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MANILA BULLETIN:

Kiko asks gov't intervention on NFA's overstock rice; Bam vows to protect rights of small fishers

BY [RAYMUND ANTONIO](#)

Mar 27, 2025 02:46 PM

Former senator and senatorial candidate Kiko Pangilinan is calling on the national government to intervene and allow the National Food Authority (NFA) to unload its warehouses and release overstock rice to bring down the prices of rice in the market, while another Senate bet Bam Aquino promised to fight for the rights of small fisherfolk if elected in the Senate.



Senatorial candidate Kiko Pangilinan visits a NFA warehouse in Occidental Mindoro. (Photo from Team Kiko Pangilinan)

The two senatoriables spent Thursday, March 27, in separate provinces—Pangilinan in Occidental Mindoro and Aquino in Dumaguete City—to push for their candidacies and share their advocacies to voters and stakeholders.

NFA

warehouses

In Occidental Mindoro, Pangilinan lamented how farmers have nowhere to store their rice harvest because the NFA's warehouse there has been overflowing with stock rice, some of which have been there since 2023.

“Ito dapat talagang mahanapan ng solusyon (We need to solve this), and I think it's up to the national level now. Dalhin sa national level, sa secretary ng DA at chairman of the board ng NFA, at hanapan ng immediate na intervention para maayos itong problemang ito (Let's bring it to the national level, to the DA secretary and chairman of the board of the NFA, and find immediate intervention to solve this problem),” he stressed, promising farmers that he would talk with Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. to raise their concerns.

Although he explaining that the NFA's inability to release its rice stocks was due to the restrictions imposed by the Rice Tariffication Law (RTL), the former senator explained that there should still be an “immediate action” to help the NFA unload its warehouse, especially amid the declaration of the food security emergency on rice last month by the DA.

“Sinasabi natin dahil meron naman emergency situation, food crisis, dapat agaran action ang maaaring masagawa ng NFA para ma-unload dahil right now, punong puno na ang kanilang mga warehouse (What we’re saying is because there’s an emergency situation, food crisis, the NFA should act immediately to unload because right now, their warehouses are full to the brim),” Pangilinan, the principal author of the Sagip Saka Act and a former food security secretary, said.

“Anihan ngayon, ang farmers hindi na rin malaman, at ang NFA, saan dadalhin itong oversupply o dagdag na supply (It’s the harvest season, our farmers don’t know, and the NFA, where to bring the oversupply or the additional supply),” he added.

The former senator, however, addressed farmers, saying that he would study and possibly amend the Rice Tarrification Law if he becomes a senator again.

“Well, wag tayong manghinaan ng loob, hahanapan dapat ng solusyon yan. Kalma-kalma lang (let’s not lose hope, we will find a solution. Calm down),” he said.

Commercial

fishing

Meanwhile, Aquino assured that if he gets elected for another term, he will fight for the rights of small fisherfolk against commercial fishing.



Independent Senate bet holds a dialogue with Dumaguete fishermen. (Bam Aquino Media Bureau)

The former one-term senator met with members of the Barangay Tinago Fisherfolks Association in Poblacion I Tinago, Dumaguete City where he said that he would be willing to talk with owners of commercial fishing vessels not to fish too closely to small fishermen.

“Kapag nakabalik tayo sa Senado, kakausapin namin ang mga may-ari na baka puwede mas layu-layuan naman nila. Dapat magharap-harap, mag-usap-usap (If we get to return to the Senate, we will talk with the owner if they can give you more space. We should meet face-to-face),” he said.

“Sana may espasyo lahat. Ang laki-laki ng dagat. Kinukuha ang lugar niyo. Malaki naman ang mga barko nila, doon sila sa malayo (There should be space for all. The ocean is very big. They’re fishing in your area. Their vessels are already more capable, so they can fish farther),” Aquino added.

He also vowed to address the problem of fishing vessel ports, so smaller fishing boats can have an easier time unloading their catch.

<https://mb.com.ph/2025/3/27/kiko-asks-gov-t-intervention-on-nfa-s-overstock-rice-bam-vows-to-protect-rights-of-small-fishers>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

100% pork max SRP compliance, says group

Bella Cariaso - The Philippine Star

March 28, 2025 | 12:00am



Pork retailers display meats at their shops inside a public market in Marikina on March 10, 2025 morning.

Walter Bollozos / The Philippine STAR

MANILA, Philippines — Compliance with the maximum suggested retail price (SRP) for pork products is at 100 percent, according to farmers' group Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag).

Hog producers have followed the farmgate price of P230 per kilo of pork, the group said yesterday.

Sinag chairman Rosendo So said there is no reason for other stakeholders not to afford the max SRP of P350 for pork shoulder and P380 for pork belly since hog raisers have agreed to lower their farmgate price to P230 per kilo from P250.

