

CLIPPINGS FOR TODAY FEBRUARY 05, 2025

A. MANILA BULLETIN:

Opposite views on PhilHealth fund transfer presented to SC

Bohol halts whale shark watching in 3 towns

Food security emergency proves EO 62 failed to lower rice prices, says farmers' group

NFA to release buffer stocks at ₱35/kilo to stabilize rice market amid food security

DA cuts imported rice SRP to ₱55, eyes further reduction to below ₱50

B. THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Subsidizing rice in emergency to cost government P2.25 billion

Government asked to comment on 2025 budget blank items

P55 per kilogram cap on imported rice takes effect on Feb. 5

C. PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

DA to implement P55/kilo MSRP for imported rice starting Feb 5

DA goal: Cut rice prices to 2023 levels of P41-P45

DA to lift food security emergency on rice 'as soon as possible'

D. BUSINESS WORLD:

NFA sales of rice to LGUs may cost gov't as much as P2.25B

Price cap on imported rice to take effect nationwide

Philippines to launch free trade negotiations with Chile in April

PCCI backs delaying new import fees for alternative sweeteners

E. REMATE:

P35/kilong bigas ibebenta sa ilalim ng food security emergency

P55/kilo rice MSRP kasado sa Feb. 5

TINGNAN: Food security emergency sa bigas, epektibo na

F. ABANTE:

P35 per kilo ng bigas mabibili na

G. MANILA STANDARD:

Cheaper NFA rice available at P35/k

PH commits to advance agriculture sustainability

H. THE MANILA TIMES:

P55 ceiling set on imported rice

I. BUSINESS MIRROR:

DA adjusts rice MSRP to ₱55 a kilo, hints at further cuts

Editorial Cartoon

Soaring pork prices in Metro Manila leave consumers and hog raisers perplexed

NFA to release rice at ₱33 per kilo to LGUs, Kadiwa

J. PILIPINO STAR NGAYON:

Mataas na presyo ng bigas

MANILA BULLETIN:

Opposite views on PhilHealth fund transfer presented to SC

BY [REY G. PANALIGAN](#)

Feb 4, 2025 11:38 PM

The government insisted that the transfer of the P60 billion of the P89.9 billion excess funds of the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) to the national treasury was “within legal bounds.” However, three amici curiae or “friends of the court” who were invited by the Supreme Court (SC) to help in resolving the issue pointed out a possible violation of the Constitution in the fund transfer.

The opposing stands were presented on Tuesday afternoon, Feb. 4, during the oral arguments on three petitions that sought to declare unconstitutional the transfer of PhilHealth’s excess funds to the national treasury.

The stand of the “friends of the court,” in effect, supported the allegations of unconstitutionality pointed out in three petitions that were subjected to oral arguments.

Center of the legal debate on the three petitions is the constitutionality of Special Provision No. 1(d) of the Unprogrammed Appropriations in the 2024 General Appropriations Act (2024 GAA) and Department of Finance (DOF) Circular No. 003-2024 which laid down the guidelines for the implementation of the special provision.

The government, through Solicitor General Menardo I. Guevarra, said the inclusion by Congress of Special Provision No. 1(d) in the General Appropriations Act of 2024 and the DOF’s issuance of Circular No. 003-2024 “are the government’s common-sense approach -- again, within legal bounds -- to temporarily eke out the cash needed for the National Government’s numerous priority programs.”

Guevarra said that under Special Provision No. 1 (d), “the Unprogrammed Appropriations shall be sourced from ‘any remainder resulting from the review and reduction of the GOCC’s (government-owned and controlled corporations) reserve funds to reasonable levels taking into account the disbursements from prior years.’”

Thus, he said that “Congress, in the exercise of its sound judgment considering the exigencies of the times, found it necessary to: (1) direct GOCCs to review and reduce their reserve funds to reasonable levels on the basis of their previous annual disbursements; and (2) once the new level of reserve funds has been determined, to utilize the remainder for the financing of the unprogrammed appropriations.”

He also said that the DOF defined “fund balance” as the unrestricted funds of the GOCCs in the form of cash, investment in securities, and government subsidy, among others.

“In the case of PhilHealth, the fund balance was computed by adding the total amount of government subsidies for indirect contributors (e.g., senior citizens, indigent persons, persons with disabilities) for the years 2021 to 2023, and subtracting the total amount of benefit claims of indirect contributors during the same three-year period,” he added.

During this three-year period, Guevarra said the total government subsidies to PhilHealth amounted to P239.11 billion, while the total benefit claims of indirect contributors amounted to P149.23 billion.

“In particular, the government subsidies exceeded the total benefit claims of indirect contributors by P27.12 billion in 2021, by P23.97 billion in 2022, and by P38.79 billion in 2023, for a total of P89.9 billion,” he said.

Thus, he pointed out that “PhilHealth’s fund balance of P89.9 billion was thus an accumulation of three years’ worth of government subsidies which had remained unexpended or unutilized as of the end of 2023.” Guevarra also told the SC that “the P5.7 trillion budget for 2024 could only fund the Programmed Appropriations for specific priority projects that were intended to foster economic and social transformation

and mitigate the effects of inflation on basic commodities, as well as to advance the government's eight-point Socioeconomic Agenda.”

He cited: “In the 2024 GAA, other important programs – from government infrastructures to health-related and other social programs -- were identified but would have to stand by until new or additional financial resources became available. These were the Unprogrammed Appropriations.”

“It might have been less complicated if the National Government simply borrowed money. But then, we must consider that, as of the end of February 2024, the National Government debt was already recorded at P15.18 trillion,” he said.

He added: “Based on a population of 114 million in 2025, every Filipino -- young and old, rich and poor, abled and disabled – is indebted in the amount of P139,000.00 each. This is rather heavy.”

“It is in this cash-starved context that the Congress trained its sight on money that was there but was not being productively utilized. Respondent Congress, in its wisdom, identified the fund balance of government corporations as a source of additional funds to finance the Unprogrammed Appropriations,” he also said.

“This is the legislative wisdom behind Special Provision No. 1(d), as implemented by DOF Circular No. 003-2024. It was the executive and legislative departments' way of creating and implementing a fiscal policy to boost economic growth without bloating the government's indebtedness or burdening the people with new tax measures. It is a common-sense approach that does not violate any law, much less the Constitution, in any way,” Guevarra declared.

One of the “friends of the court,” public budget analyst Zy-za Nadine Suzara told the SC the enactment of the national budget resurrected the pork barrel scheme that had been declared unconstitutional in 2013.

“The new scheme of funding pork barrel circumvents the SC's 2013 ruling in *Belgica vs the Executive Secretary* which declared as unconstitutional any form of post enactment authority in the budget by legislators,” Suzara said.

The new scheme, she said is being undertaken by Congress by deliberately defunding strategic infrastructure and development programs and projects and transferring them to unprogrammed appropriations.

Citing the 2024 GAA, Suzara said Congress either fully or partially defunded multiple programs of various departments and agencies, such as the Metro Rail Transit Line 4, the Revised Armed Forces Modernization Fund, Universal Access to Tertiary Education, Cold Storage Expansion, Social Pension for Indigent Senior Citizens, and the Pension and Gratuity Fund.

She pointed out that from the proposed level of P282 billion in the National Expenditure Program (NEP), the unprogrammed appropriations in the 2024 GAA ballooned to P732 billion resulting in an excess of P450 billion.

To provide cash cover to the “bloated unprogrammed appropriations,” Congress introduced Special Provision No. 1(d) which provides that the fund balance of GOCCs, including PhilHealth, be the sources of financing, she said.

She also said that the 2024 GAA shows that an “avalanche of funding” went to departments where the hard and soft projects of legislators are traditionally lodged like those of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Health (DOH), and Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE).

“The unprogrammed fund is no longer a list of general line items that could provide standby appropriations as it has always been used. It has morphed into a long list of line items that were eliminated by Congress in exchange for funding their pork barrel in programmed appropriations. Congress has certainly found a way to circumvent the prohibition on post enactment intervention, mangling the budget as it undergoes legislation,” she stressed.

IBON Foundation Executive Director Sonny Africa, also a “friend of the court,” agreed with the position of the petitioners that the PhilHealth reserved funds should be used to increase the program benefits and to decrease the amount of members' contributions as mandated under Section 11 of the Universal Health Care Act (UHCA).

Africa also shared Suzara's views on the higher budget allocation for infrastructure projects compared to the health and education sectors.

“Infrastructure spending is over three and a half times higher than spending on health and it is actually even larger than education, which arguably breaches the constitutional provision that health and education should be given the highest share of the budget,” he said.

He also said that unprogrammed appropriations are part of the budget mentioned in the Constitution whose appropriation may not be increased by Congress.

“There is much reason to conclude that the budget process is flawed and needs fixing. So much needs to be done to institutionalize a process... towards a budget that addresses the most urgent needs of the economy and the people,” he added.

Dr. Beverly Ho, another “friend of the court,” told the SC that instead of transferring the funds to the national treasury, PhilHealth should “maximize” its legal instruments and financial resources, “not only to provide insurance coverage to every Filipino, but to expand benefits to a level necessary to finance and provide healthcare that Filipinos deserve.”

