

France tightens GM rapeseed import checks after wild plants found

PARIS — French authorities said on Friday they had asked oilseed processor Saipol to tighten procedures on handling imports after genetically modified (GM) rapeseed, cultivation of which is banned in the European Union (EU), was found growing wild last year.

The plants were found by anti-GM crop association Inf'OGM growing along a road linking a port terminal with a crushing facility operated by Saipol, a unit of oilseed group Avril, at Rouen in northern France, French health and safety agency ANSES said in a report.

EU countries including France import large volumes of GM crops, including varieties of rapeseed, soybeans and maize, notably to feed livestock.

However, cultivation of GMO varieties is rare due to public

opposition and no GMO rapeseed has been approved for growing. Imports of GM rapeseed, also used to produce biodiesel fuel, mostly come from Canada and Australia to complement non-GM supply from Europe.

ANSES had requested that Saipol improve prevention of grain spilling from lorries and increase monitoring of wild plants in an extended port zone, the agency said, adding there was little risk of contamination of local farmland.

Saipol said in an e-mailed statement that it had taken additional measures, including more frequent weeding of wild plants.

"These actions seem to be effective and we will continue to monitor the matter with the authorities and reinforce the measures if needed," it said. — **Reuters**

Only 5,000 MT expected to arrive by onion import deadline

By Ashley Erika O. Jose
Reporter

THE Agriculture department said only 5,000 metric tons (MT) worth of onion imports from the initial target of 21,060 MT will arrive by the shipment deadline this week.

"The applications (for onion imports were) approved last week," Rex C. Estoperez, deputy spokesman of the Department of Agriculture (DA), told *BusinessWorld* by phone on Sunday. "The volume that has been granted import clearances is only 5,000 metric tons."

Mr. Estoperez said that the imports will be distributed to Luzon, the Visayas, and Mindanao, with

a target sale price of P100 to P150 per kilogram.

"Our projection is to sell it between P100 to P150, but we'll see once the imports arrive," Mr. Estoperez said.

In a letter dated Jan. 6, the DA opened the application process for sanitary and phytosanitary import clearances on Jan. 9 for imported yellow and red onions, with the application deadline set at Jan. 13.

Importers were given a Jan. 27 deadline to bring in their shipments, a condition designed to minimize the impact on the domestic onion harvest.

Onion prices in wet markets rose to P420-P600 per kilo during the Jan. 6-10 period.

According to the DA's price monitoring report from Jan. 20,

domestic red onions sold for P300 to P400 per kilo, with white onions at P250 to P400 per kilo.

The suggested retail price (SRP) for onions is P250 per kilo.

Gerald Glenn F. Panganiban, officer-in-charge director of the DA's Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI), told reporters in a briefing last week that the goal is to bring onion prices below the SRP.

He said that the BPI continues to monitor wet markets following reports of smuggled onions.

"Most of the smuggled items are misdeclared. They may bring diseases and pests, so we continue to monitor these reports and I am warning the public that these are unsafe for consumption," he said.

Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura Executive Direc-

tor Jayson H. Cainglet said in a Viber message on Sunday that the farmgate price of onions is now at P100-P120 per kilo, barely above the cost of production estimated at P80 to P100 per kilo.

"And yet retail prices of onions remain high. Regardless of the actual volume of imported onions that will arrive, the damage has been done," he said.

Mr. Cainglet added that traders and importers may use imports as leverage to negotiate even lower farmgate prices.

"There is no worse enemy of the local agriculture sector than these elements within the Department of Agriculture that announce onion imports. We fear the worst for our onion farmers, as the bulk of the onions has yet to be harvested," Mr. Cainglet said.

Brazil launches first anti-deforestation raids under Lula

URUARA, Brazil — Brazilian environmental agents cut through the rainforest with machetes in search of criminals in the first anti-deforestation raids under President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who has pledged to end surging destruction inherited from his predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro.

Reuters exclusively accompanied raids led by environmental agency Ibama in the rainforest state of Para to stop loggers and ranchers illegally clearing the forest.

The agency also launched raids this week in the states of Roraima and Acre, Ibama environmental enforcement coordinator Tatiane Leite said.

About 10 Ibama agents set out in pickup trucks on Thursday from their base in the municipality of Uruara, Para, along with a dozen federal police, heading toward a cluster of points where satellite images showed loggers and ranchers recently at work clearing the forest illegally.

In 12 hours driving on dirt roads illegally crisscrossing an indigenous reserve, the convoy reached five areas that were deforested and burned around the

time of last October's election that pitted Mr. Da Silva against Mr. Bolsonaro.

The areas all lay within the Cachoeira Seca indigenous reserve, where deforestation is strictly prohibited. Four of the tracts appeared to be subsequently abandoned, with no signs people were living nearby or in the process of turning them into ranches.

Agents said it could be a sign that illegal ranchers gave up on investing time and money in turning illegal land into productive pasture, knowing that Mr. Da Silva campaigned on a pledge to crack down on deforestation.

"People know that in this government enforcement will tighten and won't let them use an area they deforested illegally," said Givanildo dos Santos Lima, the agent leading Ibama's Uruara mission. "If the other government had won, you would have found people here, well-maintained pastures and cattle."

The government under Mr. Bolsonaro had gutted staff and funding for environmental enforcement by Ibama in his four years in office, while the former

president criticized Ibama for issuing fines to farmers and miners.

Mr. Bolsonaro gave the military and later the Justice Ministry authority over operations to fight deforestation, sidelining Ibama despite the agency's extensive experience and success in fighting the destruction of the Amazon.

An area larger than Denmark was deforested under Mr. Bolsonaro, a 60% increase from the prior four years. In another area of the reserve, agents found a newly built house with several chainsaws and stocked with weeks of food, indicating the occupants had likely fled just before Ibama's arrival.

Flanked by police with semiautomatic weapons, Ibama agents hacked a path through the adjacent jungle to reach an area the size of 57 football fields strewn with downed trees and charred trunks.

Some messily planted corn sprouted up to knee-level in what appeared to be an attempt to lay claim to the area to eventually turn it into cattle pasture, the agents said. "We'll come back with a helicopter and catch them by surprise," Lima said.

He was optimistic that Ibama would be able to conduct more raids under Mr. Da Silva, aimed at fining deforesters and spooking criminals from attempting to clear more areas.

Mr. Da Silva on the campaign trail last year pledged to put Ibama back in charge of combating deforestation with beefed-up funding and personnel.

He took office on Jan. 1, so additional money and staff have yet to reach the frontline enforcers.

Mr. Bolsonaro's government denied several requests by Reuters to accompany Ibama missions during his 2019-2022 administration. His government instituted a gag order forbidding Ibama agents from speaking to the press, which agents say has already been reversed.

Mr. Da Silva took office for the first time in 2003 when Amazon deforestation was near all-time highs, and through strict enforcement of environmental laws reduced it by 72% to a near record low when he left office in 2010. — **Reuters**

Russia forecasts grain exports at 55-60 million tons

MOSCOW — Russia's Agriculture Ministry said it expected Russia to export 55-60 million tons of grain in the 2022/23 season, and that it had no plans to lower the grain export quota, according to the Interfax news agency.

President Vladimir Putin said earlier last week that Russia needed to maintain stable food reserves, if necessary by restricting some exports, but did not provide specific details.

It was not clear whether Mr. Putin was suggesting that Russia might limit exports of major food commodities such as grain, which much of the world depends on. — **Reuters**



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