

CLIPPINGS FOR TODAY MARCH 20, 2025

A. MANILA BULLETIN:

DA introduces standardized criteria for project evaluation in multi-year budget

‘Bawal ang manloloko!’: Valenzuela LGU cracks down on vendors using tampered weighing scales

DepEd advocates stronger support for farm schools

B. THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Number of ASF-affected barangays declining – DA

P62/kilo rice sold in Valenzuela

C. PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

DA expects FDA go-ahead for hog vaccines in April

Rice imports down on MSRP jolt, local gains

D. BUSINESS WORLD:

Rice imports fall 46% as MSRP, food emergency deter traders

April commercial release targeted for ASF vaccine from Vietnam

E. REMATE:

Mababang presyo ng palay sa Cagayan ‘di dahil sa importasyon – Malakanyang

DA: Mga barangay na sapul ng ASF, kumonti

F. ABANTE:

Apektadong barangay sa ASF nabawasan – DA

G. PEOPLE’S JOURNAL:

SEARCA Photo Contest winners showcase carbon-neutral farming

H. MANILA STANDARD:

The Department of ‘Importation’

I. THE MANILA TIMES:

Swine fever cases fall to 39 as of mid-March

Group to invest P260M for coffee industry

Searca champions carbon-smart agriculture

Bacarra tobacco farmers get assistance

J. BUSINESS MIRROR:

Lower global rice quotations a challenge to local farmers

NFA: Paddy rice purchases surge in January

Ex-senator plans to expand tomato procurement program

DA: New budget process aims to transform agri sector

K. MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT:

NEDA Board approves P70.6B irrigation, 'community resilience' projects

Hog, rice local production seen improving this yr

DA to formulate criteria-based multi-yr budget planning

MANILA BULLETIN:

DA introduces standardized criteria for project evaluation in multi-year budget

BY [DEXTER BARRO II](#)

Mar 19, 2025 03:53 PM



The Department of Agriculture (DA) will introduce a standardized set of criteria within its multi-year budget planning process to attain efficiency in allocating resources for projects aimed at enhancing the agriculture and fisheries sector.

The criteria system seeks to evaluate programs, activities, and projects based on their respective contributions to achieving the agency's long-term goals.

Under the new policy, projects under the DA must be aligned to critical areas such as poverty reduction, enhancing nutrition, and sustainable economic growth.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, in particular, stressed the need to assess if said projects could help reduce dependency on food imports.

Laurel added that the "cornerstone" of the criteria is to ensure a more equitable environment for farmers and fisherfolk, thereby improving their income and overall welfare.

"Through this initiative, we aim to maximize the benefits of our investments to ensure food security for the nation and uplift the lives of our rural heroes—our farmers and fisherfolk," he said.

Under the national budget this year, the DA received an allocation of ₱237.4 billion.

While its 2025 budget is an increase from three proposed ₱211.3 billion, this is a massive decrease from the department's initial request of ₱513 billion.

Given these limited resources, Laurel said evaluation on programs and their budget will also focus on cost efficiency and feasibility.

He called on the agency's officials to abandon the "business-as-usual" approach and pursue initiatives that will transform agriculture.

"Through careful planning and focused execution, the department is committed to building a stronger, more sustainable, and resilient agricultural economy for future generations," noted Laurel.

The DA's new budget planning scheme is aligned with the Marcos administration's goal of reducing the country's poverty rate from 18 percent to nine percent by 2028.

In this context, the criteria system not only strives to foster efficient resource allocation but also as tool to drive the government's goals forward.

<https://mb.com.ph/2025/3/19/da-implements-criteria-system-to-maximize-budget>

MANILA BULLETIN:

‘Bawal ang manloloko!’: Valenzuela LGU cracks down on vendors using tampered weighing scales

BY [HANNAH NICOL](#)

Mar 19, 2025 02:55 PM

The Valenzuela City government will relentlessly pursue market vendors who continue to use tampered weighing scales and who are not complying with regulations on measuring devices.



Confiscated weighing scales from market violators (Photos from Valenzuela PIO)

In a forum at the 3S Center in Marulas City, Mayor Weslie “WES” Gatchalian, along with Committee Chairman on Market and Slaughterhouse Councilor Ghogo Deato Lee and Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Fair Trade Enforcement Bureau representative Joel Buag, discussed the New Market Code Ordinance and emphasized penalties for non-compliant vendors, which range from P5,000 to P15,000 for those using tampered or unauthorized weighing devices.

Buag also explained Republic Act 11706 (Timbangan ng Bayan), which was authored by Mayor WES Gatchalian during his term as congressman.

Gatchalian urged vendors to uphold fair trade practices and said that Valenzuela should serve as a model city for compliance.

“Ipinaglaban ko po iyan (Timbangan ng Bayan) hindi lang para sa Valenzuela kundi para sa buong Pilipinas.... Sana po, bilang dito po ako nanunungkulan at nakatira (sa Valenzuela) sana dito natin maging example na maganda sa Valenzuela (I fought for that (Timbangan ng Bayan) not just for Valenzuela but for the entire Philippines... I hope that since I serve and live here in Valenzuela, we can set an example of how well it can be implemented in our city),” he said.

According to the city’s Public Information Office (PIO), 74 non-compliant weighing scales were confiscated from various markets in the city during the Operation Timbangan conducted by the city’s Treasurer’s Office, LEDIPO, and Consumer Welfare Unit on March 17 to 18. Owners must pay penalties, recalibrate scales, and secure a seal before retrieving them.

Gatchalian personally conducted a surprise inspection at the Marulas Public Market to check rice retailers' compliance with the Department of Agriculture's MSRP directive, which sets the price of imported rice (5 percent broken) at P49.00 per kilo.

The local government announced that it will start selling NFA rice at a maximum of 10 kilograms per consumer starting next week. Around 1,000 to 3,000 kilograms will be sold in selected 3S Centers in Valenzuela City.

Also present at the event were DTI Consumer Protection and Advocacy Bureau representative Carlina Josue, LEDIPO Officer-in-Charge Janina Bautista, City Treasurer Adelia Soriano, and Marulas Barangay Chairman Cocoy Espino.

The local government remains committed to enforcing consumer protection laws and urged vendors to comply to avoid penalties, ensuring fair and transparent market transactions for all Valenzuelanos.

<https://mb.com.ph/2025/3/19/bawal-ang-manloloko-valenzuela-lgu-cracks-down-on-vendors-using-tampered-weighing-scales>

MANILA BULLETIN:

DepEd advocates stronger support for farm schools

BY [MERLINA HERNANDO-MALIPOT](#)

Mar 19, 2025 08:14 PM

Highlighting their importance in equipping rural students with essential skills in agriculture and agribusiness, Department of Education (DepEd) Secretary Sonny Angara has urged greater support for the country's farm schools.



(Photo from DepEd)

In a statement issued Wednesday, March 19, DepEd said Angara calls for better support for farm schools as these institutions play a crucial role in advancing President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s vision for food security and economic development.

“They have the land to cultivate, and they operate like a farm while still being a school,” Angara said on the sidelines of the historic joint management committee meeting of DepEd and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) in Bacolod.