“The opportunity to have our healthcare system that Filipinos can be proud of is actually here. The opportunity is before our eyes and we just need to make sure that the resources are actually translated to actual benefits...,” she said.

The SC will resume the oral arguments on Feb. 25.

The petitions against the transfer PhilHealth funds were filed by the groups of Sen. Aquilino Pimentel III and Bayan Muna Chairperson Neri Colmenares, and ISAMBAYAN Coalition together with members of the University of the Philippines Law Class 1975, Senior for Seniors Association, Inc., Kidney Foundation of the Philippines, and other private individuals.

Named respondents in the petitions were Department of Finance (DOF) Secretary Ralph G. Recto, the House of Representatives represented by Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez, the Senate represented by Senate President Francis Chiz Escudero; Executive Secretary Lucas P. Bersamin; and PhilHealth.

The three petitions pleaded for the issuance of a temporary restraining order (TRO).

Last Oct. 29, the SC issued a TRO that stopped the transfer of the funds.

However, at the time the TRO was issued, a total of P60 billion in PhilHealth’s excess funds had been transferred to the national treasury – P20 billion last May 10, P10 billion last August 21, and P30 billion last Oct. 16.

<https://mb.com.ph/2025/2/4/opposite-views-on-phil-health-fund-transfer-presented-to-sc>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Bohol halts whale shark watching in 3 towns

BY [CALVIN CORDOVA](#)

Feb 4, 2025 08:28 PM

CEBU CITY – The provincial government of Bohol has taken a bold step to protect the province’s tourism by stopping whale shark interaction activities in three towns.



BOHOL Gov. Aris Aumentado (seated) signs an executive order halting whale shark interaction in three towns in the province. (Contributed photo)

Gov. Erico Aristotle Aumentado on Monday, Feb. 3, signed Executive Order (EO) No. 10 to immediately stop whale shark watching in Lila, Alburquerque, and Dauis.

The order was issued based on the findings of an inter-agency team created by Aumentado.

The inter-agency team discovered that whale shark interactions involved feeding them with krill to lure the marine animals to stay.

Such practice violated Provincial Ordinance No. 2020-008 and Joint Memorandum Circular No. 1, Series of 2020, issued by the Department of Tourism (DOT), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Department of Agriculture (DA), and Department of the Interior Local Government (DILG).

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The team also found krill on the water's surface, causing very foul odor. Operators lacked permits from essential national agencies, including the DENR and the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR). Aumentado emphasized the need to preserve Bohol’s natural resources and maintain fairness across all municipalities. “All I did was to protect our tourism and enforce the law,” Aumentado said.

He highlighted that whale shark feeding disrupts their natural behavior, threatens ecological balance, and could harm the local tourism industry.

The unpleasant odor from this activity raised concerns about their effects on Panglao and Balicasag Islands.

Aumentado warned that he will not allow any other town in Bohol to engage in whale shark tourism activities.

The governor called on the Philippine National Police Maritime Group, Philippine Coast Guard, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, DENR, and the Coastal Law Enforcement Council to enforce the order.

Aumentado said that Bohol is not against whale shark interaction tourism but insists that it must be sustainable and in line with the ordinance, national laws, and regulations. “We have to be proactive here,” he said.

He added that the provincial government together with the Department of Labor and Employment will give financial assistance to workers displaced by the order.

Aumentado said the EO is effective immediately but operators were given until Friday, Feb. 6, to comply with the order.

The ban on whale shark interactions will remain in effect until all regulatory requirements are met and verified by the concerned national agencies and after consultations with stakeholders and conservation groups.

<https://mb.com.ph/2025/2/4/bohol-halts-whale-shark-watching-in-3-towns>

MANILA BULLETIN:

Food security emergency proves EO 62 failed to lower rice prices, says farmers' group

BY [JEL SANTOS](#)

Feb 4, 2025 03:45 PM



(MB FILE PHOTO)

The government's declaration of a food security emergency is an admission that Executive Order (EO) 62 has failed to lower rice prices, an agricultural group said.

In a statement on Tuesday, Feb. 4, the Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) welcomed efforts to stabilize rice prices but stressed that the emergency declaration underscores the failure of tariff cuts and unlimited imports to benefit consumers, urging its immediate repeal.

“The emergency declaration is a direct admission from the government that tariff reduction and unlimited imports have not lowered rice prices,” SINAG Executive Director Jayson Cainglet said. He called on authorities to crack down on those profiting from the persistently high cost of rice and to prosecute them under the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act (RA 12022).

“Hindi nakinabang ang consumers sa natipid na ₱16 billion ng importer-traders sa tariff reduction (Consumers did not benefit from the P16 billion saved by importer-traders through tariff reduction),” Cainglet added, emphasizing that the supposed savings never reached ordinary Filipinos.

Repealing EO 62

SINAG said that revoking EO 62 would generate additional government revenue that could be redirected to directly support rice farmers.

“Allocating ₱16 billion to 1.5 million hectares of rice lands could reduce the cost of producing palay by ₱2.90 per kilo, which would translate to a ₱5 per kilo reduction in local rice prices,” Cainglet explained.

He also pointed out that global rice prices have dropped significantly—from \$568 per metric ton on July 10, 2024, to \$422 on January 18, 2025—a \$146 per metric ton decrease. This price drop

equates to an ₱8.54 per kilo reduction, far exceeding the ₱6-7 per kilo decrease that EO 62 aimed to achieve.

“Kung hindi itinulak ang EO 62, matagal na sanang napababa ang presyo ng bigas through increased support for local production (Had EO 62 not been implemented, rice prices could have been lowered much earlier through increased support for local production),” he stated.

To ensure fair farmgate prices and stable consumer costs, SINAG urged the government to increase the Department of Agriculture’s (DA) budget for purchasing palay at P22-23 per kilo—helping farmers earn sustainably while keeping rice prices affordable.

On Feb. 3, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. declared a food security emergency in the Philippines to address persistently high rice prices, despite declining global costs and reduced tariffs.

Signed by President Marcos in December 2024, EO 62 slashed tariffs on rice imports in an attempt to bring down retail prices.

However, the policy faced strong opposition from farmers’ groups and agricultural stakeholders, who argued that it primarily benefited importers and traders while failing to control rising rice costs.

<https://mb.com.ph/2025/2/4/food-security-emergency-proves-eo-62-failed-to-lower-rice-prices-says-farmers-group>

MANILA BULLETIN:

NFA to release buffer stocks at ₱35/kilo to stabilize rice market amid food security emergency

BY [DEXTER BARRO II](#)

Feb 4, 2025 03:07 PM

The National Food Authority (NFA) announced on Tuesday, Feb. 4, that the rice buffer stocks it will disburse as part of the declaration of a food security emergency on rice could be purchased by consumers at ₱35 per kilo as early as this week.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) declared the emergency on Tuesday, Feb. 4, following recommendations from the National Price Coordinating Council (NPCC) that raised the alarm on the “extraordinary” increase in local rice prices.

Under this, the NFA is authorized to release its buffer stocks to help stabilize prices.

According to NFA Department Manager Roy Untiveros, the agency is now awaiting the DA’s order in order to start the rollout of its buffer stocks.

The rice shall be directed to a wide range of prospective partners, including the Kadiwa ng Pangulo (KNP) program, through its number of stalls and stores; local government units (LGUs); and other government agencies.

Under Republic Act (RA) No. 12078, which amended the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), the NFA is restricted from selling rice directly to the public.

To facilitate such limitations, the DA will oversee the selling of rice, through the state-owned corporation Food Terminal Inc. (FTI).

Untiveros said the NFA’s stocks are in “consumable condition,” noting that these are 25 percent broken well-milled rice, ranging between zero to three months old.

He noted that this is available at ₱33 per kilo for the NFA’s partners, and is suggested to be sold to consumers at ₱35.

“So, hopefully ito ay magkaroon ng epekto sa pagbaba ng presyo ng bigas sa merkado,” the official said. (So, hopefully this will have an impact on the price of rice in the market.)

Untiveros said based on a pricing framework submitted to the NFA Council, the rice was initially set at ₱38.

However, it was decided to cut the price in order to accelerate the disbursement of stocks, which will create decongest warehouses to accommodate the upcoming February harvest.

Based on the NFA’s average buying price last year, releasing its rice would incur an estimated loss of ₱12 to ₱15.

Given restrictions from selling, the DA would be receiving the earnings from its stocks. In turn, the DA would replenish the NFA’s stocks.

With this, Untiveros said they would purchase rice from Filipino farmers, with a range of ₱23 to ₱30 for clean and dry palay (unmilled rice) and ₱17 to ₱23 for wet palay stocks.

Waiting game

Following Monday’s declaration, the NFA is now actively finding potential partners to receive its rice buffer stocks.

The agency currently holds a buffer stock of approximately 300,000 metric tons (MT) of rice.

About 150,000 MT of this is expected to be released over the next six months under a “staggered basis”.

“Kami po ay patuloy na nakikipag-ugnayan upang malaman sino ang interested na mag-participate. Kung mayro’n na po, for pick-up po ang ating stock sa mga bodega ng NFA na dadaan sa FTI papuntang mga LGUs bago ma-distribute sa publiko,” said Untiveros.

