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**THE PHILIPPINE STAR:**

# Rice max SRP led to P15/kilo price drop – DA

**Bella Cariaso** - The Philippine Star

March 17, 2025 | 12:00am



Rice retailers unload newly delivered P38 per kilo Kadiwa ng Pangulo rice at the Kamuning Market in Quezon City on February 3, 2025.

Michael Varcas / The Philippine STAR

MANILA, Philippines — The maximum suggested retail price (SRP) on imported rice has resulted in a drop of P15 per kilo in the cost of the staple without significantly disrupting the grains industry, Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said yesterday.

He said that before the DA introduced the max SRP in early February, imported rice with five percent broken grains was being retailed at around P64 per kilo.

The max SRP started at P58 per kilo. He noted that in less than a month, by March 1, the DA had reduced it further to P49 per kilo.

“The Philippine Statistics Authority recognized the MSRP as a crucial factor in bringing down rice prices and helping tame inflation, with March print surprisingly lower than market and central bank expectations,” Tiu Laurel said.

Tiu Laurel added that the max SRP might be lowered again before the end of March if global rice prices continue to soften and the peso maintains its appreciation against the US dollar.

He said rice prices have dropped to their lowest levels in over two years, with some rice varieties quoted below \$400 per metric ton.

Tiu Laurel noted that the landed cost of good-quality rice variety from Vietnam – those with five percent broken grains has dropped to around \$490 per metric ton, more than \$200 cheaper than in November 2024 and approximately \$80 less than early January prices.

Tiu Laurel assured the public that falling rice prices and lower tariffs would not impact the P30 billion annual budget allocated to the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund, which supports local rice farmers under the amended Rice Tariffication Law.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/03/17/2428877/rice-max-srp-led-p15kilo-price-drop-da>

**PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:**

# Baguio's version of PITX under review for competitive bidding

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 04:30 AM March 17, 2025

BAGUIO CITY, Philippines — If a developer's plans push through, Baguio commuters could soon be served by the city's version of the Parañaque Integrated Terminal Exchange (PITX).

The City Council began a review this month of this prospective P1.190-billion public-private partnership (PPP) venture, before it is put up for competitive bidding through a Swiss Challenge.

The proposed Baguio Intermodal Transport Terminal was introduced by PITX developer Megawide Constructions Corp. through an unsolicited proposal in 2019. It was one of many investment proposals that were pitched when Mayor Benjamin Magalong resumed Baguio's redevelopment program.

Megawide had offered to build and govern the intermodal terminal under a 40-year lease agreement following five years of negotiating the project's terms of references with Baguio's PPP panel. But some councilors have indicated they preferred a shorter lease period.

If approved, the winning developer would construct a series of terraced buildings and bus passenger loading bays at a sprawling hillside property near the gateway to Benguet's Tuba town center on the Palispis-Aspiras Highway, a segment of the Marcos Highway, which is one of the access routes to Baguio.

The buildings were designed to accommodate 300 to 400 provincial buses daily, and would feature airport-styled passenger lounges and parking spaces for public utility jeeps, taxis and private vehicles that would ferry passengers to Baguio destinations, said Miles Young, the Megawide business development manager overseeing the PPP proposal.

The terminal can operate within 5 hectares of a 10-ha lot it was allowed to develop at the Department of Agriculture's Dairy Farm facility through a 50-year usufruct agreement, said City Administrator Bonifacio dela Peña. Should the council approve a 40-year lease within a 120-day time frame, the developer would have 44 years to operate at the usufruct area, Young said.

The terminal would generate a P2.2 billion revenue stream for Baguio, or a total of P3 billion when the agreement lapses.

Young also confirmed a provision that was tackled at the negotiations, which would waive the developer's monthly lease payments should bus travel frequency drop to 600 trips because it would affect their profits.

Councilors Betty Lourdes Tabanda and Peter Fianza, both lawyers, raised their objections to this possible arrangement.

Councilor Elmer Datuin also raised a potential backlash from Baguio residents, who have been taking the bus at the staging areas of seven bus lines along a portion of Governor Pack Road. Bus passengers would require a P180 taxi ride to the proposed intermodal terminal at Baguio's outskirts, he said.