Department of Agriculture (DA) spokesman Arnel de Mesa earlier said compliance with the pork max SRP, enforced since March 10, increased to 31 percent from 25 percent.

“The decision to implement a max SRP is part of the local industry’s collective effort to help consumers by reducing local pork prices while working for the viability and sustainability of the local hog industry,” So said on the sidelines of the 31st National Hog Convention at the SMX Convention Center in Pasay.

An industry-wide consultation should be organized by the DA to address low retail compliance with the max SRP, he noted.

For his part, Sinag executive director Jayson Cainglet said while there is a focus on local fresh pork prices, it is high time for the DA to consider reverting pork tariffs to their original rate.

Per Executive Order 62, Cainglet noted that pork tariffs were slashed to 25 percent from 40 percent for out-quota, and to 15 percent from 35 percent for in-quota.

“Despite record pork imports last year, it did not contribute to the reduction of pork prices. Similar to rice imports under EO 62, any savings from tariff reduction did not result in decreased pork prices,” he said.

‘Increase swine production’

Meanwhile, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. yesterday challenged the swine industry to increase hog production by six million by 2028.

Adding about two million hogs annually in the next three years will bring back the population of 14 million before the outbreak of African swine fever (ASF) began in 2019.

“Now we have eight million hogs, creating a six-million head deficit,” he said.

“My challenge to the industry is clear: we need to produce an additional two million hogs each year – through 2026, 2027 and 2028 – to return to pre-ASF levels... and that’s the minimum,” he added.

The expected commercial rollout of an ASF vaccine this year and financial support from the proposed Animal Industry Development and Competitiveness Act could help accelerate the industry’s recovery, he noted.

Under the proposed animal industry competitiveness enhancement fund, at least P4 billion will be allocated to the swine industry to support its recovery and growth, he said.

Tiu Laurel has directed Agriculture Undersecretary for livestock Dante Palabrica to guide the swine industry’s recovery.

At least two large commercial hog producers have committed to each produce half a million more hogs starting next year, Tiu Laurel said.

Garlic max SRP eyed

A max SRP for imported garlic is being studied by the DA.

Retail garlic prices have reached P200 per kilo, Tiu Laurel said.

“Ninety-five percent of our supply is imported. If it reaches P160 per kilo, that’s wrong. There is already profiteering,” he said in a chance interview.

The landed cost of imported garlic is only P80 per kilo, he noted.

Meanwhile, party-list Rep. Erwin Tulfo has vowed to propose measures amid skyrocketing prices of food and farm products.

Traders or middlemen are procuring agricultural produce at farm gates at low prices and selling them in the market at a higher price, the senatorial candidate noted.

“As a result of this practice, farmers, hog raisers and poultry growers earn less. It is the traders who earn much,” he said.

“There is this problem with food and everybody is experiencing a high cost of living. Perhaps the Senate or Congress need to revisit this,” he added.

At Quezon City Rep. Juan Carlos Atayde’s first State of the District Address on Monday, Tulfo congratulated Atayde and Mayor Joy Belmonte for making their city progressive.

Meanwhile, senatorial candidate Las Piñas Rep. Camille Villar has filed a bill allowing pregnant women to work from home.

A flexible work arrangement, she said, would allow pregnant women to take care of their health, giving them time for medical consultations. — **Delon Porcalla**

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/03/28/2431598/100-porkmax-srp-compliance-says-group>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Swine industry urged to produce 2M more pigs yearly to recover from swine fever

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

March 27, 2025 | 6:24pm



File photo shows hogs in a local piggery.

AFP, file

MANILA, Philippines — The Department of Agriculture (DA) urged the swine industry to raise an additional two million hogs annually to restore the pig population, which was decimated by the African Swine Fever (ASF) outbreak in 2019.

At the 31st National Hog Convention and Trade Exhibit on Thursday, March 27, Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said the goal is to return to pre-ASF levels by 2028.

The DA estimates that the country lost around six million pigs when the outbreak first struck in 2019. The current hog population stands at around eight million, down from 14 million before the disease.

“My challenge to the industry is clear: we need to produce an additional two million hogs each year — through 2026, 2027 and 2028 — to return to pre-ASF levels...and that’s the minimum,” Tiu Laurel said.

With the potential rollout of a commercial ASF vaccine in 2025, Tiu Laurel said the swine industry’s recovery could speed up, bolstered by the expected financial support from the proposed Animal Industry Development and Competitiveness Act.

The House-approved measure seeks to allocate P20 billion annually for 10 years to develop the domestic livestock, dairy and poultry sectors, with funding sourced from tariffs on imported meat and dairy products. Of this, P4 billion will be earmarked for the swine industry’s recovery and development.