(We are in constant communication to find out who is interested in participating. If there is already, our stock is for pick-up at NFA warehouses that will go through FTI to LGUs before being distributed to the public.)

The NFA has so far sent 53 letters to LGUs from the National Capital Region (NCR) and Cavite to encourage their participation.

As of writing, the agency is still waiting for a response.

According to the DA, the priority for the NFA's stocks is the Greater Metro Manila area. However, other locations like Metro Cebu and Iloilo are still expected to receive such stocks.

DA Assistant Secretary Genevieve Guevarra said consumers can expect the ₱35 rice "within the week or next week".

She said the rice will be first made available at Kadiwa centers and the DA's partner markets across the capital region.

End in sight

The food security emergency measure is expected to be reviewed monthly by the NPCC to identify if its objectives are being met.

"If we are already seeing the objectives of the declaration, the secretary may lift. Since this is an emergency, we want to resolve it as soon as possible," said DA Spokesman Arnel De Mesa.

Based on data by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), rice inflation surged to 17.9 percent in July 2023, far exceeding the government's target of four percent for food inflation.

De Mesa acknowledged that while rice inflation dipped as low as 5.1 percent in November, prices for the staple food remain stubbornly high.

Ideally, he said price levels should return "close" to that of pre-July 2023, before the DA would terminate the food security emergency.

During that time, well-milled rice is priced at P45, while regular-milled is P41.

<https://mb.com.ph/2025/2/4/under-food-security-emergency-rice-to-be-sold-at-p35-per-kilo>

MANILA BULLETIN:

DA cuts imported rice SRP to ₱55, eyes further reduction to below ₱50

BY [DEXTER BARRO II](#)

Feb 4, 2025 11:43 AM

The Department of Agriculture (DA) will reduce the maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) of imported rice from ₱58 to ₱55, effective on Wednesday, Feb. 5.

The price reduction is part of the DA's ongoing efforts to stabilize rice prices and alleviate inflationary pressures on basic commodities.

The initial MSRP for imported rice was implemented on Jan. 20, to ensure that rice remains affordable for consumers while also supporting the profitability of the rice industry.

Imposing a price cap on the commodity was seen as a vital measure to address the persistently high rice prices despite the government's reduction in tariffs last year and the lower global market costs.

In a statement on Tuesday, Feb. 4, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel said he is seeking a further reduction of the MSRP in the coming weeks.

He said the price cap could go even below ₱50 per kilo by early March.

"After this reduction, we plan to lower it further to ₱52 a kilo by mid-February and then at ₱49 per kilo two weeks after. This should reflect the lower global prices of rice and the reduced tariff," said Laurel.

The newly reduced MSRP on imported rice will only be in effect in Metro Manila.

However, beginning Feb. 15, the MSRP will now be imposed nationwide, according to DA Assistant Secretary and Spokesperson Arnel de Mesa.

In addition to the price cut, the DA has vowed to continue its close monitoring of the rice supply and market conditions.

"The agency remains committed to ensuring the availability of rice at stable prices while supporting long-term food security and the growth of the local rice industry," it said.

During a market visit last month, officials of the DA and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) inspected stalls selling rice to make certain of their strict compliance with the MSRP.

While there is no inflicted penalty yet on erring violators, the MSRP is expected to be strictly enforced following the release of official guidelines.

Laurel previously warned that if the MSRP fails to bring down rice prices to "reasonable levels", the DA will recommend price controls and ceilings.

Violations of such measures may result in fines of up to P1 million for offenders.

<https://mb.com.ph/2025/2/4/da-cuts-imported-rice-price-cap-to-p55>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Subsidizing rice in emergency to cost government P2.25 billion

Jasper Emmanuel Arcalas - The Philippine Star

February 5, 2025 | 12:00am



A rice store owner in Lingayen, Pangasinan conducts his daily business operations on February 4, 2025

STAR / Cesar Ramirez

MANILA, Philippines — Losses of up to P2.25 billion will be absorbed by the government due to the sale of subsidized rice in the market during the state of food security emergency, but officials maintained the measure is necessary to influence prevailing retail prices that have remained exorbitant.

Aging rice stocks of the National Food Authority (NFA) would be sold to local government units (LGUs), Kadiwa centers and other state entities at P33 per kilo, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said.

Partner LGUs are expected to sell rice to constituents at a suggested retail price of P35 per kilo.

The amount would be enough to cover logistics costs, Tiu Laurel said.

The NFA is estimated to lose between P1.8 billion and P2.25 billion in six months for selling 150,000 metric tons of rice, as the approved selling price is P12 to P15 per kilo lower than its break-even cost.

Possible sanctions against LGUs that would sell rice above P35 per kilo will be outlined in guidelines that the government is still drafting.

Computation of the selling price accounted for costs incurred in palay procurement, milling and storing of grains, as well as a so-called social discount, according to Roy Untiveros, acting manager of the NFA's operations department.

Max SRP on imported rice lowered to P55/K

The DA has reduced the maximum suggested retail price (SRP) for imported premium rice today, from P58 to P55 per kilo.

The reduced max SRP reflects easing rice prices in the world market, the DA said.

Metro Manila markets are implementing the max SRP on five-percent broken imported rice at present. It will be enforced nationwide on Feb. 15, the agency noted.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. is expecting the max SRP to decline in the coming weeks, possibly to below P50 per kilo by early March.

“After this reduction, we plan to lower it further to P52 a kilo by mid-February and then to P49 per kilo two weeks after. This should reflect the lower global prices of rice and the reduced tariff,” Tiu Laurel said yesterday.

Rice prices have continued to rise despite a 20-percent tariff cut.

The DA devised the max SRP to stabilize rice prices and alleviate inflationary pressure on the country’s staple.

Imposing a max SRP would have a domino effect on the prices of other rice varieties sold in the market, agriculture officials said earlier.

Five-percent broken rice is considered premium based on the NFA’s classification. It has been the widely imported variety by importers and traders since the rice industry was deregulated in 2019.

Imported premium rice is currently sold between P51 and P58 per kilo in Metro Manila markets with an average price of P54.3 per kilo, based on the DA price monitoring report.

Imported well-milled rice, meanwhile, ranges from P40 to P52 per kilo, while its regular-milled counterpart costs P38 to P48 per kilo, the report showed.

‘Publicity stunt’

Declaring a food security emergency on Monday is a publicity stunt that failed to address the worsening rice crisis, according to Gabriela Rep. Arlene Brosas.

The House assistant minority leader also criticized the DA for releasing 300,000 metric tons of buffer rice through Kadiwa stores, saying it is an inadequate band-aid solution that will last only three days.

“This might be just another election gimmick to use cheap rice distribution for their candidates’ campaigns,” Brosas said, recalling President Marcos’ 2022 campaign promise of P20 per kilo of rice.

The rice liberalization law, she said, must be junked.

“What we need is genuine land reform, adequate subsidies for farmers and fair prices for their produce to ensure food security,” Brosas said. — **Christine Boton, Jose Rodel Clapano**

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/02/05/2419262/subsidizing-rice-emergency-cost-government-p225-billion>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Government asked to comment on 2025 budget blank items

[Daphne Galvez](#) - The Philippine Star

February 5, 2025 | 12:00am



The SC gave the respondents, the House of Representatives, Senate and Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin, 10 days to comment on the petition for certiorari and prohibition filed by former executive secretary Vic Rodriguez and Davao City 3rd District Rep. Isidro Ungab, among others.

STAR / File

MANILA, Philippines — The Supreme Court (SC) has asked Congress and Malacañang to comment on the petition claiming unconstitutional irregularities in the enactment of the 2025 national budget, including the supposed blank items in the bicameral conference committee report of the spending plan.

The SC gave the respondents, the House of Representatives, Senate and Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin, 10 days to comment on the petition for certiorari and prohibition filed by former executive secretary Vic Rodriguez and Davao City 3rd District Rep. Isidro Ungab, among others.

According to the petitioners, the legislative and executive branches violated Article VI, Section 27 of the Constitution, which mandates that no public funds can be allocated without an appropriation made by law, when the bicameral panel submitted a report with blank items.

The bicameral report is the reconciled version of the House and Senate’s respective budget bills, which becomes the general appropriations bill that turns into the General Appropriations Act (GAA) once signed by President Marcos.

The petitioners claimed members of the bicameral conference committee left blanks in its report pertaining to budget allocations for the National Irrigation Administration, Department of Agriculture and the Philippine Coconut Authority.

These blanks, they said, are “very dubious and dangerous as the budgets for the said offices and programs remain to be undetermined.”

The petitioners said that while the bicam panel has the power to reconcile conflicting provisions in the Senate and the House versions of the 2025 general appropriations bill, “it is prohibited from amending provisions without clearly stating the version to which it should be amended to. Such irregularity is a blatant violation of the Constitution which should not be condoned.”

The identified items, however, all had appropriated amounts under the 2025 GAA signed by Marcos, a copy of which is available on the Department of Budget and Management website.

The petitioners also claimed the 2025 budget law violated Article XIV, Section 5(5) of the 1987 Constitution for not giving the education sector the highest budget allocation, as the GAA only “gave the

impression” that the education sector got the lion’s share of the budget, but the figures were “merely bloated” by the inclusion of non-education-related agencies.

