

Meat imports expected to exceed 2022 levels

THE PHILIPPINES is expected to exceed the 2022 meat import total of 1.36 million metric tons (MT) this year after the government extended a reduced-tariff scheme for foreign pork, farmers said.

“We see no respite on imports — more than what we need and to the detriment of local producers

and the local agricultural sector,” Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura Executive Director Jayson H. Cainglet said in a Viber message on Sunday.

The Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) said the 2022 meat import total rose 16.2% from a year earlier, led by pork at 710,362 MT, followed by chicken at 411,069 MT.

The top source of imported meat last year was Brazil with 384,095 MT, followed by Spain (225,592 MT) and the US (173,612 MT).

“The sector is compelled to compete with goods from subsidized agricultural systems while ours is neglected,” United Broiler Raisers Association President

Elias Jose M. Inciong said in a Viber message.

Mr. Cainglet said that the data provided by BAI does not include the smuggled and misdeclared pork meat and chicken imports, which also affected domestic producers.

“That does not include some 20-30% more of outright smug-

gled or misdeclared pork, buffalo meat or chicken imports,” he said.

Mr. Cainglet said cold storage is sufficient only for the domestic meat industry’s output.

“Yet the government went ahead with the extension of EO (executive order) that lowered the tariffs on pork, rice and corn — that will only further encour-

age a few privileged importers with their unli import mindset over the course of 2023,” he said.

Last week, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., signed EO No. 10 extending reduced duties for imported pork, rice, corn, and coal, citing the need to keep inflation in check. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

Democrats’ downgrade of Iowa’s role is a blow to Corn Belt, biofuels

THE Democratic Party’s unseating of Iowa from its position as host of the first US presidential nominating contest every four years is a blow that could also reshape the corn and biofuels industries throughout the Midwest, lobbyists and political consultants say.

Backed by President Joe Biden, the party is set to demote Iowa starting in the 2024 election and replace it with South Carolina, which catapulted him to the presidency thanks in part to the backing of Black voters there.

Iowa’s political importance created a cottage industry out of educating and supporting candidates on issues that corn farmers and ethanol manufacturers care about.

For decades, presidential candidates would crisscross the state, visiting crop and cattle farms and ethanol plants to get a crash course in rural America, often publicly supporting a legislative agenda steeped in Farm Belt politics.

But now, the Democrats’ new map means no early nominating state will be fully in the Central Time Zone: the core of the US Farm Belt. That threatens the primacy of corn in national politics just as Congress is set to negotiate

crop subsidies, disaster assistance and other support for farmers in a massive spending bill.

While the farm industry directly contributes just 0.6% of gross domestic product and 1.4% of US jobs, national politicians courted the industry in Iowa to demonstrate they could win support in rural America.

“Forward looking, to get Democratic candidates exposed to farm issues and get these issues in front of them is going to be extremely challenging. The Iowa caucuses did that, and it made a huge difference,” said Aaron Pickrell, an Iowa native who ran Barack Obama’s 2008 general campaign in Ohio.

Iowa’s outsized influence in presidential politics has often spilled over into federal policy making and boosted legislative support on a host of key agricultural issues, from generous subsidies in the multi-billion dollar Farm Bill to ethanol mandates.

In 2018, then President Donald Trump signed an \$867 billion bill that received broad bipartisan support and provided billions in federal financial support to US farmers. The bill expires this year, triggering talks in Congress on a replacement package.

In 2021, Iowa’s gross farm receipts totaled \$40.58 billion, second only to the much larger and more populous California, according to the US Agricultural Department.

Iowa’s figure is nearly double the combined amount of the five states Mr. Biden now wants to see hold early presidential nominating contests.

Dave Walton, 57, is an 8th generation farmer in Iowa who grows corn and soybean and raises cattle. He saw the caucuses as an invaluable way to educate politicians and said losing that opportunity will undoubtedly hurt the industry’s influence in Washington.

“Every four years, we are given the opportunity to show the importance of farming in Iowa and to the US. Now, we you have to wonder what industry fills that void in another state,” Mr. Walton said.

Iowa leads the nation in the production of corn, the biggest crop in the country by volume. The state accounts for roughly 17% of national output. It is also the top producer of corn-based ethanol, an industry that relies on federal mandates requiring it to be blended with gasoline.

“The process ensures that rural issues are a part of the national party’s platform and provide a measure of accountability for candidates when they go back to Washington,” said Brooke Coleman, executive director of the Advanced Biofuels Business Council.

Jeff Link, an Iowa-based Democratic strategist, was part of a group funded by ethanol interests that helped set up tours of ethanol plants for Democratic candidates in 2020, including Mr. Biden and Vice-President Kamala Harris. “It’s a blow to the industry, in terms of educating and informing the Democratic candidates,” Mr. Link said. “If you’re a northeast Democrat, what does ethanol matter now for you politically?”

Republicans still plan to hold their first votes of the presidential primary season in Iowa. Link noted that many of the Democratic candidates vying for the nomination were often already serving as elected leaders in Washington or would later become vice-presidents or cabinet secretaries.

The Iowa caucuses helped developed empathy for rural issues that could later be tapped for legislative success. — **Reuters**

World food prices hit record high in 2022 despite December fall

PARIS — World food prices eased in December, marking the ninth consecutive monthly fall, but gained more than 14% in 2022 compared to the previous year, to reach the highest since records began, the UN food agency said on Friday.

The Food and Agriculture Organization’s (FAO) food price index, which tracks international prices of the most globally traded food commodities, averaged 132.4 points last month compared with a revised 135.00 points for November.

The November figure was previously given as 135.7 points. For 2022 as a whole, the benchmark index averaged 143.7 points, up 14.3% from 2021, and the highest since records started in 1990.

The decline in the index in December was driven by

a steep drop in the international price of vegetable oils, together with some declines in cereal and meat prices, but mitigated by slight increases in those of sugar and dairy, the FAO said.

Food prices surged after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February last year on fears of disruptions to Black Sea trade.

They have pared gains in part because of a UN-backed grain export channel from Ukraine.

The FAO said last year that food import costs in 2022 would lead the poorest countries to cut back on shipped volumes.

Its food price index comprises the average of its meat, dairy, cereals, vegetable oils and sugar price indices, weighted to the average export shares of each of the groups for 2014-2016, it said. — **Reuters**

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