Restoring the country’s hog population, Tiu Laurel said, is crucial to reducing pork imports. He has tasked DA Undersecretary for Livestock Dante Palabrica with drafting a recovery plan for the sector.

Meanwhile, the DA has secured commitments from two major commercial hog producers to expand their operations, each pledging to increase production by 500,000 pigs starting in 2026.

Livestock and poultry account for one-fourth of the country’s agricultural output, the department said, with pork and chicken making up more than half of Filipinos’ protein intake. The industry also supports 2.8 million farmers.

The country continues to struggle with high pork prices in Metro Manila, with some cuts exceeding P400 per kilogram.

Pork producers are calling for another round of consultations after the DA imposed a maximum suggested retail price, which the agency found is largely being ignored.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/2025/03/27/2431538/swine-industry-urged-produce-2m-more-pigs-yearly-recover-swine-fever>

THE PHILIPPINE STAR:

Lower prices of farm products, foods sought via SRP

Philstar.com

March 27, 2025 | 2:48pm



Customers visit the Paco Market in Manila to check on the goods that are put up for sale on April 6, 2024.

The STAR/Ryan Baldemor

MANILA, Philippines — A review of laws and government regulations is being underscored to combat skyrocketing prices of food and farm products.

This is according to senatorial aspirant Erwin Tulfo, who cited a practice wherein traders or middlemen acquire agricultural produce right from the farm gates at a very low price, and then sell the products in the market at very high price.

"As a result of this practice, our farmers, hog raisers and poultry growers earn less. It is the traders who earn much," Tulfo said during a short speech during the first State of the District Address of Rep. Arjo Atayde (1st District, Queen City) at SM North Edsa Skydome in Quezon City last Monday, March 24.

"Nariyan po ang problema sa pagkain, and everybody is experiencing that high cost of living. Kailangan na pong gawan ng paraan. Kailangan po siguro balikan ng Senado, ng Kongreso ang mga batas na ito," he added.

It would be advisable if a suggested retail price (SRP) scheme is being followed to control the prices of food and other prime commodities, said Tulfo.

"Kung kinakailangan, maglagay ng Suggested Retail Price para po ika nga makontrol ang presyo po ng pagkain," he continued.

Agriculture is a major sector of the Philippine economy, ranking third among the sectors in 2022, behind only services and industrial. As of 2022, the sector employs 24% of the Filipino workforce and accounts for 8.9% of the total gross domestic product (GDP).

Tulfo added that farmers, including those in the four sub sectors of the agriculture (farming, fisheries, livestock and forestry), need every help they can get from the government.

<https://www.philstar.com/business/agriculture/2025/03/27/2431506/lower-prices-farm-products-foods-sought-srp>

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER:

P30-M “smuggled” sugar seized at Subic port — SRA

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

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 04:00 AM March 28, 2025

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Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) | FILE PHOTO

MANILA, Philippines — The Bureau of Customs (BOC) confiscated P30 million worth of alleged smuggled sugar at the Port of Subic, according to the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA).

SRA administrator Pablo Luis Azcona said the Bureau of Customs (BOC) held the release of 10,000 bags containing 500 metric tons of misdeclared sugar imports from Vietnam.

The SRA did not disclose the consignee, saying it had yet to know the identity of the importer.

In a briefing on Tuesday evening, Azcona said the commodity confiscated about three weeks ago contained 88 percent sugar and 12 percent glucose but was declared as white sweet powder.

‘Not sugar’

“It’s technically brought in as not sugar. However, it’s under[going] testing (to determine its sugar content)...” he said, adding the SRA deployed its personnel to extract samples for chemical analysis.

“I feel based on the packaging and everything and the physical appearance, it seems it is intended for resale. But that’s just my personal opinion,” he told reporters.

Azcona said the testing will prove if the commodity is indeed sugar. If confirmed, the BOC will confiscate it or sell it via the Kadiwa store.

Up for auction

“Usually, confiscated sugar gets sold [or] auctioned out. However, we are suggesting that before it gets auctioned, it should be classified by the SRA as [products for] domestic [use]. It should be reclassified so we can record the volumes,” he added.

Azcona stressed that the proliferation of such commodities could disrupt the entire sugarcane industry.

“If there are things entering this way unnoticed –[because] we base our plans on our production and the sugar that we legally import – it will ruin our plans,” he added.

Under the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, smuggling, hoarding and cartel operations involving agricultural products are considered economic sabotage.

Smuggling and hoarding of agricultural products are also considered economic sabotage when the value of goods exceeds P10 million.