“This is an essential lesson for our senior high school students because we want to teach them entrepreneurship, accounting, and business skills,” he added.

DepEd noted that under Republic Act 10618, farm schools provide agricultural training, technical skills, and entrepreneurship education, particularly in rural areas.

During his visit to Ramon Torres Malingin Farm School, Angara praised its upgraded facilities—including newly built kubo lounging areas and its pioneering PAAWASAN Water Filtration System, which addresses both sanitation and irrigation needs.

DepEd said the school currently serves 117 students under three dedicated teachers.

Meanwhile, DepEd officials also visited Cansilayan Farm School, one of 26 pioneering farm schools in Western Visayas and the only one in Negros Occidental implementing the Farm School Program.

Strengthening education-industry linkages

To further strengthen education-industry linkages, Angara also visited Victorias National High School, Ramon Torres Farm School, VMA Global College and Training Center, Vallacar Transit and Ceres Bus, and Peñalosa Farm.

These institutions, DepEd said, engage in Senior High School (SHS) Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) programs that provide students with real-world skills and job opportunities.

Moreover, DepEd monitored the situation at Alicante Day Care Center, where discussions are ongoing on a joint DepEd-DBM-EDCOM initiative to build more Child Development Centers, reinforcing the agency's broader push for early investments in education.

Focusing on farm schools, industry partnerships, and crisis preparedness, Angara reaffirmed DepEd's commitment to expanding career pathways and boosting education's role in national development.

Mt. Kanlaon situation

Meanwhile, Angara visited La Granja Elementary School and Yubo Elementary School in La Carlota City to assess the impact of the Mt. Kanlaon eruption on affected schools.

DepEd data showed that as of March 14, a total of 11,177 learners and 441 personnel from 11 schools have been affected by the Mt. Kanlaon eruption.

Angara assured that DepEd is continuously updating its Contingency Plan and Emergency Response Preparedness to address any further escalation of the situation.

<https://mb.com.ph/2025/3/19/dep-ed-advocates-stronger-support-for-farm-schools>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Number of ASF-affected barangays declining – DA

Bella Cariaso - The Philippine Star

March 20, 2025 | 12:00a



DA spokesman Arnel de Mesa attributed the decline in the cases to the active participation of stakeholders in efforts to control the spread of ASF and improve biosecurity.

AFP / File

MANILA, Philippines — The number of barangays that reported cases of African swine fever (ASF) has decreased to 39 from 66 previously, according to the Department of Agriculture.

DA spokesman Arnel de Mesa attributed the decline in the cases to the active participation of stakeholders in efforts to control the spread of ASF and improve biosecurity.

“As of March 14, the number of barangays with active ASF cases went down to 39, covering 27 municipalities in seven regions. Most of the cases are in Western Visayas, particularly Bohol,” De Mesa said.

He said the outbreak in Calabarzon, particularly in Sta. Maria, Laguna, has been addressed.

De Mesa said the number of barangays that recorded ASF cases peaked to 500 in August last year, following an outbreak in Batangas.

“There are no ASF cases in Batangas now. The last case reported was in Laguna, but it has been controlled,” he said.

Noting this development, De Mesa said the controlled vaccination against the virus was proven successful based on an initial report of the Bureau of Animal Industry.

“The BAI report showed at least 29 hog farmers participated in the controlled ASF vaccination and 28,000 of 160,000 vaccine doses were used during the immunization campaign,” De Mesa noted.

Of the 27,937 hogs inoculated with ASF vaccine, only 51 died.

“We are still waiting for the final report of the BAI. Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. has asked the Food and Drug Administration to approve the commercial rollout of ASF vaccine from Vietnam by April,” De Mesa said.

<https://www.philstar.com/nation/2025/03/20/2429630/number-asf-affected-barangays-declining-da>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

P62/kilo rice sold in Valenzuela

EJ Macababba - The Philippine Star

March 20, 2025 | 12:00am



“When I asked my team to inspect markets in Barangay Malanday, Dalandanan and Karuhatan, only in Marulas did they find P62 per kilo of rice,” Mayor Wes Gatchalian told reporters yesterday.

STAR / File

MANILA, Philippines — A wet market in Valenzuela is selling imported rice labeled “President” at P62 per kilo, far beyond the maximum suggested retail price (SRP) of P49 per kilo.

“When I asked my team to inspect markets in Barangay Malanday, Dalandanan and Karuhatan, only in Marulas did they find P62 per kilo of rice,” Mayor Wes Gatchalian told reporters yesterday.

“Together with the Department of Agriculture (DA), we will investigate why this overpriced rice is being sold in Marulas,” Gatchalian added.

Vendors selling the rice will remain in business until the city government receives a directive from the DA, he noted.

Gatchalian said the rice could have come from Chinese suppliers.

The rice max SRP will further drop to P45 on March 31, according to the DA.

Meanwhile, over 100 defective, unsealed and uncalibrated weighing scales were confiscated in Barangay Marulas.

Some vendors got back their weighing scales after paying P5,000.

<https://www.philstar.com/nation/2025/03/20/2429684/p62kilo-rice-sold-valenzuela>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

DA expects FDA go-ahead for hog vaccines in April

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

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 02:12 AM March 20, 2025



Live hogs from South Cotabato, Mindanao region RICHARD A. REYES / INQUIRER

MANILA, Philippines — The Department of Agriculture (DA) hopes to secure the approval of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) by next month for the commercial rollout of African swine fever (ASF) vaccines from Vietnam in a bid to sustain the decline in active cases.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said in an interview on Wednesday that the vaccines “should have commercial approval from the FDA within April.”

Citing initial reports that the DA received on the government-controlled vaccination, de Mesa said the ASF vaccines from Vietnam are effective as most vaccinated pigs are healthy.

De Mesa, also the DA’s spokesperson, said 29,000 out of 160,000 available doses of ASF vaccines have been administered, including 10,000 doses acquired by the government via emergency procurement.

The biggest part of the supply was administered to hogs located in Lobo and Lipa towns in Batangas as well as in Bulacan, Tarlac and Laguna.

De Mesa also said that among 29 farms that participated in the government’s vaccination drive, only 51 inoculated hogs had died.

The DA initiated the drive in August last year, about five years after recording the first ASF outbreak in 2019 that resulted in billions of pesos in losses and substantial reduction of the local swine population.

Despite this, the number of communities with active ASF cases declined to 39 barangays in 13 provinces based on the Bureau of Animal Industry's (BAI) tally as of March 14.

This was lower than active cases recorded in 66 barangays in 18 provinces as of Feb. 28.

The BAI's latest report noted that most ASF cases are concentrated in Central Visayas, particularly Bohol. De Mesa said new cases have been recorded in Laguna, although pigs in the area have already been quarantined while ASF-positive pigs have been culled.

"The good thing here is that the numbers are very good, the number of active cases is going down. And then, these are very significant drops in the number of affected barangays," he added.

Aside from the controlled vaccination of hogs, the DA has updated various policies to govern the movement of pigs and instituted strict border checkpoints as part of wider efforts to control the spread of ASF.