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2044388/baguios-version-of-pitx-under-review-for-competitive-bidding>

**BUSINESS WORLD:**

# PHL seeks easier Japan access for banana exports

March 17, 2025 | 12:02 am



[ANFLOCOR.COM/TADECO](https://www.anflocor.com/tadeco)

THE Philippine embassy in Tokyo said visiting Department of Agriculture (DA) officials have asked Japan to lower tariffs on Philippine bananas, citing the need to keep the industry afloat and aid in the development of Mindanao, the primary growing area.

The embassy, in a statement, said Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. made the case for lowering tariffs imposed by Japan “to sustain and expand this industry.”

“This will not only attract greater investment in banana production but also drive poverty alleviation, job creation, and security in Mindanao,” he was quoted as saying.

In 2024, Philippine bananas had a 75% market share in Japan, the embassy said, though this was off the high of 90% more than a decade ago.

Philippine domestic production has also declined, as reflected in a decline in overall exports of 2.97% to 2.28 million metric tons (MT) in 2024, losing its position as the third-leading banana exporter.

China’s banana imports from the Philippines hit a 15-year low in 2024 of 463,306 MT, according to the International Trade Centre, an arm of the World Trade Organization.

Vietnam’s banana exports to China, meanwhile, rose 24% to 625,166 MT.

In Japan, Mr. Laurel met with Hirofumi Takinami, State Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, and Hiroshi Moriyama, the Liberal Democratic Party Secretary General and Japan-Philippines Parliamentary Friendship League Chairman.

Former Agriculture Undersecretary Fermin Adriano earlier told *BusinessWorld* that the Philippines was bound to lose its position as China’s largest supplier of bananas after China started improving rail links to mainland Southeast Asia, reducing logistics costs for banana suppliers like Vietnam.

“We already knew that this would happen in 2018 because China was then building a trans rail system passing through Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam,” he said.

China in 2022 launched a new rail network connecting Chengdu and Chongqing to Hanoi, bringing shipment times down to five days from 20, according to ASEAN Briefing.

Laos and China in 2021 also opened a 414-kilometer rail line connecting Vientiane to its network.

Mr. Adriano said the DA has failed to invest significantly in banana research amid threats from Panama disease or fusarium wilt, first detected in Davao City in 2009.

“Our banana farms were hit by fusarium wilt or Panama disease, particularly small growers who cannot afford biosafety measures costs,” he said. “The DA did not heavily invest in banana research to respond to fusarium because all its focus and more than half of its budget goes to rice.”

Ties have also soured with China over territorial disputes, he said.

China is the Philippines’ largest source of imports and the second-biggest market for its exports, with total trade of \$41 billion in 2023.

Federation of Filipino Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Inc. President Cecilio Pedro said while market diversification moves are needed, the sheer size of the Chinese market cannot be ignored. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2025/03/17/659617/phl-seeks-easier-japan-access-for-banana-exports/>

**BUSINESS WORLD:**

# Biofertilizer plant opens in Laguna

March 17, 2025 | 12:01 am



DA.GOV.PH

By **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**, *Reporter*

AGRI SPECIALIST, Inc. said it opened a 2,000-square meter automated manufacturing facility in Laguna with a capacity of 7,200 metric tons of biofertilizer annually.

The facility makes fertilizer that uses the nitrogen-fixing properties of bacteria known as Bio N, a blend of Azospirillum and nutrient-rich mediums developed by the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) in 1991, its Chief Executive Officer and President Mario C. Labadan, Jr. told *BusinessWorld*.

“The plant’s production capacity is set to meet the country’s biofertilizer needs, with the goal of reducing dependence on imported chemical fertilizers,” the company said in a statement.

Among the staff of the P250-million Bio N facility are graduates of UPLB’s National Institute of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology.

The biofertilizer promises to increase farmer incomes, with five 200-gram packs of Bio N fertilizer sufficient for a hectare planted to rice or corn. Every kilogram of the biofertilizer can replace 100 kilos of urea, an inorganic fertilizer, Mr. Labadan said.

Bio N provides 30-50% of the total nitrogen requirement of rice and corn.

Bio N has undergone testing by rice farmers in 13 regions over the past two cropping seasons.

“Farmers have reported healthier plants — characterized by deep green leaves, sturdy stems, and robust root systems — along with fewer pests and reduced need for chemical pesticides,” the company said, citing findings from its pilot studies.