They cited how the Philippine Military Academy, the Philippine National Police Academy and the National Defense College of the Philippines, which were under the Department of National Defense and were historically categorized under the defense sector, “were lumped with appropriations for the education sector.”

The petitioners also noted that the Local Government Academy, the Philippine Public Safety College, the Philippine Science High School System and the Science Education Institute, which were previously classified in other non-education sectors, were now included in the education budget.

They also noted budget re-alignments, which supposedly increased the proposed budget appropriations for Congress and other line agencies, in violation of Article VI, Section 25(1) of the Constitution, as it exceeded the amounts recommended by the President in the National Expenditure Program.

From the proposed budget of P16.35 billion for the House of Representatives, they said the budget ballooned to P33.67 billion when the bill was passed into law. For the Senate, there was a “more modest” increase from P12.83 billion to P13.93 billion.

The petitioners also claimed “not a single centavo” was appropriated for the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth), justified by the estimated P600-billion reserve funds of the state insurer.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/02/05/2419288/government-asked-comment-2025-budget-blank-items>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

P55 per kilogram cap on imported rice takes effect on Feb. 5

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

February 4, 2025 | 5:11pm



Workers unload sacks of rice from a delivery truck along Dagupan Street in Tondo, Manila on Jan. 22, 2024.

The Philippine STAR / Ernie Penaredondo

MANILA, Philippines — The price of imported rice sold in Metro Manila markets will be capped at P55 per kilogram starting Wednesday, February 5.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) reminded retailers on Tuesday, February 4, that the maximum suggested retail price for imported rice will be lowered from P58 to P55 per kilogram as part of their efforts to bring down prices.

Current prices of rice, whether imported or local, have reached beyond P60 per kilogram in Metro Manila. DA previously explained that the gradual decline in the price cap is meant to avoid destabilizing the industry. It aims to further lower it to P52 per kilogram by February 15 and P49 per kilogram by March. House lawmakers investigating the sudden spike in agricultural commodity prices, potential collusion among traders and retailers, and smuggling have criticized the move, arguing that the price cap remains too high.

However, the DA said it is also meant to give enough time for importers to transition to the lowered prices. Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel stated that the scheduled price cap was set after extensive consultations with stakeholders in the rice industry.

Aside from the price cap, which is being piloted in Metro Manila, the DA declared a food security emergency for rice on Monday, February 3.

This follows President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s [order](#) to lower tariffs on imported rice from 35% to 15%, which was unable to address the high prices. While the move aimed to boost market supply to meet demand, rice prices remained elevated.

The food security emergency, through the amended Agricultural Tariffication Law, allows the National Food Authority (NFA) to release rice buffer stocks to the market at really low prices.

On Tuesday, the NFA announced it would sell rice to local government units and government-owned and controlled corporations (GOCCs) at P33 per kilogram, and to consumers at P35 per kilogram.

The buffer stocks, stored in NFA warehouses, will be replenished through the purchase of rice from local farmers. It will release 300,000 metric tons of rice over a span of 10 months.

However, farmer groups such as the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) and the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) have criticized the declaration of a food security emergency.

The groups argued that the policies failed to address the rice crisis, as they prioritized imported rice over locally produced rice.

They also reported that farmgate prices for palay remain low, and have even declined in some regions, forcing farmers to break even or incur losses when retailers purchase from them.

Marcos' campaign promise during the 2022 presidential election was to bring prices to P20 per kilogram. He has been in office for nearly three years already.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2025/02/04/2419168/p55-kilogram-cap-imported-rice-takes-effect-feb-5>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

DA to implement P55/kilo MSRP for imported rice starting Feb 5

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

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 10:43 AM February 04, 2025



(L-R) Trade Assistant Secretary Agaton Teodoro Uvero, Agriculture Assistant Secretary Genevieve Velicaria-Guevarra, Agriculture Assistant Secretary and Department of Agriculture (DA) spokesperson Arnel de Mesa, and National Food Authority Acting Department Manager Roy Untiveros during a press conference on food security emergency on rice on February 5, 2025. (Photo by Jordeene B. Lagare)

MANILA, Philippines — The Department of Agriculture (DA) announced on Tuesday it will further slash the maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) for 5 percent broken imported rice to P55 per kilogram starting tomorrow, Feb. 5.

“And then, by Feb. 15, the MSRP will now be nationwide,” Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said in a press briefing on Tuesday.

De Mesa, also the DA’s spokesperson, said the DA plans to slash the MSRP further in the coming weeks after the periodic review.

The DA imposed the MSRP for imported rice in public and private markets on Jan. 20, initially within the National Capital Region, to tame rising rice prices despite tariff cuts and the decline in global prices.

<https://business.inquirer.net/504809/da-to-implement-p55-kilo-msrp-for-imported-rice-starting-feb-5>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

DA goal: Cut rice prices to 2023 levels of P41-P45

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

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 05:40 AM February 05, 2025



EXPENSIVE STAPLE A rice store at Marikina Public Market restocks its inventory on Tuesday, a day after the Department of Agriculture declares a food security emergency to address the “extraordinary” rise in rice retail prices. —Grig C. Montegrando

MANILA, Philippines — Following its declaration of a food security emergency, the Department of Agriculture (DA) aims to further lower rice retail prices to July 2023 levels—P41 per kilogram for regular milled rice and P45 per kg for well-milled rice.

At the same time, the DA said the maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) for 5 percent broken imported rice in Metro Manila would also be slashed to P55 per kg starting Wednesday.

“And then by Feb. 15, the MSRP will now be nationwide,” Agriculture Assistant Secretary and DA spokesperson Arnel de Mesa told reporters in a briefing on Tuesday, adding that the DA plans to further reduce the MSRP in the coming weeks after a periodic review.

The DA imposed on Jan. 20 the MSRP for imported rice in public and private markets in the National Capital Region (NCR) to curb rising rice prices despite tariff cuts and the decline in global prices.

As of Feb. 1, the DA’s monitoring showed that public markets in NCR sold local regular milled rice from P37 to P46/kilo while local well-milled rice was priced from P40 and P55/kilo.

Addressing the “extraordinary” rise in retail prices of rice, subject to periodic reviews, was the main aim of the food security emergency declared on Monday by Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. through Department Circular No. 3.

“When we see that we are already meeting the objectives of this declaration, the agriculture secretary may lift it. Since this is an emergency, we want to resolve it as soon as possible,” De Mesa said.

No supply shortage

He clarified that the declaration was prompted by elevated retail rice prices, not a supply shortage.

Under the amended Rice Tariffication Law signed in December, the agriculture secretary is authorized to declare a food security emergency on rice due to supply shortages or extraordinary increases in prices, as recommended by the National Price Coordinating Council (NPCC), which includes the DA.

In its Jan. 14 resolution making the recommendation, the NPCC pointed to the “extraordinary increase in the price of rice when rice inflation has exceeded the upper bound target for food inflation and reached double.”

Constantly high

“Such a condition is considered to remain in place while rice prices have not returned close to the levels prior to the breach of the food inflation target,” it said.

Trade Assistant Secretary Agaton Teodoro Uvero explained that the basis of the NPCC recommendation was the situation in July 2023 when “prices increased and never ... almost never declined.”

The NPCC cited data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) showing that rice prices “remain elevated,” with regular milled rice and well-milled rice priced at P48.51 per kg and P54.38 per kg, respectively.

“These price levels are 19 percent and 20 percent higher compared to the period before the price spikes in July 2023,” it added.

The emergency declaration also allows the National Food Authority (NFA) to sell its rice stocks to local governments, government-owned and -controlled corporations and other government agencies at P33 a kilo.

The rice stocks would be released to designated government offices through the Food Terminal Inc. and sold to consumers at P35 per kg.

Acting NFA Department Manager Roy Untiveros said they were hopeful the move would drive down rice prices although the agency would end up losing around P12 to P15 per kilo for selling the staple at discounted prices.

Assuming that 150,000 metric tons of its rice stockpile would be sold to the public, the NFA said it expects to lose from P1.8 billion to P2.25 billion while the emergency declaration was in effect.

Sought for comment, the Federation of Free Farmers believes traders would not match the selling price for NFA rice as they “cannot afford to lose money.”

“P41 to P45 may be the lowest possible price for regular milled and well-milled rice, but these will be for relatively poor quality or inferior grades of rice,” FFF national manager Raul Montemayor said in a Viber message.

<https://business.inquirer.net/504977/da-goal-cut-rice-prices-to-2023-levels-of-p41-p45>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

DA to lift food security emergency on rice ‘as soon as possible’

By: [Jordeene B. Lagare @jordeenelagare](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)
Philippine Daily Inquirer / 11:26 AM February 04, 2025



MANILA, Philippines — The Department of Agriculture (DA) intends to lift the food security emergency on rice “as soon as possible,” according to its official.

“So, pag nakita natin na we are already meeting the objectives, itong declaration, the secretary may lift it already. So since this is an emergency, we want to resolve it as soon as possible,” Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said in a press briefing on Tuesday.

(When we see that we are already meeting the objectives of this declaration, the agriculture secretary may lift it already. Since this is an emergency, we want to resolve it as soon as possible.)