<https://business.inquirer.net/513881/da-expects-fda-go-ahead-for-hog-vaccines-in-april>

Rice imports down on MSRP jolt, local gains

By: [Jordeene B. Lagare](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)
[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 02:22 AM March 20, 2025



Department of Agriculture (DA) Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa at an interview on Wednesday. Photo by Jordeene B. Lagare

MANILA, Philippines — The Department of Agriculture (DA) said importers have reduced their overseas rice purchases in anticipation of a better local harvest, but a group also believes a recent decision to put a price cap on imports could have alarmed businessmen.

Rice imports that entered the country totaled 640,915.708 metric tons (MT) as of March 13, data from the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) showed.

The volume was almost 46 percent lower than the 1.19 million MT of imported rice bought by traders between January and March last year.

“This means that a large volume of imported rice entered the country last year, plus the expectation that this year’s harvest will improve. We can see that importation is adjusting,” Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa said in an interview on Wednesday.

Federation of Free Farmers national manager Raul Montemayor attributed the slowdown to importers backpedaling after the DA set the maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) for imported rice.

The agency introduced the MSRP for imported premium rice on Jan. 20 as one of its strategies to lower retail prices of the staple food. It hinted at lowering the price ceiling to P45 per kilogram by end-March from the current P49 per kg depending on market conditions.

“The declaration of a food security emergency could have also spooked importers because under the [Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act], the government can embargo stocks on the mere suspicion of smuggling, hoarding or profiteering,” Montemayor told the Inquirer in a Viber message.

“There could also be residual stocks from 2024 imports,” he added. The country’s rice imports peaked at 4.8 million MT last year, up by 33.3 percent from 3.6 million MT in 2023.

Vietnam remains the leading source of imported rice, accounting for more than one-third of the total. Pakistan and Thailand came next with a market share of about 10 percent each.

Montemayor, however, sees rice imports declining this year, although he said it would remain at the 4 million MT level.

“Demand is still outpacing local production, thus requiring imports,” he added.

Samarendu Mohanty, Asia regional director at International Potato Center, said the Philippines’ import requirements have become more predictable and rational, adding that “price speculation has diminished across the region.”

Mohanty, an Indian-American agricultural economist, highlighted the Philippines’ price cap and India’s decision to lift rice export restrictions that resulted in world rice prices decreasing by 18 percent after reaching recent record highs.

“These concurrent policy changes created a perfect storm that ultimately stabilized and transformed rice markets worldwide,” Mohanty said.

He also said the country’s approach of targeting unnecessary artificial demand fueled by speculation and hoarding created a ripple effect across rice markets in Asia.

“The Philippines had long struggled with rice price volatility, with urban consumers often paying significant premiums due to supply chain inefficiencies and market manipulation,” he added.

<https://business.inquirer.net/513890/rice-imports-down-on-msrp-jolt-local-gains>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Rice imports fall 46% as MSRP, food emergency deter traders

March 19, 2025 | 8:38 pm



BW FILE PHOTO

RICE IMPORTS fell 46% year on year to 641,000 metric tons (MT) in the year to date ending March 13, which industry representatives attributed to trader reluctance to import in the face of a maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) scheme.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel V. de Mesa said at a briefing that 96,260 MT of the shipments arrived in March, 267,114 in February, and 277,540 in January.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said the equivalent year-earlier volumes are 429,260 MT in January 2024, 341,585 in February 2024, and 415,764 in March 2024.

Federation of Free Farmers Director Raul Q. Montemayor said the imposition of the MSRP in January may have caused the significant decline in imports.

The DA first implemented the MSRP for imported rice on Jan. 20, setting it initially at P58 per kilo. It has since been lowered to P52 on Feb. 15, and to P49 on March 1.

The DA over the weekend said 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 kilo by March 31.”

“Importers may be hedging and adopting a wait and see stance because of the successive decline in the MSRP,” Mr. Montemayor said.

“There could also still be residual stocks from 2024 imports,” he added.

He said the declaration of a food security emergency could have also spooked importers because under a 2024 anti-agricultural economic sabotage law, “the government can embargo stocks on the mere suspicion of smuggling, hoarding or profiteering.”

Danilo V. Fausto, president of the Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food, said via Viber:

“While rice imports might have decreased, this is still not a welcome development since first quarter is rice harvest season.”

“Any imports during this time will affect palay farmgate prices to the detriment of the rice farmers,” he added.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) recently reported that a kilo of regular-milled rice fetched P46.30 on average at retail in early March, a period it calls the first phase of March, against the last reading of P47.19 a little past mid-February.

“Similarly, this was lower relative to its price level in the first phase of February 2025 at P47.77 per kilogram,” it added.

The farmgate price of palay, or unmilled rice, fell 18.9% year on year in February to an average of P20.29 per kilogram, after rice imports hit record levels last year.

Month on month, the palay farmgate price fell 1.9%, the PSA reported.

Inflation eased to 2.1% in February from 2.9% in January as rice inflation dropped to 4.9%, the sharpest decline since April 2020.

The DA in January said it was expecting the palay harvest to exceed 20 million MT (MMT) this year.

In 2024, rice imports hit a record 4.68 MMT, against 3.6 MMT a year earlier. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/03/19/660470/rice-imports-fall-46-as-msrp-food-emergency-deter-traders/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

April commercial release targeted for ASF vaccine from Vietnam

March 19, 2025 | 8:37 pm



REUTERS

THE Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) said it is working to ensure the commercial release by April of a Vietnamese vaccine against African Swine Fever (ASF).

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel V. de Mesa said at a briefing the possible April timing of vaccines for the commercial market will ensure that supply will be adequate even before the vaccine stocks procured by the government for a test rollout are exhausted.

The utilization rate for the 160,000 doses procured by the government is currently 17.46%. They were administered at 29 farms identified as ASF hotspots.

Mr. De Mesa said based on initial data, the ASF vaccine has been effective, with only 51 deaths recorded among inoculated hogs.

He said Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. had asked the BAI to ensure that commercial approval of the vaccine is issued by the Food and Drug Administration by April.

Citing conversations with members of the hog industry, Mr. De Mesa said growers expect a “significant rebound” this year.

He said an April release should mitigate seasonal increases in ASF cases in the latter half of the year.

The hog population has fallen to nine million from 15 million since ASF was first detected in 2019, he noted.

As of March 14, there were 39 barangays in 13 provinces and 27 cities and municipalities affected by ASF, according to the BAI. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/03/19/660469/april-commercial-release-targeted-for-asf-vaccine-from-vietnam/>

REMATE:

Mababang presyo ng palay sa Cagayan ‘di dahil sa importasyon – Malakanyang

March 19, 2025 15:01



MANILA, Philippines – PINABULAANAN ng Malakanyang na ang ‘rice importation’ ang dahilan ng mababang presyo ng palay sa Cagayan.

Sinabi ni Palace Press Officer at Communications Undersecretary Claire Castro, ayon kay Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, ang mababang presyo ng palay sa naturang lalawigan ay dahil sa local traders, na direktang bumibili ng palay mula sa mga magsasaka.

“Base po sa records – nakausap po natin si Secretary Kiko Laurel – base po sa records po, mababa po ang importasyon natin. At hindi po totoo na dahilan po ito, iyong pagbaba po ng pagbibili sa mga magsasaka— bumababa ang bili ng palay, hindi po dahil sa importasyon,” ang sinabi ni Castro.