<https://www.bworldonline.com/agribusiness/2025/03/17/659616/biofertilizer-plant-opens-in-laguna/>

**BUSINESS WORLD:**

# Philippines signs sustainable fisheries management deal with Palau

March 16, 2025 | 8:16 pm



**PHILIPPINE COAST GUARD PHOTO**

THE PHILIPPINES and Palau have signed an agreement to manage their fisheries more sustainably, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said.

The parties to the agreement — the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and Palau’s Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment involves fighting illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, promoting technology sharing, and advancing fisheries infrastructure development.

The agreement involves collaborating in conserving highly migratory fish stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean, which is home to commercially important fish species such as tuna and billfish.

A joint committee will oversee the agreement’s implementation, with senior officials meeting annually to plan, monitor, and assess progress.

“The MoU sets the foundation for future collaboration through detailed implementation frameworks,” the DA said.

“It is designed to be reviewed in five years, providing both countries with the flexibility to adapt to shifting needs and emerging priorities,” it added. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/03/16/659675/philippines-signs-sustainable-fisheries-management-deal-with-palau/>



**MANILA STANDARD:**

# DA sees price of imported rice at P45/kilo by March 31



By Othel V. Campos

March 17, 2025, 12:35 am

Rice prices may drop to P45 per kilo by March 31 if global prices continue to decline and the peso remains strong, Agriculture secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. announced Sunday.

“If the current trend in world rice prices persists and the peso maintains its strength, we may lower the MSRP for imported rice to around P45 per kilo by March 31,” he said.

This follows the government’s recent move to cut the maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) for imported rice from P58 per kilo to P49 as of March 1.

Implemented in early February, the Department of Agriculture’s (DA) MSRP policy has significantly lowered rice prices without disrupting the market.

Before its enforcement, imported rice with 5 percent broken grains was retailing at around P64 per kilo despite falling global prices, reduced tariffs, and a stronger peso.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) identified the MSRP as a key factor in easing inflation, with March figures coming in lower than expected.

The initiative is congruent with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.’s decision to cut rice tariffs from 35 percent to 15 percent starting in July 2024, following consultations with industry stakeholders.

Aiding the downward trend in prices, India lifted its year-long ban on non-basmati rice exports in September 2024, boosting global supply.

As a result, rice prices have hit a two-year low, with some varieties now below \$400 per metric ton.

Vietnamese high-quality rice (5 percent broken grains) now costs around \$490 per metric ton—over \$200 cheaper than in November 2024 and about \$80 lower than early January prices.

Meanwhile, the Philippine peso strengthened in March after hovering above P58 per US dollar since November. It briefly touched P59 in November but appreciated to P57.225 per dollar as of March 11, per Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas data.

Tiu Laurel assured that reduced tariffs and lower rice prices would not affect the P30 billion annual budget for the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), which supports local farmers under the amended Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).

The government has also secured RCEF’s continuity through the General Appropriations Act starting in 2026, ensuring its expansion until 2031 to enhance the competitiveness of Filipino rice farmers.

<https://manilastandard.net/news/national/314569432/da-sees-price-of-imported-rice-at-p45-kilo-by-march-31.html>

**MANILA STANDARD:**

## **New plant to lower rice prices, hike agri income — Speaker**



*NEW FERTILIZER PLANT. Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualde, with his daughter Mariabella Gabrielle Romualdez, leads the ceremonial distribution of Bio N Rice Microbial Fertilizer to farmer beneficiaries during the inauguration of Agri-Specialist Inc. (ASI) at Bio N Fertilizer Plant in Sta Rosa, Laguna yesterday morning. Also in the photo are ASI President Mario Labandan, Jr. and his father, ASI Chairman Mario Labadan, Sr. The ASI plant, with its state-of-the-art bioreactors, automatic packaging systems, and microbiology research lab, will produce 7,000 metric tons of Bio N fertilizers every year—enough to supply the needs of our rice and corn farmers nationwide. Ver Noveno*

By [Rio N. Araja](#)

March 17, 2025, 12:40 am

Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez sees a better income for Filipino farmers and access to more affordable food for everyone with the inauguration of a plant that would mass-produce locally developed biological fertilizer.

In his message at the inauguration of the Agri Specialist Inc.'s Bio N fertilizer plant in Sta. Rosa, Laguna on Sunday, the Speaker said the event was a game changer to usher in a new chapter in Philippine agriculture and a turning point for “our farmers, our food supply, and the nation’s future.”