“Such [a] condition is considered to remain in place while rice prices have not returned close to the level prior... not exactly,” said de Mesa, also the DA’s spokesperson.

According to de Mesa, regular milled rice was available in the markets for P41 per kilogram (kg), while well-milled rice was priced at P45 per kg in July 2023.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. declared a food security emergency on Monday to address the “extraordinary” rise in retail prices of rice. It is subject to a monthly or bi-monthly review.

The food security emergency declaration, as stated in Department Circular No. 3 issued by the agency, will remain in effect “until lifted or withdrawn” by the agriculture secretary.

De Mesa clarified that the emergency declaration was prompted by the “extraordinary” rise in rice retail prices, rather than a supply shortage.

With the declaration in place, the National Food Authority’s (NFA) rice stocks will be sold to local government units, government-owned and controlled corporations (GOCCs), and other government agencies for P33 per kg and eventually to consumers for P35 per kg.

NFA Acting Department Manager Roy Untiveros said the grains agency is waiting for the response of LGUs within the National Capital Region and Cavite to buy and sell NFA rice.

<https://business.inquirer.net/504818/da-to-lift-food-security-emergency-on-rice-as-soon-as-possible>

BUSINESS WORLD:

NFA sales of rice to LGUs may cost gov't as much as P2.25B

February 4, 2025 | 8:26 pm



PHILIPPINE STAR/MICHAEL VARCAS

By **Adrian H. Halili**, *Reporter*

THE SALE of rice reserves to local government units (LGUs) during the food security emergency could generate losses of P2.25 billion for the government, the National Food Authority (NFA) said.

In a briefing on Tuesday, NFA acting Department Manager for Operations Roy Q. Untiveros said the expected losses on the price-controlled sales to LGUs could amount to P12 to P15 per kilogram.

The NFA is expected to release 150,000 metric tons or 150 million kilos over the next six months, or about 30,000 MT per month.

The emergency sales of rice call for the tapping of NFA reserves by Food Terminal, Inc. to LGUs, government-owned and controlled corporations (GOCCs), and other agencies.

The NFA Council had approved a resolution allowing the NFA to sell rice stocks to LGUs and other agencies during the food security emergency.

“The NFA will release (rice) to LGUs, GOCCs and others (agencies) who are interested in selling it at P33 per kilogram, and it is suggested to be sold to the public at P35 per kilo,” Mr. Untiveros added.

The current selling price is lower compared to the earlier proposed price of P36 per kilo, and the suggested retail price is currently capped at P38 per kilo.

On Monday, the Department of Agriculture (DA) declared a food security emergency for rice, giving it authority to release NFA reserves onto the market instead of holding the rice as a “buffer stock.” The release of NFA stock is designed to tame stubbornly high rice prices, even though global rice prices have been easing and import prices should also have benefited from reduced tariffs.

The National Price Coordinating Council had urged the DA to declare a food security emergency for rice, citing “extraordinary” price increases.

Republic Act No. 12708 or the Agricultural Tariffication Act authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to declare a food security emergency in the event of shortages or extraordinary price increases.

The NFA has said that its inventory is currently over 300,000 MT and needs to free up space for the upcoming harvest.

The NFA has set a buying price for palay, or unmilled rice, of P21- P23 per kilo for clean and dry grain, depending on location.

Mr. Untiveros added that the NFA has invited LGUs and government entities within the National Capital Region, including Cavite, to purchase NFA rice.

“We are waiting for the reply of the LGUs so we can ascertain those who are interested to participate,” he said.

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/02/04/651150/nfa-sales-of-rice-to-lgus-may-cost-govt-as-much-as-p2-25b/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Price cap on imported rice to take effect nationwide

February 4, 2025 | 8:26 pm



REUTERS

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said on Tuesday that the maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) scheme on imported rice will take effect nationwide starting Feb. 15.

Assistant Secretary and Spokesperson Arnel V. de Mesa said at a briefing that the DA will also lower the MSRP on imported rice to P55 per kilo for rice with broken-grain content of 5%.

Mr. De Mesa said the DA plans to further slash the MSRP on imported grain in the coming weeks following a review.

In a separate statement, Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. said that the MSRP on rice could be lowered to below P50 per kilo by early March.

“After this reduction, we plan to lower it further to P52 a kilo by mid-February and then at P49 per kilo two weeks after. This should reflect the lower global prices of rice and the reduced tariff,” Mr. Laurel added.

The MSRP on imported rice first took effect on Jan. 20 around Metro Manila. It was imposed after imported rice prices remained stubbornly elevated despite the reduction of the import duty for the grain, as well as the easing of global prices.

Executive Order No. 62 slashed tariffs on rice imports to 15% from 35% previously until 2028, it was issued by President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. last year and took effect in July.

According to DA price monitors surveying Metro Manila markets, as of Feb. 1, a kilo of imported special rice sold for between P52 and P61 per kilo, compared with the P57 and P65 range a year earlier.

The price of imported premium rice stood at P51-P58 per kilo as of Feb. 1, easing from P54-P62 a year earlier.

On the other hand, imported well-milled rice is currently selling for between P40 and P52 per kilo, with imported regular-milled rice fetching P38-P48.

“The decision (to take the MSRP national) follows extensive consultations with rice industry stakeholders, including importers and retailers, to ensure that the price decrease will benefit consumers without negatively affecting the supply of rice,” the DA said. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/02/04/651149/price-cap-on-imported-rice-to-take-effect-nationwide/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Philippines to launch free trade negotiations with Chile in April

February 4, 2025 | 8:23 pm



REUTERS

THE PHILIPPINES and Chile are expected to start the first round of negotiations for a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) in April, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said.

“The first round will be (in Chile),” Trade Undersecretary Allan B. Gepty told reporters last week.

“We are finalizing the terms of reference,” he added.

Talks for a Philippines-Chile Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement were conducted in December.

On Dec. 6, Trade Secretary Ma. Cristina A. Roque and Chilean Minister of Foreign Affairs Alberto van Klaveren issued a joint statement marking the official launch of negotiations.

According to the joint statement, the two sides noted the benefits of a CEPA in increasing bilateral trade resulting from tariff liberalization, while providing economic and social benefits to both countries.

“The parties will endeavor to conclude the CEPA negotiations within a year from the date of launch,” according to the joint statement.

The CEPA aims to cover trade in goods and services as well as chapters on investment.

The DTI has expressed hope for expanded market access for Philippine agricultural and processed products as well as semiconductors under the CEPA, while opening up access to Chilean wine.

Meanwhile, Mr. Gepty said that the Philippines is working on its planned accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

“We are working on the preparation for both the application process and consultation. We will also schedule meetings with CPTPP partners,” he added.

The CPTPP is an FTA involving 11 countries, — Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam.

Last year, the UK signed the protocol of accession to join the CPTPP.

The DTI has said that the Philippines' accession to the CPTPP will result in expanded market access in Chile, Mexico, Peru, Canada, and the UK.

“With the entry now of the UK, that gives us more reason to consider now joining the CPTPP because the UK, in a way, is an important partner for the Philippines. If I'm not mistaken, the UK would be the biggest economy in terms of gross domestic product and trade in the CPTPP next to Japan,” Mr. Gepty said.

Secretary Roque said the Philippines and the UK are committed to establishing the UK-Philippines Joint Economic and Trade Committee in the first half of the year.

“This dedicated platform will facilitate ongoing dialogue and cooperation on trade, investment, and economic issues between the two states,” the DTI said. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/02/04/651147/philippines-to-launch-free-trade-negotiations-with-chile-in-april/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

PCCI backs delaying new import fees for alternative sweeteners

February 4, 2025 | 8:20 pm



PHILIPPINE STAR/MIGUEL DE GUZMAN

THE PHILIPPINE Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) said it supports delaying the Sugar Regulatory Administration's (SRA) new import clearance fees for some non-sugar sweeteners.

"We are glad that the Sugar Regulatory Administration has listened to and considered valid the concerns of the manufacturers, and acted immediately on the postponement of the order's implementation," PCCI President Eunina V. Mangio said in a statement on Tuesday.

Sugar Order (SO) No. 6, originally set to take effect on Feb. 1, imposes a P60 per metric ton clearance fee on imported commodities covered by tariff codes 1701, 1702 and 1704. These include sucrose, lactose, glucose, maltose, maple syrup, honey and caramel, and flavored syrups.

Additionally, commodities under tariff code 1704 include chewing gum and white chocolate not containing cocoa.

Last week, the SRA postponed the effectivity of SO 6 after pushback from food and beverage manufacturers, industry associations and chambers of commerce, citing the potential impact on confectionery and beverage prices from the higher fees.

The PCCI said industry groups also called on the SRA to consult at more broadly and conduct a Regulatory Impact Assessment on any policy changes.

Groups also urged the regulator to adopt the Anti-Red Tape Authority's Ease of Doing Business approach, which calls for "simplified, efficient, and transparent governance."

"Such regulatory measure should not be to the detriment of other quarters in the industry that are legitimately doing business," Ms. Mangio added.

The SRA has said that the order is intended to help document and better monitor the entry of imported non-sugar sweeteners, and not to restrict their entry.