Ang hinala ni Tiu Laurel, ang mga local traders ang dapat na sisihin.

“[M]alamang po – ang sabi sa akin ni Secretary Kiko – ang namamayagpag po dito iyong mga local traders,” aniya pa rin.

At upang magawan ng remedyo ang situwasyon, sinabihan ang mga magsasaka na makipag-ugnayan sa kani-kanilang mga local government units (LGU) at direktang ibenta ang kanilang ani sa National Food Authority (NFA) buying station upang maiwasan ang pagdurusa ng pagtapyas na kadalasang ipinapataw sa mga mangangalakal.

“So, ang magiging rekomendasyon po namin ay makipagtulungan po muna iyong mga magsasaka doon sa local government units po para po madala po ito sa NFA buying station; bumibili po ang NFA ng P23 to P24 dry,” ang pahayag ni Castro.

Samantala, hindi naman lingid sa kaalaman ng Malakanyang ang mga hamon na kinahaharap ng mga magsasaka lalo na ang direktang pagbebenta ng kanilang kalakal sa gobyerno ay ‘logistics.’

Ani Castro, kasalukuyan ngayong bumibili ang DA ng mga trak para pahintulutan ang mga magsasaka na direktang magbenta ng kanilang kalakal sa NFA. *Kris Jose*

<https://remate.ph/mababang-presyo-ng-palay-sa-cagayan-di-dahil-sa-importasyon-malakanyang/>

REMATE:

DA: Mga barangay na sapul ng ASF, kumonti

March 19, 2025 08:17



MANILA, Philippines – Iniulat ng Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Animal Industry na bumaba ang bilang ng mga barangay na may kaso ng African swine fever (ASF) mula 68 patungong 66 noong Pebrero 28.

Apektado ang walong rehiyon kabilang ang Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), Ilocos, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol, Central, at Caraga.

Ang karamihan sa 42 apektadong syudad at munisipalidad ay sa Central Visayas, partikular sa Bohol kabilang ang Batuan, Bien Unido, Bilar, Catigbian, Dagohoy, Loon, Panglao, San Miguel, Tagbilaran City, Talibon, Trinidad, at Ubay.

Sa Virac, Catanduanes, may walong barangay na nasa red zone.

Mayroon ding bagong kaso sa Batangas.

Patuloy ang mahigpit na border control, ASF vaccination, at repopulation efforts ng pamahalaan upang matulungan ang mga hog farmer. *Santi Celario*

<https://remate.ph/da-mga-barangay-na-sapul-ng-asf-kumonti/>

ABANTE:

Apektadong barangay sa ASF nabawasan – DA

Abante News

• **March 19, 2025**



MULA sa dating 66, bumaba na lang sa 39 ang bilang ng mga barangay na apektado ng African Swine Fever (ASF) sa bansa.

Ayon kay Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa, nabawasan ang mga barangay sa bansa na naapektuhan ng pagkalat ng ASF mula sa naitala nilang mga kaso noong katapusan ng Pebrero.

Aniya, hanggang noong Marso 14 ay bumaba na lang sa 39 ang mga apektadong barangay na sakop ng 27 munisipalidad at pitong rehiyon, partikular sa Bohol.

Samantala, kinumpirma rin ni De Mesa na may binabantayan silang mga bagong kaso ng ASF sa Region 4A.

Partikular aniya rito ang mga lugar sa Sta. Maria, Laguna.

Gayunman, tiniyak ng opisyal na naka-quarantine na ang mga binabantayang babuyan at kontrolado na rin naman ang sitwasyon sa lugar para hindi na kumalat ang virus sa mga hayop. (Just Ignacio)

<https://www.abante.com.ph/2025/03/19/apektadong-barangay-sa-asf-nabawasan-da/>

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL:

SEARCA Photo Contest winners showcase carbon-neutral farming

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 SEARCA



Brimming with sustainability and innovation, the winning images of the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) Photo Contest 2024 envision a future where farming thrives in harmony with nature.

Launched in November 2024 with the theme “The Future of Farming: Pathways to Carbon-Neutral Agriculture,” the 18th edition of SEARCA’s annual competition awarded Jayson Berto of the Philippines the top prize for his striking photograph of a university student tending a hydroponics tower garden—a resource-efficient urban farming system that maximizes space and conserves water.

“Crop growing is cooler with the hydroponics tower garden of the Central Luzon State University students!” says Berto, alluding to the need to make farming more appealing to the youth.

Major Prizes: Capturing sustainability in action

A total of seven awards were given in the SEARCA Photo Contest 2024, comprising three major prizes and four special recognitions. The winners emerged from a rigorous evaluation process led by experts in sustainable agriculture, ecology, photography, and the creative arts. This year’s competition drew an impressive 653 entries from 166 amateur and professional photographers across eight Southeast Asian countries.

The second prize went to Klienne Eco of the Philippines, whose striking image captured a long stretch of solar panels alongside a lush paddy field. Eco highlighted the significance of solar irrigation technology in advancing Philippine agriculture.

“The development of solar irrigation technology is bringing about a bright future for agriculture in the Philippines. By replacing costly diesel pumps, our objective is to alleviate the financial burden on farmers and promote a more sustainable farming ecosystem,” he shares.

Meanwhile, the third prize was awarded to Mark Lienel Padecio of the Philippines for his symmetrical composition of a container gardening system—an innovative urban gardening approach.

“This method empowers residents to grow their own food at home, ensuring access to fresh produce even amid food shortages,” explains Padecio.

He further emphasizes its environmental impact, noting that repurposing used containers such as plastic bottles, boxes, and old pots helps reduce plastic waste.

Special Awards: Bridging tradition and modern farming

The SEARCA Director's Choice Award was given to Kyaw Zay Yar Lin of Myanmar whose photo showcased duck breeders and fishers using natural and traditional methods to sustain their livelihoods.

Another Myanmar national, Min Min Zaw, earned the Philippine Department of Education Secretary's Special Choice Award for his mesmerizing night fishing scene.

"The seemingly bejeweled spectacle highlights the traditional fishing practice and the deep connection between fishermen, the lake, and the cosmos," he muses.

The People's Choice Award went to Aung Chan Thar of Myanmar whose photo features a vibrant flower farm in Vietnam.

"The intricate network of waterways and floating gardens provides a model for how we can cultivate crops while minimizing our impact on the environment," he shares.

Lastly, Rahmad Himawan of Indonesia was recognized as the Best Youth Photographer for his breathtaking aerial shot of a vast green rice field. Describing the scene, he captions, "The atmosphere and natural beauty of the countryside in the morning, with mountains and rice fields in North Bengkulu Regency, Indonesia."

"These winning entries collectively celebrate sustainable farming practices, technological innovations, and the rich agricultural heritage of Southeast Asia, inspiring a greener and more resilient future for farming," says SEARCA Center Director Dr. Glenn Gregorio.

He adds that the yearly SEARCA Photo Contest is launched with a timely theme, which aims to raise greater awareness on the issues and concerns surrounding agriculture and development in the Southeast Asian region.

