was signed between Baguio, represented by Mayor Benjamin Magalong, and Taebaek, represented by Mayor Lee Sang Ho, on March 4, last year.

Tabelin said a post-contract assessment and evaluation of the program will be conducted by the CVAO and PESO upon the return and completion of the SWP participants, where their experiences, insights, and other concerns will be used as inputs for the program's improvement.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/02/20/regions/baguio-to-send-farmers-for-seasonal-work-in-skorea/2058777>

**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# COURT JUNKS MOTIONS TO QUASH GRAFT CHARGES

**Trial of ex-BFAR execs to proceed**

**By The Manila Times**

**February 20, 2025**

THE Regional Trial Court Branch 141 in Cainta, Rizal has denied the motions to quash the graft charges against two former directors of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and a British businessman involved in the alleged anomalous P2-billion vessel monitoring system (VMS) project in 2018.

In a six-page resolution dated Feb. 7, 2025, Presiding Judge Don Ace Mariano Alagar of the Cainta RTC ruled that the court found no legal basis for the dismissal of graft charges against BFAR national directors Eduardo Gongona and Demosthenes Escoto, and UK-based SRT Marine Systems CEO Simon Tucker.

The three were accused of graft charges — two counts under Section 3(e) and one count each under Sections 3(g) and 3(j) of Republic Act 3019 (Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act).

The court ruled that the Office of the Ombudsman (OMB), which filed the cases, did not commit inordinate delay in its investigation and rejected the claim of the two former BFAR chiefs that their right to a speedy disposition of cases was violated.

With the denial of their motions, the duo's arraignment and pre-trial were set for Feb. 26, allowing the prosecution to present evidence on the alleged irregular awarding of the VMS contract.

In seeking to quash the charges, Gongona and Escoto argued that the Ombudsman took nearly three years to file the case — beyond the two-year limit for complex cases set under OMB Administrative Order (AO) 1 of 2020.

However, the court ruled that "no inordinate delay in the conduct of the preliminary investigation can be ascribed to the OMB."

"As the case was complex and involved voluminous records, the OMB completed the preliminary investigation, including resolutions on the motions for reconsideration, within 24 months as provided in OMB AO No. 1 of 2020," the court stated.

"Suffice it to say there is no violation of accused movants' right to speedy disposition of their cases," it added.

The Cainta RTC also found no indication that the complaint was politically motivated or maliciously prosecuted.

"There is no allegation in the pleadings of accused movants before the OMB and their motions to quash that the prosecution of this case was politically motivated or prosecuted for malice or both," the ruling stated.

The court further noted that Gongona and Escoto failed to assert their right to a speedy disposition in a timely manner.

"They must file the appropriate motion upon the lapse of the statutory or procedural periods. Otherwise, they are deemed to have waived their right to speedy disposition of the case," it ruled.

The cases stemmed from allegations that Gongona, Escoto, and Tucker conspired in 2018 to award a P2.09-billion VMS contract to SRT-UK, despite the company's prior disqualification from a French-funded bidding process.

The original project, backed by a P1.6-billion French government loan, required bidders to be French or in a joint venture with a French firm.

However, the French Ministry of Finance later disqualified SRT-France, a subsidiary of SRT-UK, citing British ownership and lack of operational facilities in France.

Rather than rebidding the project, Philippine officials restructured the deal, secured local funding, and expanded the contract to P2.09 billion, prosecutors said.

The revised contract compelled the government to procure 5,000 vessel tracking devices, up from the originally planned 3,736 units, increasing costs and government obligations.

The Ombudsman ruled in February 2024 that the three accused "orchestrated a series of questionable events" to ensure that SRT-UK secure the contract under highly favorable terms, while the Philippine government bore the financial burden.

Gongona and Escoto — who posted bail of P360,000 each in January — will now proceed to trial alongside Tucker, who has yet to surrender to authorities.

Judge Alagar ordered Tucker to appear before the court and post bail ahead of the Feb. 26 arraignment and pre-trial proceedings.