Domestic sugar producers had asked the SRA to regulate the entry of other sweeteners due to its threat to the sugar industry. — **Adrian H. Halili**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/02/04/651145/pcci-backs-delaying-new-import-fees-for-alternative-sweeteners/>

REMATE:

P35/kilong bigas ibebenta sa ilalim ng food security emergency

February 4, 2025 14:44



MANILA, Philippines- Pwede nang bumili ang mga consumers ng bigas sa halagang P35 kada kilo kasunod ng deklarasyon ng food emergency sa bigas.

Iyon nga lamang, ito ay magdudulot ng pagkalugi sa National Food Authority (NFA) ng hanggang P2.25 bilyon dahil ipagbibili ito sa mas mababang presyo kaysa sa presyo ng pagkakabili ng suplay.

Ayon kay NFA Department Manager Roy Untiveros, ipalalabas ng ahensya ang stocks nito, well-milled rice, ng hanggang tatlong buwan sa local government units (LGUs), government-owned and -controlled corporations (GOCCs), at Kadiwa ng Pangulo (KNP) sites sa halagang P33 per kilo.

Kumpara sa actual buying price ng NFA noong 2024, ipinagpapalagay ng NFA na ang pagkalugi kada kilo ay P12 hanggang P15. Nakatakda namang magpalabas ang ahensya ng 150,000 metric tons sa loob ng anim na buwan, ito ay katumbas ng kabuuang pagkalugi na P2.25 bilyon.

Sinabi ni Untiveros na nagpadala na ng liham ang NFA sa LGUs para itatag ang demand, magiging basehan ng monthly allocation sa mga lugar, subalit hindi pa nakatatanggap ng tugon.

Ito’y matapos na ideklara ni Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., araw ng Lunes ang food security emergency sa bigas base sa rekomendasyon mula sa National Price Coordinating Council (NPCC), tinukoy ang mataas na presyo kahit pagkatapos na bumaba ang ‘cost of production’ at mas mababang taripa sa imported rice.

Ang stocks ay ipalalabas sa pamamagitan ng Food Terminal Inc. (FTI), at pagkatapos ay ibebenta sa publiko sa halagang P35 kada kilo, kabilang sa “cheapest available” habang hangad ng pamahalaan na mas mababa ang presyo ng bigas sa level na nakitang pagsirit na naitala noong Hunyo at Hulyo 2023.

“Ito po ay suggested to be sold to the public by the LGUs at P35 (per kilogram). Hopefully ito po ay magkaroon ng epekto sa pagbaba ng presyo ng bigas sa ngayon,” ang sinabi ni Untiveros sa briefing sa Quezon City.

Base sa pinakabagong data na available mula price monitoring ng DA, makikita na ang presyo sa Metro Manila markets ay mula P41.24 hanggang P59.14 per kilo “as of February 1,” habang ang Kadiwa prices ay P38.00 per kilo.

Kinukumpara ito sa P36.00 hanggang P60.00 per kilogram range na naitala noong May 31, 2023, bago pa ang pagtaas na naitala noong Hunyo at Hulyo 2023. **Kris Jose**

<https://remate.ph/p35-kilong-bigas-ibebenta-sa-ilalim-ng-food-security-emergency/>

REMATE:

P55/kilo rice MSRP kasado sa Peb. 5

February 4, 2025 13:13



MANILA, Philippines- Inanunsyo ng Department of Agriculture (DA) nitong Martes ang pagbaba sa maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) para sa imported rice, sa layunin ng ahensyang ibaba pa ito.

Ayon kay DA assistant secretary Arnel de Mesa, ang MSRP ay kasado sa P55 kada kilo epektibo sa Miyerkules, February 5, mula sa kasalukuyang P58 per kilo.

Ani De Mesa, sa briefing sa Quezon City, bagama't ang MSRP ay para lamang sa Metro Manila, palalawigin ito sa nationwide coverage simula February 15.

“After this reduction, we plan to lower it further to P52 a kilo by mid-February and then at P49 per kilo two weeks after. This should reflect the lower global prices of rice and the reduced tariff,” hiwalay na pahayag ni Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel.

Kasunod ito ng pagbaba ni Pangulong Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr., sa ilalim ng Executive Order 62, noong nakaraang taon sa tariff rates para sa bigas sa 15% hanggang 2028 mula sa nakaraang 35%.

Nauna nang sinabi ng DA na magsasagawa ito ng monthly review ng MSRP ng premium imported rice na walang mahigit 5% broken grains, naglilimita sa profit margins ng importers, traders, at retailers sa P10 per kilo. **RNT/SA**

<https://remate.ph/p55-kilo-rice-msrp-kasado-sa-peb-5/>

REMATE:

TINGNAN: Food security emergency sa bigas, epektibo na

February 4, 2025 11:33



Ibinababa na ng rice retailers sa Kamuning Market sa Quezon City ang mga bagong hatid na P38 Kadiwa ng Pangulo rice sa kanilang mga stall. Ito ay kasunod ng anunsyo ng Department of Agriculture ng pagpapatupad ng Food Security Emergency sa bigas. **DANNY QUERUBIN**



<https://remate.ph/tingnan-food-security-emergency-sa-bigas-epektibo-na/>

ABANTE:

P35 per kilo ng bigas mabibili na

Abante News

- **February 4, 2025**



Makakabili na ng P35 per kilong bigas ang publiko matapos ideklara ang food emergency sa bigas.

Ayon kay National Food Authority (NFA) Department Manager Roy Untiveros, ilalabas nila ang mga stock nilang well-milled rice sa mga local government unit (LGU), government-owned and -controlled corporations (GOCCs) at Kadiwa ng Pangulo (KNP) sites sa presyong P33 per kilo.

Ibebenta naman ito sa publiko sa halagang P35 per kilo.

Ito po ay suggested to be sold to the public by the LGUs at P35 (per kilogram). Hopefully ito po ay magkaroon ng epekto sa pagbaba ng presyo ng bigas sa ngayon,” wika ni Untiveros sa press briefing sa Quezon City.

Tinataya ng NFA na ma-^ululugi sila ng P2.5 bilyon sa pagbaba ng presyo ng bigas.

Inanunsiyo rin ng Department of Agriculture na ibababa na ang maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) ng imported rice sa P55 per kilo ngayong Miyerkoles (February 5) mula sa P58 per kilo.

Nagtakda ng MSRP sa bigas ang DA ng P58 per kilo nu’ng Enero 20, 2025 sa layuning mapamura ang presyo nito sa merkado dahil hindi naging epektibo ang Executive Order No. 62 na mapababa ang presyo ng bigas matapos ang anim na buwang pagtapyas ng taripa.

Binababa ang MSRP isang araw magdeklara ang DA ng food security emergency sa bigas para maibenta ng mura ang stocks ng bigas ng NFA sa mga local government unit at Kadiwa outlet para maibenta sa mga tao at mapababa ang presyo ng bigas.

Sabi ni Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., ibababa pa ang MSRP sa P52 per kilo sa kalagitnaan ng Pebrero at muli pang ibababa sa P49 per kilo pagdating ng Marso.

“This should reflect the lower global prices of rice and the reduced tariff,” sabi ni Tiu Laurel.

Ang MSRP ay sa importe-d rice lamang pinatutupad. Nang sinulong ng economic managers ang EO No. 62 na nagbaba ng taripa sa bigas sa 15% mula 35% noong Hulyo, sinabi nilang bababa ang presyo ng bigas ng P6-P7 per kilo.

Sa pag-iikot ng DA sa mga palengke, may mga nakita itong retailers na lampas sa P58 per kilo na MSRP ang benta na hinayaan lamang nito at hindi pinanagot.

Sabi ng DA, ang pagbaba ng MSRP ay pinagdesisyunan matapos ang konsultasyon sa mga rice industry stakeholder tulad ng importer at retailer. (Eileen Mencias)

<https://www.abante.com.ph/2025/02/04/p35-per-kilo-ng-bigas-mabibili-na/>

MANILA STANDARD:

Cheaper NFA rice available at P35/k

By Othel V. Campos

February 5, 2025, 12:45 am

DA also lowers imported rice max SRP: P55/k

Filipinos will be able to buy even cheaper NFA rice at P35 per kilogram under the food emergency declaration that took effect Monday.

The National Food Authority, however, stands to lose as much as P2.25 billion with the move.

NFA operations manager Roy Hontiveros said the agency would sell at least 150,000 metric tons of rice to local government units at below the procurement cost.

“Based on our actual buying price in 2024, the estimated loss is between P12 to P15 per kilo,” Hontiveros said.

The NFA rice will be sold to LGUs at P33 per kilogram, and will in turn be sold to the public at a suggested price of P35 per kilogram — one peso less than the original estimate of P36 per kilogram.

So far, the NFA has sent 53 letters to various LGUs, including those in Metro Manila and Cavite, to gauge interest in purchasing the rice.

However, only Navotas has confirmed its intent to buy, with other LGUs yet to respond.

The NFA said the rice will be made available on a pick-up basis.

The DA also reduced further maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) for imported rice.

Effective February 5, the MSRP for imported rice will be lowered to P55 per kilogram, down from the previous P58 per kilogram.