Dr. Gregorio explains that the photo contest "curates images from various nations of the 11 countries of the region, showcasing the current situations and trends from food production to food consumption, alongside the living conditions of those involved in the food chain."

The 19th edition of the SEARCA Photo Contest will be launched in September 2025.

https://journal.com.ph/searcha-photo-contest-winners-showcase-carbon-neutral-farming/#goog_rewarded

MANILA STANDARD:

The Department of ‘Importation’

By Florencio Fianza

March 20, 2025, 12:00 am

“Over the years some agencies have become white elephants draining valuable limited government resources”

AFTER the tumultuous political events of last week which is still being played out, maybe we should shift our focus on more mundane things like the costs of the food we eat and the government agency that is supposed to be providing the public with affordable food, the Department of Agriculture.

There has not been any poll taken as far as I know on how the public thinks about the DA but maybe the recent pronouncement of the Ombudsman about the DA and the NFA being the most corrupt agencies of the land could be taken as an indication.

Sure there are other corrupt agencies but for the Ombudsman who does not normally go about making accusations to specifically single out these two agencies, the accusation is very telling.

Where in the world could we find onions or tomatoes costing up to P650 and P450 a kilo respectively?

The prices have nothing to do with the law of supply and demand but because of syndicates perhaps with the most likely connivance of some DA officials, the prices cannot be brought down so easily. What other explanation could there be?

This goes with the prices of other food commodities such as rice, meat, fish and other foodstuffs.

All it takes is a rumor or a forecast by a DA official in an interview and before we know the unit price of a food item suddenly goes up.

PBBM since the beginning of the year has started to replace some members of his Cabinet but he should also consider abolishing some agencies or at the very least downsize them to the barest minimum to save money.

Over the years some agencies have become white elephants draining valuable limited government resources.

Perhaps, it is time to emulate the United States and drastically reduce our bloated bureaucracy.

But we should do it minus the chaos by planning it thoroughly to avoid the mistakes being committed by the US Department of Government Efficiency or DOGE.

That way, our national budget will only be equivalent to what we earn and not have to borrow year in and year out to finance huge budget deficits which in 2024 alone was equivalent to 5.7 per cent of our GDP. No government can sustain that kind of borrowing.

The question now is which of the agencies should be abolished or downsized.

<https://manilastandard.net/opinion/314570538/the-department-of-importation.html>

THE MANILA TIMES:

Swine fever cases fall to 39 as of mid-March

By Giselle P. Jordan

March 20, 2025

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) on Wednesday reported that cases of African swine fever (ASF) in the Philippines decreased from 66 in late February to 39 as of March 14.

The 39 cases are spread across 27 municipalities and seven regions — mostly in Region 7, particularly in Bohol.

According to DA spokesman Arnel de Mesa, the decrease in cases — from a peak of 500 in 2024 — can be attributed to the active participation of stakeholders to contain ASF through improved biosecurity and vaccination.

The ASF vaccine has been proven effective, de Mesa said, based on initial reports on completed and ongoing vaccinations, mostly in Central and Southern Luzon.

Twenty-nine farms participated in the DA's vaccination drive, with 28,000 doses administered out of 160,000 shots available. From the 28,000 vaccinated hogs, 51 were reported to have died.

The DA is looking into new cases in the municipality of Sta. Maria in Laguna, although de Mesa said the site has already been under quarantine, depopulation and control.

Nonetheless, the government is focused on areas that have had extreme outbreaks of the disease, de Mesa said, adding that the DA is also expanding its efforts against the spread of ASF.

Commercial approval

Meanwhile, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. is said to have instructed the Bureau of Animal Industry to work on the commercial approval of the ASF vaccine by April.

The hot, dry season is expected to further lessen ASF cases, which usually spread during the rainy season. As for the country's pork supply, de Mesa said it may be affected following the culling or selective slaughter of pigs last year due to ASF.

However, stakeholders see a recovery in terms of hog population after the drop in ASF cases and extensive vaccination.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/03/20/business/top-business/swine-fever-cases-fall-to-39-as-of-mid-march/2076384>

THE MANILA TIMES:

Group to invest P260M for coffee industry

By Leander C. Domingo

March 20, 2025

A CANADIAN network of cooperatives is seeking to forge a partnership with the Department of Agriculture Regional Field Office 2 (DA-RFO2) to boost the coffee industry in the Philippines with P260-million investment in Region 2 (Cagayan Valley).



Representatives from the Department of Agriculture-Regional Field Office 2 and the Canada-based Society for Cooperation for International Development (Socodevi) inspect coffee seedlings as part of Socodevi's initiative to invest in the development of Cagayan Valley's coffee industry. DA PHOTO

Ferdinand Cortez of the DA-RFO2 Regional Agriculture and Fisheries Section said that the Society for Cooperation for International Development (Socodevi), a Quebec-based network of cooperative and mutual assistance enterprises, recently met with DA-RFO2 representatives to explore potential collaboration opportunities.

He said the two parties will explore opportunities for collaboration and with this, it is expected that the coffee industry in the country will get a boost, uplifting the lives of the small holder farmers of the commodity in Cagayan Valley.

"Once our memorandum of agreement is finalized, Socodevi will bankroll 9 million Canadian dollars or P260 million for the funding," said Philip Felipe, Socodevi's Filipino counterpart.

DA-RFO2 Executive Director Rose Mary Aquino said that five farmers cooperatives and associations (FCAs) in the region are already making waves in the coffee industry.

Aquino told Socodevi representatives Vincent Domaire, Nicolas Montibert and Serge Lantague from Socodevi that the FCAs were clustered and consolidated through the intervention of DA-RFO2.

These FCAs include the Kasibu Coffee Growers Association, Bugkalot Coffee Growers Multi-purpose Cooperative, Tiblac Farmers Agriculture Cooperative, Kalahan Coffee Growers Association, and Kayapa Forestland Association Agriventures Inc.

Aquino also told the representatives from Socodevi that some of these groups have also availed assistance from the Philippine Rural Development Project.

"Three of these cooperatives are now engaged in production, processing and marketing," Aquino said.

A non-profit organization which also shares its technical expertise and know-how with its partners in developing countries, Socodevi's mission is to support the development of cooperatives with a focus on promoting economic development, social justice, and environmental sustainability.

During the meeting with Socodevi representatives, Carol Albay, Regional High Value Crop Development Program focal person, gave an overview of the coffee industry in the Philippines, particularly in Cagayan Valley, which ranks ninth in terms of production, with small-holders farmers dominating.

"The coffee area is dominated by small holding farmers with an average farm size from one-half to two hectares, regional sufficiency is 70 percent and per capita consumption is 1.61 kilograms," Albay said.

In Cagayan Valley, she also noted that the total coffee production area is 23,691.55 hectares; Arabica with 2,701.60 hectares; Excelsa with 1,504.70 hectares; Liberica with 147.70 hectares; and Robusta with 19,337.55 hectares.

"The Cagayan Valley region's coffee production has a total of 10,980,277 bearing trees and a volume of production of 5,323.03 metric tons paving the way for potential partnerships with Socodevi," Albay added.

Meanwhile, the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office (Penro) in Nueva Vizcaya has appropriated an adequate portion of its protected area for the coffee industry.