Developed by Filipino scientists at the University of the Philippines-Los Banos, Bio N is a biofertilizer that reduces dependence on chemical fertilizers, improves soil health, and cuts farming costs.

“This means: Mas murang abono para sa ating mga magsasaka. Mas maraming ani, mas mataas ang kita. Mas masustansya at mas abot-kayang pagkain para sa bawat Pilipino,” Romualdez said.

“For too long, our farmers have been burdened by the rising costs of imported fertilizers, leaving our country’s food security at the mercy of price fluctuations in the world market,” he added.

“Every sack of rice, every ear of corn, every vegetable on our tables comes from the sweat and sacrifice of our farmers. But if they are struggling with high costs and low yields, we all feel the impact — sa presyo ng pagkain, sa gastusin ng pamilya, sa kabuhayan ng buong bansa,” he further stated.

The new fertilizer plant is aligned with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.’s vision for the country to break free from dependence on expensive imports.

“His administration has championed the Balanced Fertilization Strategy, promoting biofertilizers like Bio N to boost productivity while protecting our environment,” he noted.

“As the President said in his latest State of the Nation Address: Pinapalawak natin ang kaalaman ng ating mga magsasaka sa makabagong mga teknolohiya at pamamaraan. Isa na rito ang paggamit ng bio-fertilizers, na gawa sa Pilipinas at subok din at maaasahan. Sa balanced fertilizer strategy, gaganda ang ani ng mga magsasaka. Hindi na kailangang umasa sa mas mahal at imported na fertilizer,” he cited.

He believes the plant would empower our farmers with real choices, real solutions, and real support.

The plant, with its state-of-the-art bioreactors, automatic packaging systems, and microbiology research lab, could produce 7,000 metric tons of Bio N every year, enough to supply the needs of our rice and corn farmers nationwide.

“This plant represents more than just production capacity. It represents hope, opportunity, and independence,” Romualdez said.

“One of the most important things about this initiative is that it is 100% Proudly Filipino,” he stressed.

The inauguration of the BIO N plant is the culmination of decades of research and innovation by the country’s very own scientists at UPLB.

The Speaker said it is proof that the private sector, the government, and the research institutions can work together to bring real change to the lives of ordinary Filipinos.

“To our farmers: This is for you. This is proof that we are committed to helping you thrive, not just survive,” he said.

“This project is a bold step forward. But we cannot stop here. We must continue investing in innovation, research, and real solutions that uplift our farmers and strengthen our agriculture sector,” he noted.

He exhorted policymakers and business leaders to invest more in agriculture, saying that a strong agriculture sector means a strong economy, strong communities, and a stronger nation.

“To every Filipino: Support local. When you choose Philippine-grown rice, corn, and produce, you help our farmers, you create jobs, and you strengthen our economy,” he said, adding that the inauguration of the new BIO N fertilizer plant is a win for every Filipino.

<https://manilastandard.net/news/314569434/new-plant-to-lower-rice-prices-hike-agri-income-speaker.html>

**THE MANILA TIMES:**

# First food quality laboratory in Cagayan Valley inaugurated

**By Red Mendoza**

**March 17, 2025**

**TUGUEGARAO CITY, Cagayan** — Cagayan Valley food researchers, startups, and even micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) need not to go to Manila anymore to analyze the safety and quality of food products as the region's first-ever Food Safety and Quality Laboratory was inaugurated at the Cagayan State University-Andrews (CSU-Andrews) campus here in Tuguegarao City on Friday.

The laboratory was built through a P5-million grant from the Department of Science and Technology-Philippine Council for Industry, Energy, and Emerging Technology Research and Development (DOST-PCIEERD).

The laboratory was inaugurated by executives of DOST-PCIEERD and CSU and was blessed by CSU Chaplain and consultant Fr. Ranhilio Aquino, also a columnist for The Manila Times.

According to the laboratory's project lead and CSU Vice President for Research, Development and Extension Dr. Junel Guzman, many food products in the Cagayan Valley needed food quality testing, and some of them are being shipped to the nearest food quality testing centers in the Cordillera Region or even in Manila.

"The laboratory testing is the last one we cannot do on our research because we do not have enough funds to conduct their research, that is why I told them that the center can now cater novel products," Guzman told The Manila Times.

Guzman added that the laboratory will also resolve the issue of oversupply of vegetables and fruits, such as tomatoes, which have become prevalent over the years.