<https://business.inquirer.net/515540/p30-m-smuggled-sugar-seized-by-bureau-of-customs-at-subic-port-sra>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Hog industry roadmap seeks return to pre-ASF herd size

March 27, 2025 | 9:25 pm



REUTERS

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said on Thursday that its plan for a hog industry revival will seek to restore the herd size of 14 million animals before the 2019 outbreak of African Swine Fever (ASF), from 8 million currently.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. said however at an industry summit that “With a growing population, demand is far higher than the previous (high of) 14 million,” he said.

He urged the industry to increase the herd by a “minimum” of 2 million hogs each year through 2028 to return to pre-ASF levels.

Undersecretary for Livestock Dante J. Palabrica has been tasked with creating a roadmap to guide the recovery of the industry, which he called critical to food security.

Livestock and poultry account for about a quarter of agricultural output and provide livelihoods for over 2.8 million farmers, according to the DA.

Pork and chicken account for more than half of the protein in the Filipino diet, it said.

The proposed animal industry competitiveness enhancement fund earmarks about P4 billion for the hog industry to support its recovery and growth.

A return to pre-ASF levels would mean a significant reduction in pork imports, Mr. Laurel said.

“Filipinos still prefer the meat of freshly slaughtered hogs,” he said, referring to the disadvantages of imported pork, which is frozen.

The DA chief said he had spoken with two large commercial hog producers who have committed to each produce half a million more hogs starting next year.

“If they deliver, I already have around 1 million additional head.”

The Philippine Statistics Authority reported that the price of fresh pork belly (*liempo*) in the March 1-5 period rose to P384.08 per kilo from P378.84 in the previous monitoring period of Feb. 15-17 and P375.02 a month earlier.

The government on March 10 started imposing a maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) of P380 per kilo for *liempo* and P350 for *kasim* (shoulder) and *pigue* (rear leg).

The DA has also imposed a maximum suggested price of P300 per kilo on traders when they pass pork on to retailers. The level of compliance with the pork MSRP during the first week of implementation was low at 20% out of the 170 stalls monitored in Metro Manila markets, according to the DA.

It said in a separate report on March 22 the compliance rate had risen to 25%, calling it a significant improvement.

The government first applied the MSRP scheme to rice, initially setting it at P58 per kilo.

The DA is also considering buying pork from importers and traders for sale in government-subsidized stores.

The DA on March 19 said the Bureau of Animal Industry was working to ensure the commercial release by April of a Vietnamese vaccine against ASF.

It said at that time that the utilization rate for the 160,000 doses procured by the government was 17.46%. These were administered at 29 farms identified as ASF hotspots. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/03/27/662348/hog-industry-roadmap-seeks-return-to-pre-asf-herd-size/>

BUSINESS WORLD:

Solar irrigation, soil rejuvenation seen raising sugar production by 180,000 metric tons

March 27, 2025 | 7:16 pm



PHILSTAR FILE PHOTO

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said the government has committed to funding soil rejuvenation and solar irrigation programs that have the potential to raise sugar production by 180,000 metric tons (MT).

SRA Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona, emerging from a meeting with President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., said the government will provide the industry with solar irrigation systems tapping shallow tube wells.

“This would be about 16,000 units which could irrigate about 160,000 hectares of the 388,000 hectares (of sugar land),” he said at a briefing.

The solar irrigation project, with a price tag of P8 billion, would cover a little over a third of the sugar industry, he noted.

“The net result of this would probably be a yield increase of about P7.7 billion a year if this happens.”

Mr. Azcona said the other project, the P1.65-billion soil rejuvenation program, will seek to remedy the highly acidic condition of the soil in some Luzon provinces.

“Most of the farms in Batangas and in Tarlac have a very low pH level of only 4.5, which is highly acidic,” he said.

“We are proposing a massive liming project to the tune of five tons of lime per hectare,” he added.

The 180,000 MT bump in production “will greatly lessen our dependence to imported sugar,” he noted. The proposals were “well received by our President.”

Mr. Azcona said the SRA has not yet seen the need to order imports.

In February, the SRA called for voluntary exports of 66,000 MT of raw sugar to the US to allow the Philippines to fulfill its obligations under the US Raw Sugar Tariff-Rate Quota World Trade Allocation.

Participants complying with the order will be allowed to import 2.5 kilograms of refined sugar for every kilogram of raw sugar exported to the US.

The Office of the US Trade Representative gave the Philippines a quota of 145,235 MT raw value of raw cane sugar to the Philippines for the year to September. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

<https://www.bworldonline.com/economy/2025/03/27/662345/solar-irrigation-soil-rejuvenation-seen-raising-sugar-production-by-180000-metric-tons/>

REMATE:

PCG, BFAR sanib-pwersa sa misyon nsa WPS

March 27, 2025 13:13



MANILA, Philippines- Naging matagumpay ang isinagawa kamakailang joint maritime patrol sa West Philippine Sea ng Philippine Coast Guard at Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources sa kabila ng harassment ng China sa mga mangingisadang Pilipino, sinabi ni PCG spokesperson for the West Philippine Sea Commodore Jay Tarriela.