Escoto, who was dismissed from government service after a separate Ombudsman ruling found him guilty of grave misconduct, also faces contempt of court charges for enforcing a fisheries tracking order that had been ruled unconstitutional.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/02/20/regions/trial-of-ex-bfar-execs-to-proceed/2058792>

## **BUSINESS MIRROR:**

# **NFA to buy 870K MT of palay in 2025**

Ada Pelonia

February 20, 2025

THE National Food Authority (NFA) is targeting to procure as much as 870,000 metric tons (MT) of palay this year.

“[We aim to procure] 545,000 MT, and if there’s still a budget for it we will go as high as 870,000 MT of palay,” NFA Administrator Larry Lacson told the BusinessMirror on Wednesday.

Earlier, the grains agency said it is seeking more funds to increase its buffer stock as mandated by the amended Rice Tariffication Law (RTL). (See: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/23/nfa-seeks-more-funds-for-increasing-its-buffer-stock/>)

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

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

Lacson said the initial allocation of P9 billion for palay procurement this year should be doubled to achieve its new buffer stocking requirement.

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

Released rice stocks

Meanwhile, the Department of Agriculture (DA) started to release the grains agency’s rice stocks to local government units (LGUs) following the declaration of a food security emergency on rice.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. officially handed over rice supplies to San Juan City Mayor Francisco Javier Zamora in a ceremony at the NFA warehouse in Valenzuela City on Wednesday.

NFA had planned to release around 25,000 MT per month during the food security emergency, noting that such volume could be increased if needed.

“This is just the beginning. We expect more local government units to participate in this effort, which will benefit not only Filipino consumers but also rice farmers,” Laurel was quoted in the statement as saying.

“With the P9 billion allocated by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. for NFA’s rice procurement this year, and the remaining funds from last year’s record purchases, we aim to buy even more palay from farmers,” he added.

The DA recently declared a food security emergency in its bid to stabilize rice prices upon the recommendation of the National Price Coordinating Council (NPCC). Such a declaration allows the agency to release rice buffer stocks held by the NFA.

Last year, the NFA Council raised the palay procurement price range to P23-P30 per kilo for clean and dry rice; and P17 per kilo for wet palay. Previously, palay buying prices ranged from P16 to P23 per kilo. Ada Pelonia

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/02/20/nfa-to-buy-870k-mt-of-palay-in-2025/>

**BUSINESS MIRROR:**

# DA amends pork MAV rules in bid to tame market prices

Ada Pelonia  
February 20, 2025



**Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.**

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) is amending the minimum access volume (MAV) rules for pork as part of efforts to tame prices.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said the proposed 2025 MAV allocation of 55,000 metric tons (MT) for pork would be split among processors, traders, and the government.

Broken down, 30,000 MT would go to the processors; 15,000 MT would be allotted to the DA through Food Terminal Inc. (FTI) and Planters Products Inc. (PPI); and 10,000 MT for traders. However, the DA chief said the allocation is yet to be settled, and the final allocation would be released within the month.

Laurel said the agency would leverage the allocation for imported pork through the said government-owned and -controlled corporations (GOCCs) and intervene in the market provided that “unreasonable or unfair prices” are proven. The frozen pork would be sold directly to retailers and Kadiwa stores, he added.

According to the DA chief, he decided to amend the MAV rules for pork to address the alleged sale and recycling of MAV allocation.

“[This is] to level the playing field and to avoid selling of the MAV and mawala ang [to stop the] recycling of the MAV,” Laurel told the BusinessMirror on Wednesday.

However, the government’s bid to import was thumbed down by the Meat Importers and Traders Association (Mita).



“The government imported before and lost a lot of money. But why should DA hold the quota when it can import duty-free anyway? The government is not addressing the root cause of the problem, which is lack of supply,” Mita President Emeritus Jesus Cham told the BusinessMirror. Mita recently wrote Laurel, decrying the quotas for the 2025 MAV that were yet to be distributed.

**Pork shortage**  
The National Federation of Hog Farmers Inc. (NatFed) recently said local pork shortage due to the persisting effect of African swine fever (ASF) pushed up prices for the protein source in Metro Manila.

“Local pork is short because of ASF last June to August [2024]. Many sows were culled so piglet production was lessened,” NatFed vice chairman Alfred Ng told the BusinessMirror. (See: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/02/17/pork-shortage-in-market-lingers-as-asf-hit-hog-farms-still-recovering/>)

He noted that farms hit by the deadly hog disease during the ASF outbreaks last year were still recuperating from the aftermath.