"How can we help them? We need to increase their income so they have help for their well-being. We just want them to be capable and productive," Guzman added.

The laboratory is equipped with technologies that would make it capable of testing Crude Fat Analysis, Crude Protein Analysis, Crude Fiber Analysis, Moisture Content Determination, and Ash Content Determination, among others.

To start off the laboratory's work, 12 local food researchers from the Cagayan Valley will now work to develop seven food products, including the creation of surimi paste made from fish, dairy-free yogurt using coconut milk, and coconut jam using coconut embryo.

Twenty-three food products developed by MSMEs are now also undergoing rigorous quality and safety testing using the laboratory, Guzman said that students of food courses at the CSU will also benefit from the laboratory.

"Since we have degree courses, and we have on the job training, we can cater to students instead of going outside to experience these things. We can [allow them to experience] these things as well," Guzman said.

Raquel Santos, senior science research specialist at DOST Region 2, said that they will continue to assist the CSU in the laboratory, especially in the testing of food products which could lead to the opening of Cagayan Valley delicacies to the export market.

"This is the start to assist all those students, researchers and MSMEs in the region," Santos, who represented DOST Region 2 Director Dr. Virginia Bilgera, said.

DOST-PCIEERD Executive Director Dr. Enrico Paringit said that the laboratory marks a "significant step toward strengthening food research and innovation in Region 2, ensuring that the food products developed in this region meet the highest standards of quality and safety."

"Through this initiative, we are enabling researchers, students, and local businesses to conduct essential food analyses without the need to send samples to distant laboratories. This means faster, more cost-effective, and more accessible food safety testing, which is crucial for product development, market competitiveness, and consumer protection," Paringit said.

The laboratory is part of the 58 Institution Development Program (IDP) laboratories established by the PCIEERD across 17 regions in the country, **with a total investment of P297 million.**

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/03/17/regions/first-food-quality-laboratory-in-cagayan-valley-inaugurated/2074013>

# Paddy rice production seen rising slightly in Q1

Ada Pelonia

March

17,

2025

The country's paddy rice output could increase slightly in the first quarter due to the improvement in yield, according to the results of the Philippine Statistics Authority's (PSA) standing crops survey.

In its report, the statistics agency said palay harvest may go up by 0.7 percent to 4.72 million metric tons (MMT) in January to March from 4.69 MMT last year despite the reduction in harvest area.

"The yield per hectare of palay based on standing crop for the period of January to March 2025 may increase to 4.11 metric tons or by 3.0 percent from the previous year's same period yield per hectare of 3.99 metric tons."

However, the latest production forecast is 0.5 percent lower than the agency's initial estimate of 4.74 MMT.

PSA said total palay harvest area in the first quarter may shrink by 2.3 percent to 1.15 million hectares (ha) from the 1.17 million ha recorded in the same period last year.

As of February 1, PSA said about 287,600 hectares or 25.1 percent of the 1.15 million hectares updated harvest area of standing crop have been harvested. This translates to palay output of 1.17 million metric tons.

"Of the total area of 860,010 hectares of standing palay yet to be harvested as of 01 February 2025, 5.1 percent were at the vegetative stage, 52.0 percent at the reproductive stage, and 42.9 percent were at the maturing stage."

Industry sources said palay output will rebound this year on the back of improved weather conditions, with the Department of Agriculture targeting to harvest 20.46 MMT this year.

The country's paddy rice output reached 19.09 MMT last year, 4.85 percent lower than the record harvest of 20.06 MMT in 2023.

Corn forecast

Meanwhile, the PSA expects corn output in the first quarter to drop by 7 percent to 2.35 MMT from the actual output of 2.53 MMT in the previous year.

The latest forecast is 1.7 percent lower than its previous outlook of 2.4 MMT.

The harvest area during the period was expected to contract by 8.8 percent to 643,150 ha from the 705,520 ha recorded in the previous year while yield per hectare may grow by 2 percent to 3.66 MT from 3.59 MT.

"As of 01 February 2025, about 193,910 hectares or 30.2 percent of the 643,150 hectares updated harvest area of standing corn have been harvested, translating to a 663,950 metric tons of corn output," the PSA said.

"Of the total area of 449,230 hectares of standing corn yet to be harvested as of 01 February 2025, about 3.1 percent were at the vegetative stage, 45.4 percent at the reproductive stage, and 51.5 percent at the maturing stage."

