

Data system proposed for poultry industry to guide import decisions

By Sheldeen Joy Talavera

THE poultry industry needs a data system that will provide a clear picture of supply to guide import decisions, an industry official said.

United Broiler Raisers Association (UBRA) President Elias Jose M. Inciong said the volume of chicken imports has increased compared to last year, which he blamed on unreliable demand projections by importers.

"The importers (will project) an increase in demand; apparently they are wrong. That is the problem with not having a data system with buy-in from everyone, especially the stakeholders," he said.

"When you do not have an information and data system in accordance with the law, policy decisions and business decisions will end up being wrong," he added.

The Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) estimates that chicken imports in the four months to April amounted to 131 million kilograms, up from 102 million a year earlier.

The Department of Agriculture (DA), Mr. Inciong said, puts the chicken supply and demand balance this year at a surplus equivalent to 110 days' consumption, less the 128 days earlier projected by the National Livestock Program (NLP).

"We already have the actual local production data for (the first quarter) and we plugged it in. Same with pork, instead of an 18-day deficit, it is now down to five days based on annual data," said NLP Director Ruth S. Sonaco in a Viber message.

Ms. Sonaco earlier said chicken production is estimated at 2.08 million metric tons (MT) liveweight, against

demand of nearly 1.6 million MT.

Meanwhile, Mr. Inciong said that demand and farmgate price of chicken are still "very low" but noted the large gap between the farmgate price and the average retail price.

He said that the current average farmgate price of chicken was P95 while the prevailing price in Metro Manila markets was between P150 and P200, according to DA price monitors.

In a meeting with DA and BAI officials last week, UBRA expressed its concern on the potential for human-to-human transmission of avian influenza A(H3N8).

"When you're planning, you plan for the worst scenario and the worst scenario for bird flu is human-to-human transmission," Mr. Inciong said.

The World Health Organization (WHO) reported last month the first human death from the person-to-person transmission of the A(H3N8) strain in China. This was also the third reported human infection.

"Based on available information, it appears that this virus does not have the ability to spread easily from person to person, and therefore the risk of it spreading among humans at the national, regional, and international levels is considered to be low," the WHO said in a report on April 11.

It said that the A(H3N8) strain is typically detected in animals and "most commonly found subtypes in birds, causing little to no sign of disease in either domestic poultry or wild birds."

No cases of the AI strain have been detected so far in the Philippines, according to the Department of Health.



Japanese firms considering abaca processing in Davao

THREE Japanese companies are considering sourcing abaca and setting up a processing plant in Davao to supply the motorcycle parts industry, a city investment official said.

Christian D. Cambaya, Davao City Investment Promotion Center investor assistance unit head,

said the companies plan to bring in the technology and train farmers to meet the required specifications.

"We found out that abaca is being used in Japan as a material to make fiberglass that is being used to build high-end motorcycles," he said at last

week's Habi at Kape media forum.

The proposed venture was among the projects discussed during a trip to Japan by Davao City officials for a tourism and investment promotion campaign, and the signing of a sister-city agreement with Sennan City.

"We presented the services that we provide here to our investors," Mr. Cambaya said.

The roadshow visited Tokyo and Osaka, and was attended by Japanese retail, airline, real estate, trading, manufacturing, tourism, and transportation businesses. — **Maya M. Padillo**

USAID-backed agri co-op beats membership target

AGRITERRA, which is implementing a \$2 million value-chain initiative backed by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), said its Generating Rural Opportunities by Working with Cooperatives (GROW Coop) project has hit 10,900 members after three years, exceeding expectations.

"Through this project, we just shared to them a more systematized, and results-oriented way

of providing support for the value chain," according to Marciano T. Virola, business advisor of Agriterra and chief of party of the GROW project.

Agriterra, which specializes in developing cooperatives into bankable, farmer-led agribusinesses, has its origins in the Dutch farm cooperative movement.

The project has developed cooperatives, federations, and private companies into local re-

source organizations which then provide in-depth mentoring, capacity development, and support for micro-, small-, and medium-sized agricultural cooperatives.

According to Mr. Virola, the project has signed 41 new purchasing agreements and has leveraged \$3.74 million worth of non-donor investment.

Agriterra hopes its model will help serve as a roadmap for agri-cooperatives, and are

pushing for legislation along these lines.

"We came up with a draft of the agricultural cooperative bill... (which) we hope to submit to legislators in the coming days," he said.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Jane C. Bacayo said that there are currently over 30,000 registered cooperatives managed by the Cooperative Development Authority. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

Brazil boosts bird flu defense to protect world's top chicken industry

CAMPINAS — Brazil is taking extra precautions to protect the world's largest poultry export industry from a highly pathogenic avian influenza virus that was detected among wild birds in the country after previously hitting neighboring nations.

Nearly \$10 billion of chicken exports would be at risk if H5N1 bird flu infects commercial flocks in Brazil, which has taken on a growing role in supplying the world's poultry and eggs as importing nations ban chicken and turkey meat from countries with the virus.

On Monday, the only World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) accredited lab in Latin America confirmed detection of H5N1 in two wild *Thalasseus aculeatus* birds, or Cabot's terns, and one Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*) captured in Espirito Santo state.

Per protocol, local veterinarians in Espirito Santo took samples from the birds on site and sent them to the reference lab in Campinas, Brazil.