“We aim to reduce the MSRP further, with a target of P52 per kilogram by mid-February and P49 per kilogram in two weeks,” said Agriculture assistant secretary Arnel de Mesa.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. on Monday declared a food security emergency on rice, citing persistently high prices despite efforts to reduce production costs and lower tariffs on imported rice.

Data from the Department of Agriculture showed that rice prices in Metro Manila markets ranged from P41.24 to P59.14 per kilo as of February 1, while Kadiwa outlets were selling rice at P38 per kilo.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.’s Executive Order 62 earlier lowered rice tariffs from 35 percent to 15 percent until 2028 to help reduce prices of the staple grain.

Along with price reductions, the DA said it will continue to closely monitor the rice supply and market conditions.

<https://manilastandard.net/news/314554229/cheaper-nfa-rice-available-at-p35-k.html>

MANILA STANDARD:

PH commits to advance agriculture sustainability



By DA News

February 3, 2025, 6:45 pm

Berlin, Germany—The Department of Agriculture last week outlined the Philippines’ vision for a sustainable and inclusive agricultural future at the 17th Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA) in Berlin, aligning with the forum’s 2025 theme of “Farming a Sustainable Bioeconomy.” Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr., in a speech read by Undersecretary Christopher V. Morales, stressed that the Philippines is already integrating bioeconomy principles into its national strategies.

Two key frameworks—the Philippine Action Plan for Sustainable Consumption and Production and the National Innovation Agenda—are central to the Philippines’ efforts to promote resource efficiency and innovation within the agricultural sector.

“The Philippines is committed to advancing sustainability across all sectors, including agriculture,” Morales said. He noted that while the country seeks to boost agricultural productivity, it is equally focused on minimizing environmental impact, aiming for a circular and resource-efficient economy.

Given the growing threats of climate change and resource scarcity, Morales said the challenges facing global agriculture require collective action.

“No single nation can address these issues alone,” he said. “Collaboration is key, particularly in creating bioeconomy strategies that are inclusive, innovative and equitable.”

At the heart of the Philippines' agricultural policy is a focus on technology-driven solutions. The National Innovation Agenda aims to tackle the complexities of modern agriculture by encouraging the adoption of green technologies and sustainable farming practices.

Morales said such innovations would not only increase efficiency but also ensure that farmers and fisherfolk benefit directly, improving their livelihoods and strengthening food security.

Morales also stressed the critical importance of inclusivity in these efforts. "We must ensure that the benefits of sustainable agriculture reach everyone, especially those most affected by climate change and economic instability," he said, citing the need for solutions that are accessible to vulnerable communities.

Morales reaffirmed the Philippines' dedication to advancing sustainable agrifood systems. "Building a sustainable bioeconomy is an ambitious goal, but one we can achieve through collaboration, innovation, and shared responsibility," he said. DA News

Morales' speech emphasized the Philippines' proactive role in addressing global agricultural challenges, positioning the country as a key player in the movement towards a sustainable, equitable food system. DA News

<https://manilastandard.net/spotlight/environmental-and-sustainability/314553840/ph-commits-to-advance-agriculture-sustainability.html>

THE MANILA TIMES:

P55 ceiling set on imported rice

By Giselle P. Jordan

February 5, 2025

The Department of Agriculture (DA) will impose a P55 per kilogram maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) for imported rice starting today, Feb. 5, bringing it to P3 lower than the level set on Jan. 20.

The move follows Monday's declaration of a food security emergency that allows the government to release rice buffer stocks held by the National Food Authority (NFA) to bring down rice prices that have remained high in markets despite a cut in tariffs on imported rice.

The MSRP could be further reduced in coming weeks to below P50 a kilo by early March, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said.

"After this reduction, we plan to lower it further to P52 a kilo by mid-February and then at P49 per kilo two weeks after. This should reflect the lower global prices of rice and the reduced tariff," he said.

The imposition of an MSRP came after consultations with rice industry stakeholders, including importers and retailers, to ensure that the agency can bring down retail prices for consumers without compromising the country's rice industry. With the MSRP in place, the DA said it hopes to stabilize rice prices and ease inflationary pressures on basic commodities.

The decision is considered a crucial step in managing inflation in food prices, particularly for rice. The government hopes to make rice affordable, especially for lower-income families.



ALL ABOUT RICE Agriculture Assistant Secretaries Arnel de Mesa and Genevieve Guevarra, National Food Authority Department Manager Roy Untiveros, and Trade Assistant Secretary Agaton Uvero discuss the effects of the food security emergency on rice on Feb. 4, 2025. PHOTO BY ISMAEL DE JUAN

The DA said it will continue to closely monitor the rice supply and market conditions. It also assured the public that it is committed to ensuring access to rice at affordable prices, as well as working on long-term food security and the growth of the local rice industry.

The agency said the imposition of an MSRP is part of its efforts to curb rising food prices and contribute to the country's overall economic stability.



The Department of Agriculture (DA) in coordination with Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) holds a press briefing on the rationale behind the government's declaration of a food security emergency and its impact on rice prices in Quezon City on Feb. 4, 2025. Present were Agriculture Assistant Secretary Genevieve V. Guevarra (2nd from left), Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel De Mesa (center), Trade Assistant Secretary Aga Uvero (left) and National Food Authority Manager for Operations Roy Untiveros (right). PHOTO BY ISMAEL DE JUAN

Under the government plan, the NFA would release 150,000 metric tons (MT) of its rice stock at P33 per kilogram, leading to an estimated loss of P12 to P15 per kilogram, based on the agency's average buying price in 2024. This would add up to a loss of P1.8 billion to P2.25 billion

Government agencies, government-owned and -controlled corporations (GOCCs), and local government units (LGUs) will sell the rice to the public at a suggested retail price of P35 per kilogram.

The agency originally intended to release its rice stocks to LGUs at P36 per kilogram, with a suggested retail price of P38 per kilogram. However, NFA Manager for Operations Roy Untiveros said they now plan to release the rice at P33 per kilogram, based on their new computations.

According to him, this would speed up the release of rice stocks in their warehouses to make way for palay (unmilled rice) procurement as the harvest season starts this month.

But Untiveros said the NFA has yet to receive an official order from the DA about the release of stocks from its warehouses.

On the other hand, he said that the NFA has already sent 53 letters to government agencies, GOCCs, and LGUs in the National Capital Region (NCR) and Cavite to find out which of them are interested in participating in the program.

On Jan. 14, the National Price Coordinating Council (NPCC) discussed a possible declaration of a food security emergency on rice, which was done Monday, Feb. 3.

DA spokesman Arnel de Mesa said the food security emergency declaration was made only on the basis of extraordinarily high retail prices and that there is no shortage in the supply of rice.

The declaration will remain in effect unless lifted by the DA.



Workers unload sacks of rice that will be sold for P38 a kilo at the Kadiwa ng Pangulo stalls at the Kamuning Market in Quezon City Monday, February 3, 2025. The Department of Agriculture announced a food emergency on rice on Monday night. PHOTOS BY JOHN ORVEN VERDOTE

Assistant Secretary for Consumer Affairs Genevieve E. Velicaria-Guevarra said the NPCC has declared a mandatory review of the policy every four months, but the DA plans a monthly or bi-monthly review to identify the effects of the declaration on the prices of rice.

De Mesa said that based on their discussions, the NPCC said they aim to lower rice prices to July 2023 levels, with well-milled rice at P45 and regular milled rice at P41 per kilo.

Untiveros said there would be a monthly allocation for each of the interested participants in the rice program.

The LGUs may decide how they will sell the rice, but there will be a memorandum of agreement between these LGUs and the DA to establish guidelines for the sale of the rice.

The DTI said their role in the food security emergency is to monitor the market prices on the ground and review the policy. They said they would also monitor how LGUs and other offices comply with the suggested selling price of P35 per kilogram.

The DA said in case of deficiencies in stocks, the agency may buy additional stocks from local sources or through importation.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/02/05/news/p55-ceiling-set-on-imported-rice/2049837>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

DA adjusts rice MSRP to ₱55 a kilo, hints at further cuts

[Ada Pelonia](#)

[February 4, 2025](#)



DA Sec. Francisco Tiu Laurel

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has adjusted downward the maximum suggested retail price of imported rice to P55 per kilo starting February 5.

However, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. hinted at a further reductions of the MSRP in the coming weeks, which could potentially drop to below P50 per kilo by early March.

“After this reduction, we plan to lower it further to P52 a kilo by mid-February and then at P49 per kilo two weeks after. This should reflect the lower global prices of rice and the reduced tariff,” Laurel said in a statement.

Last month, the DA imposed an MSRP of P58 per kilo for premium imported rice with 5 percent broken grains subject to a monthly review.

The DA said the decision to lower the MSRP follows “extensive consultations” with rice industry stakeholders, including importers and retailers, to ensure that it would benefit consumers without negatively affecting rice supply.

“This price reduction comes amid efforts by the DA to stabilize rice prices and alleviate inflationary pressures on basic commodities.”

It added that this would be a crucial step in controlling food price inflation, particularly for rice, which is a staple food for millions of Filipinos.

“By lowering the cost, the government aims to make rice more affordable, particularly for lower-income households.”