Sinabi ni Tarriela na ang misyon ay upang maghatid ng probisyon na gasolina at pakain sa 26 Filipino fishing boat malapit sa Scarborough Shoal o Bajo de Masinloc mula Marso 23 hanggang 25, 2025.

Naglayag ang apat na multi-mission offshore vessels mula BFAR kabilang ang BRP Datu Sumkad, BRP Datu Balensusa, BRP Datu Tamblot at BRP Datu Pagbuaya sa WPS noong weekend para sa misyon.

Nasubaybayan naman ng PCG ang pitong sasakyang-pandagat ng Chinese Coast Guard at dalawang People's Liberation Army vessels.

Sa kabila ng presensya ng mga barko ng China, hindi umatras ang mga mangingisdang Pinoy at isa-isang nabigyan ng probisyon.

Sa naturang misyon, tinangka ng CCG na guluhin ang operasyon sa pamamagitan ng pag-iingay ng sirena at pag-isyu ng radio challenge sa BFAR vessel, BRP Datu Balensusa, na nagsasabing nasa paligid na ng kanilang teritoryo ang mga sasakyang pandagat ng Pilipinas.

Ayon sa PCG, tatlong Rigid Hull Inflatable Boats, o RHIB, ang lumapit at nagtangkang itaboy ang mga mangingisdang Pinoy. **Jocelyn Tabangcura-Domenden**

<https://remate.ph/pcg-bfar-sanib-pwersa-sa-misyon-nsa-wps/>

REMATE

Max SRP ng imported rice ibababa pa sa P45/kg – DA

March 27, 2025 10:28



MANILA, Philippines – Inanunsyo ni Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. na babawasan pa ang maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) ng imported rice sa PHP45 kada kilo simula Marso 31, 2025, dahil sa patuloy na pagbaba ng presyo sa pandaigdigang merkado.

Mula nang ipatupad ang MSRP noong Enero 20, bumaba na ng PHP19 kada kilo ang presyo ng imported rice, mula PHP64 patungong PHP45. Kinilala ng Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) ang MSRP bilang isa sa mga dahilan ng pagbaba ng presyo ng bigas at pagbaba ng inflation.

Ang hakbang na ito ay tugma sa desisyon ni Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. na ibaba ang taripa sa bigas mula 35% patungong 15% simula Hulyo 2024. Dagdag pa rito, nag-ambag ang pagtanggap ng India sa export ban ng non-Basmati rice noong Setyembre sa pagtaas ng global supply, na nagdulot ng pinakamababang presyo ng bigas sa loob ng dalawang taon.

Bago pa man ang pagbaba ng MSRP sa PHP49 noong Marso 1, bumaba na sa USD490 per metric ton ang presyo ng 5% broken rice mula Vietnam, halos USD200 mas mura kumpara noong Disyembre. Ayon sa Food Terminal Inc., ang tinatayang landed cost ng imported rice para sa Marso 2025 ay nasa PHP32 hanggang PHP34 kada kilo.

<https://remate.ph/max-srp-ng-imported-rice-ibababa-pa-sa-p45-kg-da/>

THE MANILA TIMES:

Underdeveloped agriculture, underdeveloped economy (1)

FINER POINTS

By Fermin D. Adriano

March 28, 2025

INTERNATIONALLY famous chef and restaurateur Gordon Ramsay was all agog at Filipino cuisine when he recently visited the country to inaugurate his namesake restaurant. The Michelin Guide, meanwhile, is currently evaluating Philippine restaurants and cuisines for its 2026 edition, recognizing the increasing global popularity of Filipino food.

But while these developments are most welcome, an opinion writer in one of the morning dailies observed that further growth of Philippine restaurants and eateries was being constrained by high food prices. And while tourists feast on exquisitely tasty and expensive food, most Filipinos cannot afford to do so.

Most of us who have traveled to neighboring countries such as Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam are impressed by the affordability and the high quality of food offered there. Delicious cuisines are not only confined to fancy restaurants, but are amazingly peddled by street food vendors.

A cursory survey of food offered by these vendors will reveal that their prices are at least 25 to 40 percent cheaper than ours. Worse, our offerings have the reputation of being of poor quality as a popular street vendors' haven in Manila's University belt is pejoratively called "Hepa Lane," a reference to hepatitis.

A visit to groceries in developed economies like the United Kingdom and Australia will reveal the shocking reality that prices of food items there, such as garlic, onions, sugar, eggs, chicken, pork, fish, etc., are cheaper than what we find in Philippine stores. This is particularly galling when one is reminded of the fact that residents of those countries have incomes at least more than ten times the average earned by Filipino workers.