“Some farms need to clean, remodel their buildings, swab the environment before restocking. They need to look for loans or finances to restock.”

DA officials are banking on the commercial availability of ASF vaccines to boost pork production, and help address price spikes. The agency targets getting commercial approval of the vaccine by the first week of April.

Currently, retail prices of pork are as high as P450 per kilo for pork belly and P380 per kilo for pork ham, based on the government’s latest price monitoring report.

Despite this, the DA announced that the plan to impose a maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) for pork will be put on hold until a study on cost structure is finalized.

Laurel said pork producers, traders, and retailers agreed to review their cost structures to reduce the price of pork.

Among the cost structures under review are those of viajeros or traders, which are now estimated to add P80 per kilo.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/02/20/da-amends-pork-mav-rules-in-bid-to-tame-market-prices/>

## **BUSINESS MIRROR:**

# **Egg shortages and price hikes are challenging small businesses**

BusinessMirror  
February 19, 2025

Small business owners that rely on eggs for their products are facing sticker shock because the usually reliable staple is in short supply.

Avian flu is forcing farmers to slaughter millions of chickens a month, causing US egg prices to skyrocket. The average price of a dozen Grade A eggs in US cities reached \$4.95 in January, eclipsing the previous record of \$4.82 set two years earlier and more than double the low of \$2.04 that was recorded in August 2023. The Agriculture Department predicts prices will soar another 20 percent this year.

Most owners are taking the increase in stride, looking at it as just one of many hurdles they constantly face. But if the problem persists, they could be forced to raise prices or adjust their products.

Liz Berman is the owner and sole proprietor of The Sleepy Baker in Natick, Massachusetts. She specializes in custom, from-scratch cakes but also sells cupcakes, cookies, pies and other baked goods.

Eggs are just one of the baking ingredients experiencing price shocks. Items such as cocoa powder and butter have gone up as well. And price isn't the only issue.

"It's not just the cost of eggs, right? It's also just the availability," she said. She prefers to buy medium-sized white shelled eggs, buying a box with 18 dozen eggs, but two weeks ago those were unavailable, so she had to buy brown eggs in individual cartons of 12.

"It sounds kind of silly, but when I'm the sole proprietor and I have a huge volume of work, to have to take a dozen of eggs out of my walk-in at a time as opposed to a flat of eggs, it's just it's a pain," she said.

She doesn't think prices will ease anytime soon. Cocoa powder prices have been elevated for years. "I think ultimately I'm going to have to increase my prices, which is hard because that's going to mean that there's a category of customer that won't order from me anymore," she said.

In Princeton, New Jersey, John Nachlinger, owner of the Bad Cookie Company, is imposing a temporary 25 cent per cookie surcharge to help mitigate added costs.

"As cookies are already a tight-margin food, these increases have really hurt our bottom line," Nachlinger said. He said he doesn't want to permanently raise prices or adjust the size of his cookies since he hopes the egg situation is temporary. "We want to bring value to our customers," he said.

At Daisies, a pasta restaurant in Chicago, chef/partner Joe Frillman and chef/partner Leigh Omilinsky haven't raised prices but are thinking of adjusting menu items.

Omilinsky said she is thinking of adding more vegan and egg-free deserts to the menu and has been working more with flax seeds. She said the shortage has made her more conscious of the ingredients she is using and wasting less.

"You know, if we need egg yolks we are absolutely saving those whites," she said.

Meanwhile, Frillman said the restaurant has shifted to making pastas that use less eggs.

“We’ve just changed the shape of the noodle,” he said. “We use an extruder which is a piece of equipment that allows us to basically extrude pasta without eggs.”

Depending on how long the egg shortage lasts, they could adjust menu items too, he said.

“We have a pappardelle on our menu that’s been on since day one,” he said. “If this gets to the point where it’s just cost prohibitive, it’s very egg yolk heavy, we would then transfer to something like a spaghetti or a fettuccine that is a similar noodle that we can make without eggs.”