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/03/17/paddy-rice-production-seen-rising-slightly-in-q1/>

## **BUSINESS MIRROR:**

# **Indonesia's cocoa farmers work with businesses to fight the bitter impact of climate change**

The Associated Press  
March 17, 2025

Tanjung Rejo, Indonesia—The loud whirr of a chainsaw sounds through the forest as a small group of farmers gathers around a tree filled with red seed pods. With one slow stroke, a severed knobby branch hits the ground.

“Now it will help the tree grow new fruit,” farmer Tari Santoso says with a smile.

Thousands of cocoa farmers across Indonesia like Santoso are working with businesses and other organizations to protect their crops from the bitter impacts of climate change and underinvestment that have pushed cocoa prices to record levels.

Cocoa trees are high maintenance: Grown only near the equator, they require a precise combination of steady temperatures, humidity and sunlight. It takes five years for a tree to start producing the seeds that are processed into cocoa used to make chocolate and other delectable foods.

Climate change raises the risks for farmers: Hotter weather hurts yields and longer rainy seasons trigger the spread of fungus and deadly pests. Increasingly unpredictable weather patterns have made it harder for farmers to deal with those challenges.

So farmers are switching to other crops, further reducing cocoa supplies and pushing prices higher: In 2024, prices nearly tripled, reaching about US\$12,000 per ton, driving up chocolate costs and leading some chocolate makers to try growing cocoa in laboratories.

Indonesia is the third-largest producer of cocoa in the world, behind Cote D'Ivoire and Ghana, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, farmers are joining with businesses and nongovernmental organizations to develop better growing practices and improve their livelihoods.

Sitting in the shade of his forest farm in south Sumatra, 3 miles (5 kilometers) from a national park where Sumatran tigers and rhinos roam, farmer Santoso is working with Indonesian chocolate maker Krakakoa.

After he began working with the company in 2016, Santoso starting using practices that helped his cocoa trees flourish, regularly pruning and grafting new branches onto older trees to promote growth and prevent the spread of disease. He is using organic fertilizer and has adopted agroforestry techniques, integrating other crops and trees such as bananas, dragon fruit, coffee and pepper, into his farm to foster a healthier ecosystem and invest in other income sources.

“It wasn't very successful before we met Krakakoa,” Santoso said. “But then, we received training...things are much better.”

Krakakoa has trained more than 1,000 cocoa farmers in Indonesia according to its founder and CEO, Sabrina Mustopo. The company also provides financial support.

Santoso and other farmers in Sumatra said the partnership helped them to form a cooperative provides low-interest loans to farmers, with interest paid back into the cooperative rather than to banks outside of the community.

Cocoa farmers who need bigger loans from government-owned banks also benefit from partnering with businesses, as the guaranteed buyer agreements can provide collateral needed to get loans approved, said Armin Hari, a communications manager at the Cocoa Sustainability Partnership, a forum for public-private collaboration for cocoa development in Indonesia.

Dozens of other businesses, the government and nongovernmental organizations and cooperatives are also working with cocoa farmers to better cope with climate change, benefiting thousands, Hari said. He pointed to a collaboration between Indonesia's National Research and Innovation Agency and the local division of international chocolate maker Mars, which have released a new variant of cocoa that produces more pods per tree.

Challenges still remain, said Rajendra Aryal, the FAO's country director for Indonesia. Fewer people see cocoa farming as a lucrative business and instead are planting other crops such as palm oil. And many small-scale farmers still cannot get loans, he said.

But Aryal said he hopes that continued collaboration between farmers and others will help.

"If we can look at the major issues these (farmers) are facing ... I think this sector could be, again, very attractive to the farmers," he said. "Despite the challenges in Indonesia, I see that there are opportunities."

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/03/17/indonesias-cocoa-farmers-work-with-businesses-to-fight-the-bitter-impact-of-climate-change/>



## **MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT:**

# **DA eyes imported rice retail price at P45/kg by March 31**

**By** *Jed Macapagal*

March 17, 2025

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it may further lower the maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) for imported rice to P45 per kg by the end of March from the current P49 per kg.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said in a statement on Sunday the move would depend on a continued decline in global rice prices, among other factors.

“If the current trend in world rice prices persists and the peso remains strong, we might lower the MSRP for imported rice to around P45 per kg by March 31,” he said.