Unquestionably, high food prices and poor food quality have had the effect of undermining efforts to promote the tourism industry in the country. It is probably one of the reasons why Thailand and Vietnam were visited by around 35.6 million and 17.5 million tourists last year, respectively, compared to the Philippines' 5.4 million (a big chunk of them likely balikbayans).

But high cost and poor quality of food are not just dead weight holding down the development of our tourism industry. It is, as I already discussed in my previous column, an "incubus" to the high and sustained growth of the Philippine economy.

Why? The agri-food sector (including food processing) contributes nearly 30 percent to gross domestic product. If it is not growing as fast as the other sectors of the economy, it will be extremely difficult to attain sustainably high economic growth. A poorly performing agri-food sector will have the effect of dragging down the entire economy.

The poorest of the poor Filipinos reside in the rural areas. Poverty statistics reveal that two out of three Filipinos live there. If the agri-food sector is not growing, the promise of our political leaders that they will uplift the Filipino poor's welfare will forever remain empty rhetoric.

The agriculture sector's yearly average growth rate for more than a decade now is around 1 percent while our population growth rate is still 1.6 percent and higher. Imagine how difficult it will be to feed the people to lead a healthy life through proper nutrition.

A major portion of calculating the minimum wage received by our workers is food. If food prices remain high, there is no way that minimum wage rates can be managed properly in order to make labor costs here competitive vis-a-vis neighboring countries. Vietnam and Indonesia, in particular, are highly attractive sites for foreign investment due to their competitive labor cost. If we can lower food prices in the country, this will make our labor cost attractive enough to foreign investors, which will lead to the creation of thousands of jobs and boost our economic development effort.

The critical role of agricultural development in promoting overall economic development is a fact in development literature. However, our policy makers and entrepreneurs seem to ignore this, mainly for three reasons.

From the business side, the returns from agriculture are relatively low and slow compared to investments in the industrial and services (including finance) sectors. Plants and animals have natural growth cycles that cannot be easily shortened in order to speed up realizing financial gains.

Two, agriculture requires "dirtying one's sleeves" and hence, for many graduates from elite schools in the country who are used to working in air-conditioned offices, it is "baduy." Undeniably, it is easier to make money by tapping keys on a laptop than cultivating the soil or raising foul-smelling animals.

And three is that agriculture's performance is so closely connected to the workings of nature that there is so much uncertainty in investing in an agriculture venture. A destructive storm can easily wipe out a harvest. Plants bearing flowers or fruits can be invaded by insects and other pests, making one's effort during the cropping season all for naught. The occurrence of an El Niño or La Niña can stunt output.

As the fate of agriculture is dependent on the vicissitudes of nature, and with the sector indispensable in ensuring the food security of the nation, government intervention is indispensable in promoting its sustained growth.

It is for this reason why developing countries, and even developed ones, have maintained strong agricultural sectors. The view is that agriculture is so important that its fate cannot just be left to the workings of the market.

In the case of the Philippines, agencies have been specifically created to oversee the performance and continued growth of the agricultural sector. The Department of Agriculture is the lead agency for this purpose and it has established numerous units under it to properly perform its functions.

The next column will delve into these functions and discuss why the failure to satisfactorily perform these functions as glaringly manifested by the fact that low productivity bedevils our farms across various agricultural commodities for more than two decades now.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/03/28/business/top-business/underdeveloped-agriculture-underdeveloped-economy-1/2081587>

THE MANILA TIMES:

PH needs to produce 2M more hogs yearly

By Giselle P. Jordan

March 28, 2025

AGRICULTURE Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. on Thursday issued a challenge to pig farmers and other stakeholders in the swine industry which has suffered from African swine fever (ASF).

"We need to produce an additional two million hogs each year — through 2026, 2027, and 2028 — to return to pre-ASF levels... and that's the minimum," he said at the 25th National Hog Convention and Trade Exhibit in Pasay City.

Since the first ASF outbreak in 2019, local hog population has dropped from 14 million to the current eight million.

Tiu Laurel cited two factors that may lead to the industry's recovery: the possible commercial rollout of the ASF vaccine this year, and a P4-billion funding from the proposed Animal Industry Development and Competitiveness Act.

He said Agriculture Undersecretary for Livestock Dante Palabrica has been tasked to make a detailed plan that would help guide the industry to full recovery.

This may likewise lessen reliance in pork imports, which has been filling in for the shortfall in local hog production, Tiu Laurel said, noting that "Filipinos still prefer the meat of freshly slaughtered hogs."

More than half of the protein in the Filipino diet comes from pork, as well as chicken.