Meanwhile, Stephanie Maynard, co-owner of Ox Hollow Farm in Roxbury, Connecticut, faces a different issue: skyrocketing demand.

The farm she owns with her husband produces beef, pork, poultry, eggs and vegetables. They have 950 laying hens, with 300 more coming in March. The winter is generally a quieter time as the farm prepares for busy spring and summer months, increasing the inventory on hand until it is ready to sell. But this year, they’re rushing to increase egg production for customers at greenmarkets.

People who might normally buy eggs at supermarkets are turning to greenmarkets due to the shortages, and regular customers are increasing their orders just to make sure they have eggs, she said.

“We have developed a rapport with our customers. I know a lot of them by name and face,” she said. “And now you’re seeing people that you’ve never seen attend a market before. So I’m drawing a lot of new customers in to get eggs at the market.” *AP*

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/02/19/egg-shortages-and-price-hikes-are-challenging-small-businesses/>

## **BUSINESS MIRROR:**

# **PHL agri trade deficit still at \$3 billion in October to December**

Ada Pelonia

February 19, 2025

The country's agricultural imports continued to outpace its farm exports in the fourth quarter of 2024, according to the latest data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

Preliminary figures from the PSA, however, showed that farm trade deficit in October to December 2024 narrowed slightly to \$3.014 billion from \$3.016 billion recorded in the same period in 2023.

"The country's total agricultural trade in the fourth quarter of 2024, which amounted to \$7.36 billion, posted an annual increase of 17.3 percent. In the third quarter of 2024, the total agricultural trade recorded an annual increase of 12.1 percent, while an annual decrease of 0.8 percent was registered in the fourth quarter of 2023," PSA said.

"In the fourth quarter of 2024, the total balance of trade in agricultural goods was recorded at \$3.01 billion, which reflects a deficit with an annual decrement of 0.1 percent. In the third quarter of 2024, the trade deficit registered an annual increase of 1.6 percent, while an annual decrease of 6.6 percent was recorded in the fourth quarter of 2023."

Figures from the PSA indicated that the total value of farm exports in the October-to-December period reached \$2.17 billion, accounting for a 29.5 percent share of total farm trade. Earnings from farm exports were higher by 33.3 percent than the previous year's \$1.62 billion.

Receipts from exports, however, paled in comparison to the import bill, which amounted to \$5.18 billion or 70.5 percent of the total agricultural trade. Payments for food purchases during the period were 11.6 percent higher than the \$4.64 billion recorded in the same period in 2023.

Cereals, including rice and wheat, were the country's top food imports at \$1.26 billion or 23.9 percent higher than the \$1.02 million recorded in the previous year. It accounted for 24.4 percent of the total value of agricultural imports in the fourth quarter.

The top five sources of cereals for the Philippines were Vietnam, the United States, Australia, Thailand, and Pakistan.

Among the other major agricultural imports during the period were meat and edible meat offal; miscellaneous edible preparations; residues and waste from the food industries; and animal, vegetable, or microbial fats and oils and their cleavage products.

Meanwhile, the top five farm exports of the Philippines were animal, vegetable, or microbial fats and oils and their cleavage products; edible fruit and nuts; preparations of vegetables, fruit, nuts, or other parts of plants; tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes; and preparations of meat, of fish, of crustaceans, mollusks or other aquatic invertebrates or of insects.

The PSA noted that of the commodity groups, animal, vegetable, or microbial fats and oils and their cleavage products, which were valued at \$779.20 million, comprised the largest share of total agricultural exports in the fourth quarter.

"Among the Asean member countries, Malaysia was the top buyer of agricultural exports worth \$163.78 million or a share of 44.8 percent to the total value of agricultural exports to Asean member countries in the fourth quarter of 2024," the PSA said.

"Among the EU member countries, Netherlands was the country's top destination of agricultural commodities worth \$273.23 million or 61.4 percent of the total agricultural exports to EU member countries for this quarter of 2024."