The landed cost of good-quality rice variety from Vietnam with 5 percent broken grains, is now at around \$490 per metric ton (MT), which is more than \$200 lower than the November 2024 price and about \$80 less than early-January prices, Tiu Laurel said.

DA added that the Philippine peso regained strength in early March after trading above P58 against the US dollar since November, and is now in the P57-range. It hit P57.225 per US dollar on March 11, though by March 14, the peso has lost some steam to P57.32 against the US dollar.

The agency said the implementation of the rice MSRP has resulted in sharp reduction in prices without significantly disrupting the rice industry. It was first implemented at P58 per kg last February and then reduced gradually until it reached the current P49 per kg on March 1. The DA recalled that before it introduced the rice MSRP, imported rice with 5 percent broken grains was being retailed at about P64 per kg, despite softer global prices, tariff reductions and a stronger peso.

Tiu Laurel also said that falling rice prices and lower tariffs would not impact the P30-billion annual budget allocated to the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (RCEF), which supports local rice farmers under the amended Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).

The DA said that during deliberations for the updated RTL, the government ensured there would be a provision to sustain the RCEF through the General Appropriations Act starting in 2026 until 2031.

‘Cautious’ welcome to MSRP

Meanwhile, local agriculture stakeholders welcomed the drop in retail prices brought by the rice MSRP but expressed fears that it may pull down the prices of locally produced rice in the current harvest season as well.

Raul Montemayor, the Federation of Free Farmers national manager, described the projected P45-rice MSRP as “very doable” as early as February, with current international market price trends, but emphasized that it could pull down local palay prices. “Problem is that as they lower rice prices, palay prices go down also,” Montemayor said.

Danilo Fausto, president of the Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. president, said the DA should consider postponing any further reduction in imported rice MSRP during the harvest season, as it could reduce the income of local palay farmers.

“I just pray that he (Tiu Laurel) delay this plan for another month or two in order not to coincide with the rice harvest since the planned MSRP is affecting the farm gate price of palay currently being harvested which can go even below the cost to produce per kg of palay,” Fausto explained.

“The dry production period usually produces good harvest and if the farm gate price is depressed, the rice farmers may not be able to recover for the next wet season since wet season cropping usually produces 30 percent to 50 percent less vs dry cropping period,” Fausto added.

Jayson Cainglet, executive director of the Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura, said imported rice should have been sold to the public as early as last November, when the landed cost of imported rice then, was already at P35 per kg.

Cainglet added that the continued imposition of the MSRP and the mandate of the National Food Authority to sell its rice stocks to local government units under the state-declared food security emergency, are also grounds for the government to reinstate higher rice tariffs.

Latest data from the Bureau of Plant Industry show that as much as 579,055.808 MT of imported rice have arrived in the country as of March 6, 2025.

Bulk of the imported rice supply came from Vietnam at 440,207.42 MT, equivalent to 76 percent of all shipments for the period.

Based on DA's monitoring of public markets in the National Capital Region, local well-milled rice sold for P42 to P52 per kg on Thursday (March 13) while regular milled rice went for P33 to P48 per kg.

Imported well-milled rice was selling for P44 to P46 per kg while the prices of imported regular milled rice ranged from P33 to P45 per kg.

Special-variety imported rice fetched P51 to P60 per kg. and premium rice, sold for P46 to P55.

Special- variety local rice was selling for P55 to P63 per kg while premium rice went for P45 to P60 per kg.

<https://malaya.com.ph/business/corporate/da-eyes-imported-rice-retail-price-at-p45-kg-by-march-31/>

## MANILA BUSINESS INSIGHT:

# Meat imports up 50% yr-on-yr in Jan

March 17, 2025

The total volume of meat imports in the country surged by 50 percent year-on-year in January this year, data from the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) showed.

The Philippines imported 137.9 million kg of meat in the first month of the year, a huge increase from 92.02 million kg imported in January 2024, the bureau said,

Meat imports for January 2025 were also 17.2 percent higher than December 2024's 117.77 million kg.

Pork made up the bulk of imports for January 2025, at 70.45 million kg, or 51.1 percent of all meat that entered the country during the month. By comparison, pork imports rose by 65.3-percent from the 42.61 million kg imported in the comparative year-earlier period.

Chicken followed with 45.63 million kg, or 33.1 percent of all imported meat in January 2025. Chicken imports for the period rose by 48.1 percent from January 2024's 30.8 million kg.