A quarter of the country's agricultural output comes from the combined livestock and poultry industries from which some 2.8 million Filipino farmers derive their income.

Tiu Laurel said two major commercial hog producers have committed to increase production by half a million hogs each starting next year.

"If they deliver, that's one million hogs," he noted.

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/03/28/business/top-business/ph-needs-to-produce-2m-more-hogs-yearly/2081583>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

DA urges hog raisers to produce 2-M more heads

Ada Pelonia
March 28, 2025

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has urged the swine industry to produce an additional 2 million hogs annually to restore the country's pig population to pre-African swine fever (ASF) levels by 2028.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said the country produced nearly 14 million hogs before ASF hit the country.

Currently, this figure has dwindled to 8 million, which creates a deficit of 6 million heads for the sector, he added.

With this, Laurel said the sector should produce an additional 2 million hogs each year through 2026 to 2028 to return to pre-ASF levels.

"We intend to reach 14 million in three years," Laurel told reporters on the sidelines of the 31st national hog convention and trade exhibit in Pasay City on Thursday.

He noted that the potential commercial rollout of ASF vaccine this year and the funding earmarked under the proposed animal industry competitiveness enhancement fund (Ancef) could help propel the country's hog output.

Under the proposed Ancef, the DA said around P4 billion will be allocated for the swine industry to prop up its recovery and growth.

The DA chief also tasked Undersecretary Dante Palabrica with creating a roadmap that will guide the recovery of the industry, which is crucial to the nation's food security and economic growth.

Laurel noted that if the hog production recovers to pre-ASF levels, this could "significantly" reduce the country's pork import.

"Filipinos still prefer the meat of freshly slaughtered hogs," he said.

The DA chief also said he has spoken with two large commercial hog producers who have committed to each produce half a million more heads of hogs starting next year.

"If they deliver, I already have around 1 million additional heads," he added.

The country's swine sector has been grappling with ASF, which slashed hog output since its detection in 2019.

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) put the country's swine inventory in 2024 at 8.75 million heads, or 8.5 percent lower than the 9.57 million heads recorded in the previous year.

The DA said livestock and poultry sectors, accounting for a quarter of the country's agricultural output, provide livelihood for over 2.8 million Filipino farmers.

Pork and chicken make up more than half of the Filipino diet's protein source, it added.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/03/28/da-urges-hog-raisers-to-produce-2-m-more-heads/>

BUSINESS MIRROR:

DA sets ₱10 billion solar irrigation, soil rejuvenation projects for sugarcane farms

Ada Pelonia
March 28, 2025

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) is set to provide the sugarcane industry with nearly P10 billion solar irrigation and soil rejuvenation projects that can boost domestic output by over 150,000 metric tons (MT) annually.

DA will include the funds for the project in its proposed 2026 budget.

Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) Chief Executive Officer and Administrator Pablo Luis Azcona said the department is looking into establishing small-scale solar irrigation facilities with shallow tube wells on sugarcane plantations.

The irrigation project would provide 16,000 units that could irrigate around 160,000 hectares of the industry's 388,000 hectares.

If this pushes through, Azcona said the project could result in a yield increase amounting to P7.7 billion annually.

In addition, the agency also proposed a soil rejuvenation program considering that the majority of farms in Batangas and Tarlac show low pH levels at 4.5, which is highly acidic.

Azcona noted that under the project, the agency would conduct a massive liming project of five metric tons of lime per hectare.

Liming is a process that increases the pH level in soil, thus reducing the acidity and enhancing soil health. He said if both projects were realized, these would bring in an increase of 180,000 MT of sugar production, which would "greatly lessen our dependence on imported sugar."

"This is the main project that was proposed by the DA for the sugar industry, and it was received very well by [President Marcos Jr.]," Azcona told reporters in a recent press briefing.

The SRA chief said the suggested budget for the irrigation project stood at P8 billion in a period of three years, while the soil rejuvenation program settled around P1.65 billion.

Both projects are set to receive an allocation under the DA's 2026 budget, he added.

Azcona noted that the soil rejuvenation project will be carried out during the planting season.

"We can't do [liming] while the sugarcanes are still standing. It should be done during land preparation," he said.

The SRA and the University of Tokyo (Tōdai) recently forged an agreement which seeks to increase domestic sugarcane output and strengthen the industry.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/03/28/da-sets-p10-billion-solar-irrigation-soil-rejuvenation-projects-for-sugarcane-farms/>

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT:

DA prepares to restore hog population to 14M by 2028

By *Jed Macapagal*
March 28, 2025

The Department of Agriculture (DA) said it will come up with a roadmap to revive the country's hog population to at least 14 million by 2028 in its post-African Swine Fever (ASF) recovery drive for the swine industry.

