

Upland rice farming touted as hunger prevention program

DAVAO CITY — Former Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol said upland rice farming on small plots could serve to mitigate hunger among farmers.

The "Kalahating Ektarya sa Bawat Pamilya (A half hectare for every family)" program (KEPB) will involve both hybrid and inbred rice, and is designed to address a possible downturn in production due to the prevailing El Niño.

"Ang focus nito ay may makain ang pamilyang Pilipino in the rural areas kasi sila ang pinaka vulnerable whenever the prices of commodity goes up (The focus is for rural families to have something available to eat because they are the most vulnerable whenever rice prices rise)," he said.

Mr. Piñol, who is also a former chairman of the Mindanao Development Authority, said the recommended hybrid seed variety is the Tatag TH82 (mestizo 51 NSIC 350H) alongside AMO Foliar Fertilizer and chicken manure slurry. The combination has a target yield of at least two metric tons per half hectare, ultimately yielding 1,200 kilos of milled rice or 24 50-kilo sacks of rice.

According to Mr. Piñol, other ways of cushioning the expected rice shortage include the repair and rehabilitation of irrigation systems, especially those used for communal irrigation, and maximum use of high-yielding hybrid and inbred seed to increase production, including the Inbred RC 222 variety.

He urged all companies in the hybrid rice seed industry to conduct an inventory of the seed supply.

He said upland areas benefit from high moisture and

regular rainfall even during El Niño events.

Mr. Piñol said the program will engage local government units to use their development and calamity funds to prepare for the impending rice crisis by aiding farm families in planting rice for their own consumption during the crisis and eventually as an eventual component of a broader food security strategy.

The KEPB initially targets North Cotabato's upland rice areas in Arakan, Antipas, President Roxas, Magpet, Kidapawan, Makilala, Tuluwan, M'Lang, Matalam, Aleosan, Midsayap, Libungan, Pigcawayan, Alamada, and Banisilan, where upland rice farming had long been practiced.

"For every farm family in the highlands or in non-irrigated but water supply-accessible areas, seed good for half a hectare will be provided along with the needed inputs for land preparation, fertilization, and plant care," Mr. Piñol said.

Mr. Piñol created the program in partnership with Seedworks Philippines, a company that is promoting TH82.

According to Remus Morandante, vice-president of Seedworks Philippines, with TH82 farmers can enjoy high yields despite the many biotic and abiotic stresses affecting rice farming.

TH82 has a proven tolerance to intermittent drought and is applicable for direct and dry seeding cultures.

Seedworks, a plant science company, is engaged in the research, production, and marketing of rice, cotton, millet, mustard, and vegetables that grow even in adverse weather and soil conditions. — **Maya M. Padillo**

Palay output growth estimated at 1.6% in three months to June

PRODUCTION of palay, or unmilled rice, in the second quarter was estimated to have risen 1.6% year on year during the second quarter, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said.

The PSA estimate for palay volume was 4.27 million metric tons (MT), higher than the actual output of 4.20 million MT a year earlier. The estimate was based on the standing crop as of June 1.

The new projection is 0.2% lower than the initial forecast of 4.28 million MT issued on April 1.

In the three months to June, the harvest area for the quarter is estimated to have increased by 0.8% year on year to 961.14 thousand hectares. If realized, yield per hectare will grow 0.7% to 4.44 MT.

"As of June 1, 2023, about 840.51 thousand hectares or 87.4% of the 961.14 thousand hectares updated harvest area of standing crop have been harvested with recorded palay output of 3.76 million metric tons," the PSA said.

Of the standing palay yet to be harvested, 96.9% were at the maturing stage, while 3.1% were at the reproductive stage.

The PSA also reported that corn production is estimated to have declined 0.5% to 1.48 million MT, based on the standing crop as of June 1.

The new estimate was 0.3% higher than the 1.47 million MT issued on April 1.

The PSA cut its harvest area estimate by 2.6% to 408.89 thousand hectares, while the assumed

yield per hectare is estimated to have risen by 2.3% to 3.61 MT.

"As of June 1, 2023, the updated area harvested for corn was 323.92 thousand hectares or 79.2% of the 408.89 thousand hectares updated area of standing crop with reported corn production of 1.25 million metric tons," the PSA said.

The new estimate was 0.85% higher than the 1.47 million MT issued on April 1.