The agency also noted that it would continue to monitor rice supply and market conditions, adding that it would ensure the availability of the country’s food staple at stable prices while supporting long-term food security and the local rice industry’s growth.

“This initiative is part of the DA’s broader efforts to address the challenges posed by rising food costs and contribute to the overall economic stability of the country as it moves toward 2025.”

Meanwhile, DA Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said the MSRP would be implemented nationwide by February 15. The measure is currently being imposed in Metro Manila.

He earlier noted that the MSRP for 25 percent broken rice variety could settle at P45 per kilo. The agency has yet to set a price for the 25 percent broken rice grains.

“That’s a probability considering the decline [in global rice prices] was very sharp,” De Mesa said in a previous interview.

Retail prices of imported premium rice range from P51 to P58 per kilo, based on the government’s latest price monitoring report.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/02/04/da-adjusts-rice-msrp-to-p55-a-kilo-hints-at-further-cuts/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

Editorial Cartoon

BusinessMirror Editorial

February 5, 2025



“This emergency declaration allows us to release rice buffer stocks held by the National Food Authority [NFA] to stabilize prices and ensure that rice, a staple food for millions of Filipinos, remains accessible to consumers.”

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. on the declaration of food security emergency to lower rice prices

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/02/05/editorial-cartoon-february-05-2025/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

Soaring pork prices in Metro Manila leave consumers and hog raisers perplexed

BusinessMirror Editorial

February 5, 2025

The latest price monitoring report of the Department of Agriculture (DA) is disturbing particularly for Metro Manila consumers who like to eat meat products. As of February 1, data from the DA showed that the weekly average price of liempo or pork belly, which most Filipinos prefer, jumped to P427.96 per kilogram (kg). The figure is 18 percent higher than the P362.03 recorded on February 2, 2024.

Local pork belly is even more expensive than beef brisket, which averaged P398.13 per kg, based on official government data. The latest figure also approximates the price of beef rump, which carried an average price tag of P455.69 per kg. Indeed, the DA should look into this to determine why Metro Manila consumers are seeing spikes in the retail price of one of their favorite protein sources.

Even hog raisers belonging to the National Federation of Hog Farmers Inc. (NatFed) are perplexed by the rise in retail prices (See, *“Spikes in pork prices prompt DA to mull over an MSRP,” BusinessMirror, January 29, 2025*). One of the officials of NatFed said farmgate price of hogs ranged from P220 to P240 per kg. Given this farmgate price, the NatFed official said pork kasim should retail from P340 per kg to P360 kg while pork belly should be priced at around P40 to P50 higher.

The average retail price in Metro Manila is also a head-scratcher because the Philippines has been importing pork in huge quantities in recent years to augment domestic supply. Figures from the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) showed that meat imports surged by 19.42 percent to 1.33 million metric tons (MMT) from January to November 2024, compared to the 1.12 MMT recorded in the previous year.

Pork shipments accounted for the largest share of the country’s meat imports in the reference period as it rose by 21.98 percent to 671,561 MT from the 550,539 MT recorded last year.

One possible explanation may be the decline in hog production last year. Based on data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), hog output last year fell by 5.1 percent to 1.703 MMT, from the 1.793 MMT recorded in 2023. The poor performance of the hog sector last year, which was attributed to the outbreaks of African swine fever, caused the output of the livestock and poultry subsector to register a 4 percent decline.

However, data from the DA and the PSA showed that despite the drastic decline in hog production in 2021, when it fell to 1.696 MMT, the average price of pork belly by end-December of that year reached only P380 per kg. Perhaps the lockdowns to stop the spread of Covid-19 may have reduced demand for pork, but the holidays did not stop consumers from buying the usual fare they have enjoyed for years, including pork-based meals.

Apart from examining the factors behind these developments, the government must fast-track the establishment of the daily price index (DPI) prescribed by Republic Act (RA) 12022 or the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act. The law defined DPI as a system of monitoring and publishing or broadcasting the prevailing retail prices of agricultural and fishery products in all regions of the country on a day-to-day basis. Setting this up will help policymakers to determine areas where they should implement interventions to prevent profiteering and hoarding.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/02/05/soaring-pork-prices-in-metro-manila-leave-consumers-and-hog-raisers-perplexed/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

NFA to release rice at ₱33 per kilo to LGUs, Kadiwa

Ada Pelonia

February 4, 2025

THE National Food Authority (NFA) will release rice buffer stock to local government units, Kadiwa stores, and government entities at P33 per kilo following the food security emergency declaration.

NFA Acting Department Manager Roy Untiveros explained that the initial recommended P38 per kilo selling price was adjusted downward to fast-track the release of stocks and create space ahead of the upcoming harvest season.

The rice stocks would be sold by the Department of Agriculture (DA) through the Food Terminal Incorporated (FTI) to LGUs, Kadiwa, and government entities, where consumers could purchase at P35 per kilo.

“Hopefully, this will have an effect on the prices of rice now,” Untiveros told reporters in a press conference in Quezon City on Tuesday.

The NFA plans to release 150,000 metric tons (MT) of rice in six months, which is 50 percent of its current 300,000 MT buffer stock stored in warehouses.

“Based on the actual average buying price of NFA for 2024, our estimated loss per kilo is at 12 to 15 pesos,” he said.

Untiveros said they had sent letters to LGUs in the National Capital Region (NCR) and Cavite inviting them to participate in the sale of rice stocks.

The DA declared on Monday a food security emergency on rice due to the “extraordinary spike” in the price of the country’s food staple despite the easing of global rice quotations and slashed rice tariffs to 15 percent. This would allow the agency to release rice buffer stocks held by the NFA.

Under RA 12078, the DA should replenish the used buffer stock with locally produced rice from farmers or cooperatives, or it can import rice when the supply of locally produced rice is not enough.

‘Repeal EO 62’ – Sinag

The Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag) has thrown its support behind the food security emergency declaration but called for the rescinding of Executive Order (EO) 62, which reduced rice tariffs to 15 percent until 2028.

“The emergency declaration is a direct admission from the government that tariff reduction and unlimited imports have not lowered rice prices,” Sinag said in a statement.

“Repealing EO62 will provide additional revenues for the government that is earmarked to directly support our rice farmers.”

The group also called for the provision of additional funding to the DA so they could purchase more palay from farmers at the floor price of P22 to P23 per kilo.

“[This would help in] safeguarding farmers’ income and supporting local production while pushing for lower rice prices,” Sinag said.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/02/04/nfa-to-release-rice-at-p33-per-kilo-to-lgus-kadiwa/>

PILIPINO STAR NGAYON:

Mataas na presyo ng bigas

[K KA LANG?](#) - [Korina Sanchez](#)

February 5, 2025 | 12:00am

NAGDEKLARA na si Agriculture Sec. Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. ng “food security emergency on rice” dahil sa mataas na presyo ng lokal na bigas ngayon. Ito ay matapos magbigay ng rekomedasyon ang National Price Coordinating Council. Ang ibig sabihin nito ay maglalabas na mga naka-imbak na bigas mula sa mga bodega ng NFA para bumaba ang presyo ng lokal na bigas. Ang target ay P38/kilo. Sa mga ahensiya ng gobyerno at lokal na pamahalaan ibibigay ang mga bigas para mabenta sa mga palengke. Ang deklarasyon ay hindi ibig sabihin na may shortage na sa bigas. Nasa 300,000 tonelada ng bigas ang ilalabas ng NFA.

Makikinabang din umano ang ating mga magsasaka ng palay. Dahil mababawasan ang mga nakaimbak na bigas ng NFA, bibili sila muli sa mga magsasaka para manatiling puno ang mga bodega ng NFA. Sana nga ganun ang mangyari. Dehado ang ating mga magsasaka dahil sa dami ng inaangkat na bigas mula sa ibang bansa. Mas mahal ang imported na bigas pero mukhang sila pa rin ang nalulugi dahil lumalabas na mura pa ang imported na bigas kapag binili sa ibang bansa.

Sinisisi rin ng gobyerno ang mga mapagsamantalang negosyante ng imported na bigas. Nagmura ang kanilang binabayaranang buwis para mag-angkat ng bigas, pero hindi naman inilalabas sa merkado at tinatambak na muna para tumaas ang presyo. Kung bakit hindi mabuwag ang mala-sindikatang ito ay nakapagtataka.

Nakapagtataka rin na isang agrikulturang bansa tulad natin, hindi kayang tapatan ng produksiyon ng palay ang pagkonsumo ng bigas. Hindi tayo magaya sa Vietnam. Ito ang dahilan kung bakit kailangang mag-angkat ng bigas na kompetisyon ng mga lokal na magsasaka. Mahalaga ang bigas sa Pilipino. Bihira kang makakakita ng kumakain na walang kanin dahil tila hindi ka nga nabubusog kung wala nito. Hindi pa masabi kung kailan babawiin ang “food security emergency” ni Tiu Laurel. Siya lang ang makagagawa nito. Siguro kapag hindi na gumagalaw ang presyo ng lokal na bigas.

<https://www.philstar.com/pilipino-star-ngayon/opinyon/2025/02/05/2419307/mataas-na-presyo-ng-bigas>