The current plan is to produce an additional 2 million hogs annually until 2028, DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said during the National Hog Convention and Trade Exhibit in Pasay City on Thursday.

"Before ASF, we had nearly 14 million hogs; now, we have 8 million. This creates a 6-million head deficit. With a growing population, demand is far higher than the previous 14 million," Tiu Laurel said.

"My challenge to the industry is clear: we need to produce an additional 2 million hogs each year through 2026, 2027 and 2028 to return to pre-ASF levels...and that's the minimum," Tiu Laurel added.

He also said that two large commercial hog producers have already committed to each produce half a million more heads of hogs starting 2026.

"If they deliver, I already have around 1 million additional heads," Tiu Laurel further said.

The DA chief also tasked Agriculture Undersecretary for Livestock Dante Palabrica in creating a roadmap to guide the recovery of the swine industry, which he called critical to the nation's food security and economic growth.

Tiu Laurel said the roadmap would be important with the expected passing of the proposed animal industry competitiveness enhancement fund wherein around P4 billion would be allocated for the swine industry to support its recovery and growth.

DA explained that if the swine industry could restore population to pre-ASF levels, it would also mean a reduction in pork imports.

About 6 million hogs were destroyed in the onslaught of the ASF since it hit the country in 2019, the DA recalled.

Meanwhile, the rate of compliance with the pork maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) has exceeded 40 percent, from the initial 20 percent, based on information gathered from monitored stalls, and has reached 6 to 7 percent on the logistics side.

"We will meet again with the industry on Monday (March 31) to sort out, to identify where the issues are. But as of the moment, as far as the farm level is concerned, majority (of the hogs producers) are complying. A few are not complying but most of these are small ones, but we will address that," Tiu Laurel said. In a separate statement, the Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (SINAG) said that farmgate prices of pork have not exceeded the agreed P230 per kg maximum suggested retail price (MSRP).

“We remain committed to the pork MSRP, despite the difficulties on many backyard hog farms, just so we can contribute to efforts to reduce pork prices,” SINAG chairperson Rosendo So said.

<https://malaya.com.ph/business/corporate/da-prepares-to-restore-hog-population-to-14m-by-2028/>

MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT:

DA keen on setting up food hubs nationwide

By Jed

Macapagal

March 27, 2025

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has proposed to President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., the setting up of food hubs in major trade corridors nationwide.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel proposed a nationwide network of food hubs to President Marcos Jr. on Tuesday after visiting the successful food hubs in Thailand recently, DA spokesperson Arnel de Mesa told reporters in a briefing in Quezon City, on Wednesday.

“Yesterday (Tuesday), we were in Malacañang and the President initially agreed on these concepts.”

So far, the development of food hub facilities in Clark and Quezon Province is in the early stages, De Mesa said.

“The one in Clark will serve North Luzon and the one in Quezon Province will serve Southern Tagalog and Bicol. And then, there will also be some sort of similar projects in Luzon, in Visayas and Mindanao,” De Mesa explained. “That’s the initial target. The food hub will be like the experience of Thailand.”

The DA official said Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel has advocated these projects as long-term solutions to the problems of local agricultural logistics and supply availability.

“This is something the secretary has seen in Thailand. That country has 20 of these food hubs that measure somewhere between 50 and 80 hectares... These can carry big volumes of vegetables and meat and every agricultural produce that can be traded everyday, and these will also have cold storages and all support infrastructures,” De Mesa said.

The DA said such facilities would help prevent sharp fluctuations in the prices of local agricultural goods.

“So, if you have this kind of facility, then you can have at least a system, which can tell you the right pricing of goods. With this, we will also not experience super high prices or extreme deficiency of products,” De Mesa explained.

However, De Mesa could not categorically say when the proposal for food hubs in Visayas and Mindanao would undergo feasibility studies, be contracted and break ground, but these have drawn the interest of President Marcos.

The agency earlier sent a local delegation to Thailand during the last week of February until March 2, to explore best practices, techniques and systems in farming, product development and agricultural supply chain management.

The DA had said its delegation also discussed bilateral trade opportunities and potential Thai investments in Philippine agriculture, with Thai counterparts and the private sector.

Among private sector commitments secured by the DA during the Thailand trip, were the planned establishment of a food processing facility and distribution network in the Philippines by Thai food and agri-industrial giant Charoen Pokphand Foods PLC (CPF) within the next three years, the DA said.

CPF is a company under Thailand’s Charoen Pokphand Group Co. Ltd., a conglomerate which also signed a partnership with the Maharlika Investment Corp. last month, to establish a private equity fund and raise up to \$1 billion to accelerate investment in agriculture and food production, digital innovation and sustainable energy in the Philippines.

<https://malaya.com.ph/business/corporate/da-keen-on-setting-up-food-hubs-nationwide/>