Beef imports for January 2025 reached 19.9 million kg or 14.4 percent of all meat imports in the period, the BAI report said. The volume was 51 percent more than the 13.18 million kg of beef imports in January 2024.

Lamb imports in January 2025 were at 65,249 kg, up by 40.28 percent from January 2024's 46,515 kg.

Some types of meat imports went down. The Philippines imported 1.93 million kg of buffalo for the period, a 63.2 percent slump from January 2024's 5.24 million kg, while turkey imports plummeted by 94.2 percent to 7,500 kg from January 2024's 130,318 kg. Duck imports only reached 18,544 kg, a dip by 25.3 percent from January 2024's 24,835 kg.

Jess Cham, president emeritus of the Meat Importers and Traders Association, said over the weekend the country will continue to rely mainly on meat imports especially for pork, unless local producers can recover their production levels amid the threat of African swine fever.

“The high price of local pork has pushed the consumer to chicken, which is lower priced, and beef, which is now slightly higher priced compared to the past. This accounts for the increased volume of these proteins. DA forecast a pork production of 1.15 million tons in 2025. Even so, it is a far cry from the 2019 peak. Unless the hog industry can return to the previous production level and at competitive pricing, imports will continue to grow,” Cham said. The Philippine pork production in 2019 reached 2.3 million tons or 2.3 billion kilograms.

<https://malaya.com.ph/business/corporate/meat-imports-up-50-yr-on-yr-in-jan/>

**ABANTE TONITE:**

# **Romualdez bilib sa biofertilizer ng mga Pinoy scientist sa UPLB**

**March 16, 2025**

Kumpiyansa si Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez na mapapababa ng lokal na produksyon ng biological fertilizers ang presyo ng pagkain kasabay ng pagtaas ng kita ng mga magsasaka.

Sa inagurasyon ng Bio N fertilizer plant ng Agri Specialist Inc. sa Sta. Rosa, Laguna nitong Linggo, Marso 15, sinabi ni Romualdez na ang lokal na produksyon ng pataba ay maituturing na game changer sa sektor ng agrikultura na magpapaliit sa gastos ng mga magsasaka sa pagtatanim, magpapatatag sa suplay ng pagkain, at magbibigay ng magandang hinaharap sa bansa.

“This means: Mas murang abono para sa ating mga magsasaka. Mas maraming ani, mas mataas ang kita. Mas masustansya at mas abot-kayang pagkain para sa bawat Pilipino,” sabi ni Romualdez.

Ang Bio N fertilizer, na gawa ng mga Pinoy scientist mula sa University of the Philippines (UP) Los Baños ay naglalayong mabawasan ang pagiging dependent ng Pilipinas sa mga imported na chemical fertilizer, magpapaganda sa kalusugan ng lupa at magpapababa ng gastos sa produksyon ng pagkain.

“Every sack of rice, every ear of corn, every vegetable on our tables comes from the sweat and sacrifice of our farmers. But if they are struggling with high costs and low yields, we all feel the impact—sa presyo ng pagkain, sa gastusin ng pamilya, sa kabuhayan ng buong bansa,” dagdag pa ni Romualdez.

Sinabi ng lider ng Kamara na ang pagbubukas ng fertilizer plant ay nakalinya sa pagnanais ni Pangulong Ferdinand `Bongbong’ Marcos Jr. na makalaya ang bansa sa mahal na imported na abono.

Ang planta, na mayroong state-of-the-art bioreactors, automatic packaging systems, at microbiology research lab, ay kayang gumawa ng 7,000 metriko tonelada ng Bio N kada taon, na sapat para sa pangangailangan ng mga magsasaka ng palay at mais sa buong bansa.

“One of the most important things about this initiative is that it is 100% Proudly Filipino,” ayon kay Romualdez. “This project is a bold step forward. But we cannot stop here. We must continue investing in innovation, research, and real solutions that uplift our farmers and strengthen our agriculture sector.”

Nanawagan din si Romualdez sa mga policymaker at mga negosyante na mag-invest upang mas tumatag ang sektor ng agrikultura na mahalaga sa pagpapaunlad ng bansa. (Billy Begas)

<https://tonite.abante.com.ph/2025/03/16/romualdez-bilib-sa-biofertilizer-ng-mga-pinoy-scientist-sa-uplb/>