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/02/19/phl-agri-trade-deficit-still-at-3-billion-in-october-to-december/>

## **BUSINESS MIRROR:**

# **Manila bans poultry from 4 US states due to bird flu**

Ada Pelonia  
February 19, 2025

The Department of Agriculture (DA) imposed a temporary ban on poultry products from four US states where outbreaks of bird flu have been confirmed.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. signed Memorandum Order (MO) 11, which authorized the ban on the entry of imported domestic and wild birds, including their products such as poultry meat, day-old chicks, eggs, and semen from the states of Illinois, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

The DA said it decided to issue the ban after US veterinary authorities confirmed several outbreaks of H5N1 High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (HPAI) in the said US states.

The Deputy Administrator and Chief Veterinary Officer of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) submitted the official report on February 3.

It added that the rapid spread of bird flu in the US in a short period since its first laboratory detection prompted a “wider coverage” of trade restrictions to prevent the disease’s entry and protect the local poultry industry.

The agency also noted that there has been a mutual HPAI-related arrangement in 2016 between the veterinary authorities of the USA and the Philippines wherein a state-wide ban should only be imposed if there are three or more counties affected by bird flu in one state.

Following this report, the DA chief ordered the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) to suspend the issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearance (SPSIC) to the affected commodity.

He also noted that only birds slaughtered or products processed 14 days before the first outbreak in the particular locality would be allowed to enter the country.

In this case, Illinois’s first outbreak was recorded on November 14, 2024; Minnesota’s on November 26, 2024; Ohio’s on December 13, 2024; and Wisconsin’s on December 10, 2024.

The agency warned that shipments that failed to comply would be stopped and confiscated by veterinary quarantine officers or inspectors at all major ports of entry.

The DA also recently imposed a temporary ban on poultry products that originated in South Dakota, Maryland, and Missouri due to bird flu outbreaks.

Meanwhile, the agency earlier said that the long-awaited bird flu vaccines are expected to hurdle field trials by the end of March this year. (See: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/01/29/phl-seen-completing-field-trials-for-bird-flu-vaccines-in-march/>)

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said the trial results for avian influenza (AI) vaccines would be presented to the BAI through the Veterinary Technical Advisory Committee (VTAC), which would then be endorsed to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

“By the end of this quarter, the two trials would be concluded and then the application for approval will be sent to the FDA,” de Mesa told reporters in a previous interview, noting that the vaccines undergoing field trials came from companies in Hungary and Germany.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/02/19/manila-bans-poultry-from-4-us-states-due-to-bird-flu/>

**BUSINESS MIRROR:**

# ‘Municipal ports need cold storage facilities for tamban export’

Jovee Marie N. de la Cruz

February 19, 2025

The chairman of the House Committee on Aquaculture and Fisheries Resources on Wednesday said there is an urgent need to equip municipal ports with cold storage and modern postharvest facilities to sustain the production of “tamban” and other fishery products for export.

Bicol Saro Rep. Brian Raymund Yamsuan, the panel chairman, said these improvements would also help raise the incomes of small-scale fishers and create more jobs across the sardine industry’s supply chain.

Yamsuan added that the government must be prepared for the export opportunities that will arise following the recognition of “tamban” as part of the Codex Standard for Canned Sardines and Sardine-Type Products by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), an international food standards body.

Post-harvest facilities, which are sorely lacking in the fisheries sector, are necessary to prepare for these export opportunities, along with helping small-scale fishers raise their incomes and create more jobs along the sardine industry’s supply chain, Yamsuan said.

“We acknowledge and thank the efforts of the Department of Agriculture, through the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources [(BFAR)] and the National Fisheries Research and Development Institute [NFRDI], in lobbying for the inclusion of ‘tamban’ in the Codex. This is certainly welcome news for our artisanal fisherfolk,” he said.

“The next step is to ensure that ‘tamban’ and other locally grown and caught fish remain competitive products in the export market by providing our fishers with adequate facilities and equipment to preserve the quality of their catch, which, in turn, would allow them to sell these at higher prices.”

Yamsuan made the remarks in response to reports that the CAC recently approved ‘tamban’ as a standard product for canned sardines, a move that Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said would open new export opportunities in the European market, attract investments, and generate more jobs in the fisheries sector.

He expects these investments to include modern drying, canning, and bottling facilities for “tamban,” as well as cold storage and ice plants in major sardine fishing communities.

“Adding value to their catch by providing them adequate post-harvest facilities is a key factor in helping our small fishers rise above poverty, along with providing support in accessing markets and training them on ensuring the sustainability of our marine resources.”