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Engineer Giovannie Magat, provincial environment officer, said this area was given to different FCAs for them to plant coffee seedlings.

Juliet Morales, regional coffee focal person, also narrated success stories of coffee farmers who also plant vegetables and are now producing Class A coffee beans.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/03/20/business/agribusiness/group-to-invest-p260m-for-coffee-industry/2076354>

THE MANILA TIMES:

Searca champions carbon-smart agriculture

By Leander C. Domingo

March 20, 2025

THE Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca) championed carbon-smart agriculture during a sustainability webinar on March 7.

In his keynote address at the Webinar on Challenges, Opportunities and Innovation Strategies in Managing Protected Forests for Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainability, Searca Center Director Glenn Gregorio said, "Agriculture and biodiversity conservation are often framed as conflicting pursuits — as if we must sacrifice one for the other."

He said that the real challenge is not choosing between agriculture and biodiversity conservation but finding ways to make agriculture a partner in conservation.

The webinar was organized and hosted by Central Mindanao University (CMU), an affiliate member of the Southeast Asian University Consortium for Graduate Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC).

Established by Searca in 1989, the UC is a regional network to strengthen graduate education and collaborative research in agriculture and natural resources.

Also serving as an adjunct professor at CMU and the University of the Philippines Los Baños, as well as academician of the National Academy of Science and Technology of the Philippines, Gregorio delivered his address to an audience of academics, students and CMU partners.

"Biodiversity is disappearing up to a thousand times faster than normal because of deforestation, urban expansion and unsustainable farming practices," he added.

Pointing out that protected forests, essential for carbon storage, climate regulation and wildlife habitats are under increasing pressure, Gregorio introduced carbon-smart agriculture as a transformative solution — a way to regenerate soils, enhance biodiversity and secure food production all at once.

"Agriculture doesn't have to deplete nature; it can restore it. With the right innovations, we can turn farms into partners for conservation," he said.

Gregorio also explained Searca's three ongoing initiatives that are aligned with the center's advocacy for "Carbon Wise Agriculture: Winnable Innovation Solutions for the Environment" embodied in the center's 12th Five-Year Development Plan for 2025–2030.

Led by United Kingdom startup Straw Innovations, Searca's Rice Straw Biogas Hub project is promoting the conversion of rice straw waste into clean energy, reducing emissions while providing Filipino farmers with sustainable energy alternatives.

Gregorio said Searca also developed a carbon footprint tracker, an internal system that enables the center to measure, manage and reduce its environmental impact.

He said this is one way of embedding sustainability into Searca's operations because "real change starts with accountability."

"We are looking to gather more than 100 experts across agriculture, finance and policy sectors to scale up carbon-smart agriculture across Southeast Asia," he said.

Emphasizing that collaboration is key, Gregorio said that achieving a balance between agricultural productivity and biodiversity conservation "demands science-based innovation, evidence-informed policies and strong cross-sectoral partnerships."

"The future of our forests and food systems is in our hands," Gregorio said, asserting that "together, we can redefine agriculture not as a threat to biodiversity, but as its ally. The time to act is now."

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/03/20/business/agribusiness/searca-champions-carbon-smart-agriculture/2076353>

THE MANILA TIMES:

Bacarra tobacco farmers get assistance

By Philippine News Agency
March 20, 2025

REGISTERED farmers' associations in Bacarra, Ilocos Norte, on Tuesday received P33.7 million worth of farm machines and equipment purchased through the municipality's share from tobacco excise tax.

The beneficiaries received combine harvesters, hand tractors with trailers, cultivators, water pumps, mist blowers, brush cutters, transplanters and irrigation hoses, among others.

"The municipal government of Bacarra remains committed to the fair, transparent, and equitable allocation of the tobacco excise tax under Republic Act (RA) 7171 and RA 8240, amounting to P33,741,478, for the benefit of our hardworking farmers," Bacarra town mayor Nicomedes dela Cruz said in an interview.

Dela Cruz, who led the distribution in Barangay 18 Santo Cristo, along with other municipal officials, said the purchase of farm machinery and equipment was based on requests of farmers during the consultation meetings.

"These are meant to empower our farmers and ensure that their needs are met to improve our agriculture sector," he said.

For a tobacco farmer like Andres Acosta, growing tobacco entails a lot of hard work and perseverance. But with the provision of various agricultural support like water pumps and machineries from the government, farming is more bearable now.

"Tobacco farming is laborious, but we are happy the local government helps us from seedling production to selling our products," Acosta said in Ilokano.

With the upcoming dry season, tobacco farmers said the distribution of water pumps will be a big help to them.

Under RAs 7171 and 8240, tobacco-growing municipalities get a share of tobacco excise tax collections based on the volume of leaves produced by their tobacco growers.

Ilocos Norte continues to expand its tobacco plantations to have more share in the tobacco excise tax.

The tobacco contract growing system is being piloted in the province to encourage more farmers to plant tobacco by providing them at least 20-percent subsidy in farm inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/03/20/business/agribusiness/bacarra-tobacco-farmers-get-assistance/2076352>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

Lower global rice quotations a challenge to local farmers

Ada Pelonia
March 19, 2025

WHILE declining global rice quotations could offer relief for Filipino consumers, the government would be hard-pressed to boost support for local farmers, according to an economist.

University of Asia and Pacific Center for Food and Agribusiness (CFA) executive director Marie Annette Galvez-Dacul said the drop in international prices of the staple grain would weigh on local rice planters.

“Declining global rice prices can lead to cheaper imports, reducing government expenditures on rice procurement. However, this also challenges local farmers, making competition tougher,” Dacul told the *BusinessMirror*.

“While consumers may gain from lower prices, the government must balance affordability with support for domestic rice production to sustain long-term food security,” she added.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently noted that exporter quotes further tumbled in February.

For one, the international agency said Vietnamese prices dropped by \$7 to \$387 per metric ton (MT) and Thai quotes shrank by \$19 to \$418 per MT with reduced sales to Southeast Asian markets.

“Pakistani quotes decreased \$20 to \$380 per MT and India is down \$10 to \$400 per MT with large supplies,” the USDA said in its latest report.

It added that United States prices declined by \$19 to \$678 per MT on weaker sales to Latin America, while Uruguayan quotes fell \$56 to \$612 per MT following the harvest of its new crop.

Data from the Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI) showed that the volume of rice shipments that entered the country as of March 13 stood at 640,915 MT.

‘P45 MSRP’

Meanwhile, the Department of Agriculture (DA) recently floated that the maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) for imported rice would likely hit P45 per kilo before end-March, a drop of P4 from its current P49-per kilo pricing.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa attributed the possible further cut to MSRP on the easing of export rice prices in the world market and strengthened Philippine peso.

“Looking at the current trend of prices, the exchange rate, and the prices in the international market, most likely the P45 pesos MSRP for imported premium rice will push through towards the end of the month,”

De Mesa said in Filipino, in a previous interview.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/03/19/lower-global-rice-quotations-a-challenge-to-local-farmers/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

NFA: Paddy rice purchases surge in January

Ada Pelonia

March 20, 2025

The National Food Authority (NFA) said its procurement of paddy rice jumped more than eightfold in January due to its “competitive buying prices.”