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COTABATO PROVINCE

Cotabato farmers trained in VCO, coco water production

THIRTY FARMERS from Libungan, Cotabato Province have undergone training in virgin coconut oil (VCO) and coconut water production, provincial officials said.

The training was conducted by the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist (OPAg).

Provincial Advisory Council member Rosalie H. Cabaya said the training was designed to raise farmer incomes by preparing them to sell higher value-added products.

Governor Emmylou J. Talino-Mendoza has said one of the goals is also to make Cotabato farmers practice sustainable agriculture.

Ms. Mendoza said the province is continuing to identify areas suitable for coconut plantations and to develop new technology for coconut manufacturing.

According to OPAg, Cotabato Province had 78,727 hectares deemed suitable for coconut plantations. — **Maya M. Padillo**

Mexico says US refuses to cooperate on GM corn studies

MEXICO CITY — The US has denied a request by Mexico to jointly conduct scientific research on the health impact of genetically modified (GM) corn, a Mexican government official said, a sign the two sides could be inching closer to a formal trade dispute.

Mexico has repeatedly called on the US to work together on scientific studies amid a conflict over the Latin American country's plans to limit the use of GM

corn. Mexico buys about \$5 billion worth of corn from its trade partner annually, most of which is GM yellow corn used for livestock feed.

The US, however, denied this request and made it clear it will not participate in new scientific studies with Mexico, Mexican Deputy Agriculture Minister Victor Suarez said in an interview with Reuters.

The two countries discussed Mexico's request, including during a visit by US Agriculture Sec-

retary Tom Vilsack, but the US will not oblige, Mr. Suarez said.

"They did not want to establish a period in which the two parties agree to carry out impact studies on animal health and human health," Mr. Suarez.

"Their science is the Word of God. That is not science, that is ideology," he added.

When asked to comment on what Mr. Suarez said, the US Department of Agriculture referred

Reuters to previous remarks by Mr. Vilsack stating that the US "fundamentally disagrees" with Mexico's position on biotechnology.

Mexico wants to ban GM corn for human consumption in the food staple tortilla, which is mostly made of white corn, and eventually replace GM yellow corn used for livestock feed, arguing that biotech corn harms native varieties and may have adverse health effects. — **Reuters**

Farm output, from SI/1

Asis G. Perez, former director of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and co-convenor of advocacy group Tugon Kabuhayan, said fisheries production likely saw improved numbers since there were no weather disturbances except for one typhoon in the second quarter.

"I anticipate good numbers since we noticed the price of fish has gone down, which is an indication that there is a lot of supply," he said in mixed Filipino and English via Viber message.

Mr. Perez noted demand for fish appeared lower in the second quarter, which may have dampened prices. This month, he said fish prices have gone up again.

Meanwhile, Ateneo de Manila University economics professor Leonardo A. Lanza said agricultural output may have declined in the second quarter due to unusually heavy rains in May and June.

"It is difficult to predict agricultural production in the second quarter. It may take a rocket scientist to accurately forecast the performance of the agricultural given its vulnerability to climate change changes," he said in an e-mail.

Mr. Lanza noted that the El Niño weather pattern does not bode well for agricultural production for the rest of the year.

In July, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) declared the onset of El

Credit rating, from SI/1

The CDS spread is a market-based measure of a country's likelihood of defaulting within a certain period of time.

"The CDS market is anticipating our single 'A' rating. Credit rating agencies look at the country's governance and the fiscal policies to pursue [in deciding their debt ratings]. For the Philippines, they see our policies are good enough, including being able to help the poor," Mr. Diokno said in mixed English and Filipino.

Still, debt watchers are being careful in giving credit ratings due to the backlash they received during the global financial crisis, Mr. Diokno said.

The three major agencies were criticized for exaggerated ratings of risky mortgage-backed securities back in 2008, which gave investors false confidence that they were safe for investing.

Mr. Remolona said the debt watchers are more "conservative" now.

To achieve the "A" credit rating, the BSP and the Department of Finance organized an InterAgency Committee on the Road to A Credit Rating Agenda in 2019.

The body aims to coordinate the efforts of member agencies in implementing the Road to A Roadmap. It also aims to enhance engagements with analysts, investors, and credit rating agencies.

"It is important to note that we managed to maintain investor grade ratings even during the pandemic, while other countries were downgraded," Mr. Diokno said. "We're fully aware that this is not going to be a walk in the park. But we are committed to work unceasingly to achieve our lofty goal." — **Keisha B. Ta-asan**

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