“Tamban” and other sardine products are usually found in the municipal waters of the Zamboanga Peninsula, Bicol, and Northern Mindanao. Other sardine-producing regions are Western Visayas, Central Luzon, Metro Manila, Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, and Mimaropa (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, Palawan).

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/02/19/municipal-ports-need-cold-storage-facilities-for-tamban-export/>

**BUSINESS MIRROR:**

# Alyansa bets pitch measures for taming food prices

Jovee Marie N. de la Cruz  
February 19, 2025

The senatorial slate of the Alyansa Para sa Bagong Pilipinas has proposed a string of measures aimed at controlling food prices and ensuring food security in the country.

During a press conference before the administration slate's campaign rally led by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., former Senate President Vicente "Tito" Sotto III outlined his proposal for the government to purchase 50 percent of all farmers' output.

According to him, this strategy would allow the government to buy produce directly from farmers at fair prices while reducing dependence on middlemen.

Former Senator Manny Pacquiao proposed a national framework called PDC—production, distribution, and consumption—to regulate basic commodities more efficiently. He emphasized the need for government participation in these three key areas.

Pacquiao, however, added that he is not against importing food products but insisted that the country should import because of trade agreements and not to address shortages.

Makati Mayor Abby Binay said legislation is not the issue, but rather the poor enforcement of existing laws. She called for stricter actions against rice smugglers and those manipulating food prices.

Former Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Benhur Abalos and ACT-CIS Rep. Erwin Tulfo both expressed concerns about the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), suggesting that the National Food Authority (NFA) should be given back the power to import and sell rice to stabilize prices.

Tulfo said that when the RTL was passed, it stripped the NFA of its ability to sell rice directly to consumers.

"We need to review the law to allow the NFA to do its job properly."

Deputy Speaker Camille Villar supported the idea of government subsidies and direct procurement from farmers, arguing that these measures would provide immediate relief to both farmers and consumers.

"For short-term solutions, the government should buy rice directly from farmers to lower prices," Villar said. "In the long run, we need to revisit laws like the RTL to see if they are still serving the public effectively."

She said there is a need to strengthen infrastructure and provide additional resources for farmers to produce rice at lower costs.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/02/19/alyansa-bets-pitch-measures-for-taming-food-prices/>

**PILIPINO STAR NGAYON:**

# Food Security tututukan ng Alyansa

Ludy Bermudo

February 20, 2025 | 12:00am

MANILA, Philippines — Itutulak ng Alyansa Para sa Bagong Pilipinas na makontrol ang pagtaas ng presyo ng pagkain at food security sa bansa.

Pangunahing tinalakay sa press conference noong Martes ang government intervention sa mas mahigpit na pagpapatupad ng mga umiiral na batas at ayuda sa mga magsasaka at mangingisda.

Panukala ni dating Senate President Tito Sotto III, dapat gobyerno ang bumili ng 50% na ani ng mga magsasaka ng hindi talo sa presyo, upang 'di na makapasok ang “middlemen” na lalong nagpapataas ng presyo sa merkado.

Sa panig naman ni dating Senador Manny Pacquiao, itutulak niya ang PDC o Production, Distribution and Consumption para sa mas epektibong ma-regulate ang mga basic commodity.

Nilinaw ni Pacquiao na hindi siya kontra sa pag-aangkat ng pagkain pero dapat gawin ito bilang bahagi ng mga trade agreement at hindi upang punan ang kakulangan ng pagkain sa Pilipinas.

Sina dating Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) Secretary Benhur Abalos at ACT-CIS Rep. Erwin Tulfo ay nababahala sa Rice Tariffication Law (RTL) at ipinanukala na ibalik sa National Food Authority (NFA) ang kapangyarihan sa pag-aangkat at pagbebenta ng bigas para makontrol ang presyo nito.

Suportado naman ni Deputy Speaker Camille Villar ang pagbibigay ng mga government subsidies at direktang pagbili sa mga ani ng mga magsasaka.

<https://www.philstar.com/pilipino-star-ngayon/bansa/2025/02/20/2422775/food-security-tututukan-ng-alyansa>