"The entire industry is mobilized to monitor the situation identified in Espirito Santo," national meat lobby ABPA said in a statement.

A case of bird flu on a farm usually results in the entire flock being killed

and can trigger trade restrictions from importing countries, while detection among wild birds does not spark bans under WOAH guidelines.

Brazilian officials say they do not expect the cases in wild birds to have any trade impact, and noted Espirito Santo on Brazil's central Atlantic coast does not border any of the country's main poultry producing states in the far south.

In other countries, avian flu outbreaks in wild birds have frequently been followed by transmission to commercial flocks. Bird flu outbreaks have contributed to higher prices of poultry and eggs, normally an affordable source of protein.

The Brazilian government this year raised investments 19-fold to increase testing capacity at its network of six federal laboratories, and increased the overall budget of its Animal and Plant Health and Inspection Services by some 12% to 209 million reais (\$42 million).

"For every real spent in the Campinas federal laboratory, some 64 reais of potential losses are avoided to the meat industry," said Rodrigo Nazareno, who coordinates the national laboratory network.

Reuters visited WOAH's reference lab on April 25, before this week's positive test. Lab workers were already on high alert after more than 75 outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza were reported in nine countries in Central and South America, many for the first time ever.

As poultry farmers increased monitoring, Brazil saw a six-fold increase in suspect case notifications through early May.

Brazil in recent weeks started using drones to patrol sensitive areas such as the Pantanal, the world's largest freshwater wetland, and implemented a strict ban on commercial farm visits by non-authorized persons.

After cases were confirmed in neighboring Argentina and Uruguay, Brazil announced in late March a 90-day suspension of all events involving the exposition of poultry.

The agriculture ministry told Reuters that more testing may be required within a 10-km (6.2-mile) radius of the Espirito Santo outbreaks, including of commercial flocks, and that it will maintain surveillance of potential cases in wild birds nationwide.

Brazil's chicken export revenue jumped by more than 27% in dollars last year as local companies benefited from the global avian flu scare, which opened up new markets.

China and the Middle East remained big customers. And the European Union, where countries like France had to kill millions of birds to contain outbreaks, boosted import volumes from Brazil by some 23%, industry data show.

Since early 2022, wild birds have spread the highly infectious virus farther and wider around the world than ever before. While humans can contract H5N1, such cases remain rare, and global health officials have said the risk to humans is low.

The virus arrived in South America through migratory birds, said Masaio Mizuno Ishizuka, a senior epidemiologist at the University of Sao Paulo.

Normally birds will only spread bird flu for around five days. But the virus' presence in small sea life the birds feed on may have enabled its broader spread this year, she said.

"The virus is extremely capable of presenting mutations to increase its potential for survival as a species," Ms. Ishizuka cautioned. — **Reuters**

DoE expects NGCP audit to start this year

THE Department of Energy (DoE) said it expects to begin reviewing the operations of the National Grid Corp. of the Philippines (NGCP) sometime this year, amid calls to renationalize the grid operator.

"We are going to do a more comprehensive study in terms of looking at the status of transmission lines, the nature of problems, and what are the solutions to these," Energy Secretary Raphael P.M. Lotilla told reporters on the sidelines of ACEN Corp.'s wind farm inauguration in Ilocos Norte on Friday.

Mr. Lotilla gave no detailed timeline for the launch of the review, but added that some prerequisites are needed before it can start, including reports due for submission to the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC).

The groundswell for an NGCP performance audit began with the tripping of transmission lines on May 8, which raised red and yellow alerts over the Luzon power grid.

The Energy department has also cited delayed transmission projects as a factor in the tight supply of power.

"What is important is that we finish these projects first and foremost. These are the ones that are going to free up stranded power," Mr. Lotilla said.

Apart from performance issues, a Chinese stake in the NGCP had also renewed national security concerns.

A consortium led by Henry Sy, Jr. and Robert Coyiuto, Jr. won a 25-year concession to run the power transmission network in December 2007. State Grid Corp. of China holds a 40% stake in NGCP.

At the same event, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. told reporters that there needs to be a good reason to withdraw NGCP's franchise.

"What I've been hearing from news items is the security problem; that will be part of the discussion. But what I'm looking at is the performance; Have they been performing? Are they following the contract with the government?" Mr. Marcos said during the inauguration of ACEN's wind farm.

"Because if the franchise is revoked, then we will have to find somebody else to operate the grid," he added.

Mr. Marcos said that the national security aspect is also being studied. He said the NGCP signed a memorandum of understanding with the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency to address any such concerns, particularly in the area of cybersecurity.

"The ERC as the regulator will be conducting a full regulatory performance review, while the PSALM (Power Sector Assets and Liabilities Management Corp.) and Transco (National Transmission Corp.) as the counterparties to the concession agreement at the same time will conduct contractual performance review," Mr. Lotilla said.

"Our review focus is really financial. But there is (also) a review on the asset base. The asset base includes of course existing assets and their construction of the proposed projects," ERC Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer Monalisa C. Dimalanta, told reporters in a separate energy conference last week.

The NGCP has said that it welcomes all audits within the framework of the rules.

The NGCP also said that it introduced many improvements to the transmission system since it took over the ageing government-run transmission system in 2009. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

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