The NFA said it procured 282,033 50-kilo bags or 14,101.65 metric tons (MT) of palay in the first month of the year, higher by 782.12 percent than the 31,972 bags or 1,598.6 MT purchased in January 2024.

However, the grains agency noted that it fell short of its procurement target of 409,800 bags or 20,490 MT for January.

“NFA [is] still able to exceed more than 50 percent of its monthly target despite the post-harvest season and it is largely attributed to the implementation of Pricers [Price Range Scheme],” the NFA said in its latest accomplishment report.

Under the grains agency’s program, the NFA buys clean and dry palay at P23 to P30 per kilo while the price of fresh and wet palay ranges from P17 to P23 per kilo. This flexible price scheme changes weekly per province.

Meanwhile, the NFA said it had a total rice inventory of 5.78 million bags or 289,178 MT at the end of January.

“It should be noted that NFA’s inventory is 13 percent of the country’s national rice inventory.”

The agency distributed 86,412 bags or 4,320.6 MT of milled rice during the reference month, 23.7 percent of its target of 364,655 bags or 18,232.75 MT.

“The low distribution accomplishment is due to the low demand for NFA rice and minimal requests from calamity relief government agencies.”

It distributed 1,799.8 MT of rice to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Office of Civil Defense (OCD), legislators, and local governments for relief operations and calamity response.

About 798.35 MT of rice were distributed to government agencies and local government units (LGU) rice requirement under the Executive Order 51 program, the NFA said.

This year, the NFA is targeting to procure as much as 880,000 MT of palay to meet its new buffer stock requirement of 15 days as stipulated under the amended Rice Tariffication Law (RTL).

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

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

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

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/03/20/nfa-paddy-rice-purchases-surge-in-january/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

Ex-senator plans to expand tomato procurement program

Butch Fernandez
March 20, 2025

Comebacking Senator Kiko Pangilinan announced plans to expand Oplan Sagip Kamatis to more local government units (LGUs) following its successful pilot run in Rizal, Nueva Ecija.

“Tuloy-tuloy iyan. We are already reaching out to several LGUs to implement this initiative,” Pangilinan told the media during his visit to Tagbilaran, Bohol, on Wednesday.

Oplan Sagip Kamatis was launched to rescue surplus tomatoes that would have otherwise gone to waste, ensuring fair prices for farmers while addressing food security needs.

The initiative is made possible by the Sagip Saka Act, a law authored by Pangilinan that allows LGUs to directly purchase produce from farmers and fisherfolk without the need for public bidding.

“Ito mismo ang dahilan kung bakit natin ipinasa ang Sagip Saka Act—para hindi na dumanas ng kawalan ang ating mga magsasaka,” he said.

“Dahil sa batas na ito, puwede nang bumili ang mga LGU nang direkta sa ating farmers at fisherfolk. Wala nang bidding, walang middleman, kaya mas mataas ang kita ng mga magsasaka.”

The initiative’s pilot run in Nueva Ecija prevented massive food wastage, with 12 tons of tomatoes “rescued” and sold at fair prices. The Muntinlupa City government purchased five tons at P25 per kilo for its feeding programs and calamity relief efforts—far above the P4 per kilo price that farmers were initially forced to sell at.

“Ang bentahan noon sa Nueva Ecija, P4 pero kilo, binili ng LGU ng 25 pesos. So times seven halos ang kinita ng ating mga magsasaka, hindi sila binarat,” he said.

Pangilinan is calling on more LGUs to follow Muntinlupa’s lead and maximize the Sagip Saka Act to support local farmers and fisherfolk.

“We are now calling on other LGUs na gawin ito. Wala nang public bidding pag direktang binili sa ating mga magsasaka at mga mangingisda ang pagkain. Tataas ang kita ng magsasaka at makakatipid ang LGU. Lahat makikinabang.”

During his visit to Bohol, Pangilinan also met with supporters and volunteers, expressing his deep appreciation for their commitment.

“Pag nakikita ko ang mainit na pagtanggap, paninindigan at pagtatayo ng ating mga volunteers, sa inyo ako kumukuha ng inspirasyon, sa inyo ako kumukuha ng dagdag na tapang para ituloy ang pinaglalaman natin,” he told the crowd.

As Oplan Sagip Kamatis expands, Pangilinan’s advocacy for fair farmgate prices and a food-secure Philippines continues to gain ground, proving that real solutions exist when governance prioritizes the welfare of farmers and consumers alike.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/03/20/ex-senator-plans-to-expand-tomato-procurement-program/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

DA: New budget process aims to transform agri sector

Ada Pelonia

March 20, 2025

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is adopting a multi-year budget planning process as it moves away from the “business-as-usual” approach to significantly raise the country’s food production and cut poverty. Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. said the new initiative is part of a broader strategy to achieve “more meaningful results in the DA’s programs.”

“[This] ensures that every peso spent contributes directly to achieving long-term goals, such as poverty reduction, farmer welfare, and sustainable economic growth,” he said in a statement.

He said a major development in its budget process is the introduction of a standardized set of criteria to evaluate the department’s programs, activities, and projects.

These criteria, according to Laurel, are designed to assess the impact of proposed initiatives on critical areas such as poverty reduction, income improvement for farmers and fishers, enhanced nutrition, and reducing dependency on food imports.

“Additionally, the program and budget evaluation will focus on the cost efficiency, feasibility, and the technical and absorptive capacity of implementing agencies.”

He also urged DA officials to challenge the status quo in pursuit of agricultural transformation.

“The DA’s four-year framework, Para sa Masaganang Bagong Pilipinas, will guide the department’s budget planning and strategic initiatives,” he said.

“This framework is aligned with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.’s agenda to significantly reduce the country’s poverty rate from 18 percent to 9 percent by 2028. In this context, the newly established evaluation criteria will not only enhance resource allocation but also serve as a tool to measure progress toward these national development goals.”

Laurel said a cornerstone of this strategy is strengthening the resilience and efficiency of the agriculture and fisheries sectors to create “a more equitable environment for farmers, fishers, and rural communities.”

“Through this initiative, we aim to maximize the benefits of our investments to ensure food security for the nation and uplift the lives of our rural heroes—our farmers and fisherfolk.”

In August 2024, Laurel proposed a budget of P513.81 billion for this year to address the severe lack of farm infrastructure.

He said the severe lack of investments in agriculture for almost four decades led to the declining contribution of the sector to GDP.

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority showed that the output of almost all subsectors registered declines in 2024. The crops subsector contracted by 6.3 percent; livestock, 4 percent; and fisheries, 5 percent.

Only the poultry subsector registered a production increase at 6.6 percent in 2024.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/03/20/da-new-budget-process-aims-to-transform-agri-sector/>

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT:

NEDA Board approves P70.6B irrigation, ‘community resilience’ projects

By *Angela Celis*
March 20, 2025

The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Board said it has approved two projects focused on community resilience and irrigation, with a combined cost of P70.6 billion.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, the NEDA Board, chaired by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., approved during its 25th meeting on March 19 key local projects aimed at boosting infrastructure and economic progress across the country.

The Board approved the P56.7 billion Panahon ng Pagkilos: Philippine Community Resilience Project (PCRP) by the Department of Social Welfare and Development and the P13.9-billion Tumauni River Multipurpose Project by the National Irrigation Administration in Isabela.

Economic Secretary Arsenio Balisacan, who serves as the Board’s vice chair, said these projects reflect the government’s commitment to promote inclusive growth.

“By prioritizing regional growth, we are not only enhancing infrastructure but also creating sustainable economic opportunities throughout the country,” Balisacan said.

The community resilience project will benefit 4.13 million households across 500 municipalities in the country. It aims to strengthen community capacities so they can participate in resilience planning. This will increase their access to resilient investments for critical projects in vulnerable areas.

Supported by the World Bank, the project targets areas with high incidence of poverty, as well as areas that usually experience severe climatic hazards, stunting rates and significant indigenous populations.

NEDA said this will enhance the communities’ ability to withstand and recover from economic shocks related to natural disasters.

The Tumauni River project is designed to irrigate about 8,200 hectares across 26 barangays in Tumauni, three barangays in Cabagan and three other barangays in the City of Ilagan.

It is to be implemented from September 2025 to September 2030. It aims to elevate the productivity and income of 5,860 farmer-beneficiaries and support the government’s pursuit of rice production and food security.

The Board also approved requests for changes in scope, cost and implementation period for the Balog-Balog Multipurpose Project Phase II.

By building a 105.5-meter-high dam and reservoir in the Zambales mountains, the project aims to irrigate 21,935 hectares of new service areas and stabilize irrigation for 12,475 hectares once the first phase is in place.

Also approved was the request for a change in scope and the reallocation of loan proceeds for the Improving Growth Corridors in Mindanao Road Sector Project, details of which were not disclosed.

The project aims to boost economic growth in Mindanao by improving roads and bridges, while ensuring resilience in road infrastructure development.

Meanwhile, the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Center provided updates on the progress of the PPP projects to the NEDA Board.

As of this writing, NEDA said 224 projects are ongoing, such as the Ninoy Aquino International Airport, the Bulacan International Airport, Laguindingan and Bohol International Airports and the Metro Rail Transit Line 7.

“To address issues in project implementation, we must strengthen our coordination and streamline processes across all levels of government and among stakeholders. This includes proactively managing issues such as site conditions, funding and approvals,” Balisacan said.

“By enhancing our planning, oversight and collaboration, we can reduce delays and ensure that infrastructure projects are delivered on time to benefit our communities and support economic growth,” he added.

<https://malaya.com.ph/business/business-news/neda-board-approves-p70-6b-irrigation-community-resilience-projects/>

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT:

Hog, rice local production seen improving this yr

By *Jed Macapagal*
March 20, 2025

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is optimistic that local production of hog and rice will improve this year, based on data gathered by the agency.

DA Assistant Secretary Arnel de Mesa told reporters in an interview in Quezon City on Wednesday that as of March 14, the number of barangays with active cases of African swine fever (ASF) has gone down to 39 from 66 in February 28.

Data from the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) show the 39 affected barangays are located in 13 provinces namely Abra, Ifugao, Kalinga, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Zambales, Marinduque, Catanduanes, Bohol, Biliran, Leyte, Northern Samar and Surigao del Sur.

“The active participation of all stakeholders and the administration of vaccines helped us in this. Vaccination rate is not yet that high but we focused on areas that had extreme cases of ASF before,” de Mesa said.

He said that 29 hog farms have participated on the vaccination program and 28,000 out of the available 160,000 vaccines have already been administered.

The DA added that only 51 hogs experienced mortalities after receiving vaccinations, a number which the agency is considered low.

“We are waiting for BAI (to) submit a final report but from what I remember, they were requested by (DA) Secretary (Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr.) to (get) a commercial approval from the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) by April for these ASF vaccines from Vietnam,” de Mesa said.

Meanwhile, de Mesa said that rice imports that arrived in the country as of March 13 reached around 641,000 metric tons (MT), down by 46.6 percent compared to end-March 2024’s imported rice arrival of around 1.2 million MT.

The agency attributed this to the expected better local palay harvest this year among other factors such as India’s decision to lift its long-standing export restrictions and the Philippines’ implementation of a maximum suggested retail price on imported rice.

“Plus the control of smuggling, hoarding and the stricter monitoring of markets... these factors played a significant role and they say that our needs for imported rice is already becoming predictive which can be manifested in our import data,” de Mesa added.

Earlier, the DA said with better weather and additional input support to farmers, the country may produce a record-high 20.46 million MT of palay this year, 6 percent higher than 2023’s million MT production.

This year’s target palay production is also 1.9 percent higher compared to 2023’s 20.06 million MT, the current record-high for the country.

As for hogs, the agency has no official target production for the year but output has reached 1.7 million MT in 2024, a 5 percent decline from 2023’s 1.79 million MT.

Based on DA’s monitoring of public markets in the National Capital Region, local well-milled rice sold for P40 to P53 per kg on Tuesday while regular milled rice went for P38 to P46 per kg.

Imported well-milled rice was selling for P44 to P46 per kg while the price of imported regular milled rice ranged from P35 to P45 per kg.

Special variety imported rice fetched P52 to P60 and premium rice, P48 to P51.

Special variety local rice was selling for P55 to P62 per kg while premium rice went for P47 to P60 per kg.

For the same period, prevailing price of pork ham ranged from P330 to P410 per kg; pork belly from P370 to P470 per kg; frozen kasim from P220 to P280 per kg; frozen liempo from P290 to P360.

<https://malaya.com.ph/business/corporate/hog-rice-local-production-seen-improving-this-yr/>

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT:

DA to formulate criteria-based multi-yr budget planning

By *Jed Macapagal*
March 20, 2025

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said it is implementing a transformative multi-year budget planning process to maximize the impact of its limited resources on the livelihood of farmers and fisherfolk.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said in a statement on Wednesday the new initiative is part of a broader strategy to achieve more meaningful results to ensure that funds contribute directly to achieve long-term goals, such as poverty reduction, farmer welfare and sustainable economic growth.

According to the DA, a major development in the process is the introduction of a standardized set of criteria to evaluate programs, activities and projects.

Tiu Laurel said these criteria are designed to assess the impact of proposed initiatives on critical areas, such as poverty reduction, income improvement for farmers and fishers, enhanced nutrition and reducing dependency on food imports.

The DA said the program and budget evaluation will also focus on the cost efficiency, feasibility and the technical and absorptive capacity of implementing agencies.

The four-year framework, Para sa Masaganang Bagong Pilipinas, will guide the department's budget planning and strategic initiatives to create a more equitable environment for farmers, fishers and rural communities, the DA chief said.

“Through this initiative, we aim to maximize the benefits of our investments to ensure food security for the nation and uplift the lives of our rural heroes — our farmers and fisherfolk,” Tiu Laurel said.

The DA's budget this year amounts to P200.9 billion, down by 5.7 percent from its P213 billion allocation in 2024 and lower by 59.8 percent than its proposed P500 billion budget for 2025.

<https://malaya.com.ph/business/corporate/da-to-formulate-criteria-based-multi-yr-budget-planning/>