

LANDBANK approves loans worth over P8B for hog repopulation as of end-June

LAND BANK of the Philippines (LANDBANK) said it approved loans for hog repopulation worth P8.05 billion in the six months to June.

In a statement on Sunday, the bank said 36 borrowers took out loans from its Special Window

and Interim Support to Nurture Hog Enterprises (SWINE) Lending Program.

The projects to be financed include the purchase of hogs and feed, construction and expansion of piggeries. Some of the loans were also for working capital.

The bank said commercial hog farmers registered as cooperatives or farmer's associations, small and medium enterprises, and large enterprises or corporations may borrow up to 80% of the project cost.

Working capital loans are payable in a year, while permanent

working capital financing may be repaid over five years, the bank said.

"Loans for fixed assets and construction of facilities are payable based on project cash flow (over) its economic useful life," it added.

The SWINE Lending Program is a partnership with the Department of Agriculture.

LANDBANK said AJ Piggery Farm, which is among the beneficiaries of the program, was able to borrow P24 million for its startup commercial farm.

The loan covers construction of three piggery buildings, support facilities, a manure lagoon, wastewater treatment facilities, and the acquisition of young female hogs for breeding. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

Mountain Province capital Bontoc bans live hogs, pork from Ilocos Sur due to ASF

BONTOC, the capital of Mountain Province, is temporarily banning hogs and pork products from Cervantes, Ilocos Sur, after the detection of African Swine Fever (ASF) there.

Bontoc Mayor Jerome Tudlong, Jr. in a public advisory warned his constituents about cases of ASF spreading from Ilocos to adjoining areas.

"To prevent further spread of this disease and to help protect the livelihood of our swine raisers against the re-infection of ASF in our municipality, the entry of live swine/pigs, pork, locally processed pork products and by-products from the said area is hereby suspended," the mayor said.

ASF was detected in a barangay in Cervantes in July, prompting other towns in Ilocos Sur to erect barriers against pigs or pork products from that town.

On July 24, the government of Benguet province issued a temporary ban on the entry of hogs and swine products from Cervantes.

In the first week of August, Abra province and Bauko, Mountain Province did the same.

Checkpoints were set up at the border of Ilocos Sur and nearby provinces.

On Aug. 12, three hog traders were intercepted at the border transporting 11 pigs. — **Artemio A. Dumlaog**

Can 'superfood' millet make a climate comeback?

KAURIKALA, India/LAGOS — Riding a red electric scooter on country roads in eastern India, Sanjulata Mahanta has become something of a poster girl for millet since she stunned fellow villagers by planting the hardy grain — and making a profit — three years ago.

"People laughed at me and said I was growing grass," Ms. Mahanta, 35, said on a humid morning as farmers from Kaurikala village in Odisha state gathered under a tree for a millet workshop mixing history, cookery and climate change adaptation.

Ms. Mahanta has now helped about a dozen other women farmers to sow millet, long a staple in Asia and Africa before rice, wheat and maize started to take its place in fields and on menus about six decades ago.

But the forgotten crop is making a global comeback riding on its high nutritional value and ability to grow on arid land — crucial to its appeal as climate change fuels more frequent and intense droughts.

Sitting beneath the tree's shady canopy, awaiting a reluctant monsoon, volunteers chopped curry leaves and green chillies into a finger millet batter to make fritters as organizers trumpeted its dietary benefits.

When Bhanumati Mahanta, 62, sowed millet on her farm for the first time last year, she did not aim to tackle the problems posed by the region's increasingly truant rains but to ensure her late husband ate healthy food to help his diabetes.

"My husband had encouraged me to grow millet but he did not survive to see the harvest," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation, digging a finger into the dry soil to transplant millet seedlings under a harsh morning sun.

"For decades, we grew hybrid rice using fertilizers and pesticides. We consumed the same rice. I now understand it was all toxic," she added.

A farming revolution in the 1960s saw policies supporting rice and wheat crops and their sale at guaranteed prices, which shrank millet's share in India's grain basket to about 6% today compared with 20% in the 1950s.

But millet is now being dubbed a saviour crop as climate change impacts — including harsher heat, drought and floods, which can slash harvests, spur new pests and accelerate food waste — become a major emerging threat to global food security.

Efforts to rethink food trade, aid and speculation are needed alongside ways to balance nature protection, farming and climate-

smart dietary changes in a world where a growing number of people face hunger despite sufficient global food output.

With that in mind, the UN named 2023 as the International Year of Millet and the humble grain was included in the White House's vegetarian dinner for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he visited in June.

In Odisha, where a state initiative is promoting the crop, it is also returning to kitchens. A chef at the trendy Bocca Cafe in the state capital, Bhubaneswar, has been substituting rice with whole grain millet in a Mexican-inspired dish, while millet cookies are being served with tea in government meetings.

Back in Kaurikala village, Bhanumati Mahanta uses finger millet to prepare a sweetened porridge, replacing the rice that she had been using until now.

Odisha is not a top millet producing state in India or a big consumer like the western and southern states, but the Odisha Millet Mission that started in 2017 is being emulated in other parts of the country and has been hailed as an "inspiring example" by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Located on the coast of the volatile Bay of Bengal, Odisha is frequently hit by cyclones, floods and droughts that have impacted lives and incomes, fuelled migration and hunger.

The state's bet on millet aims to protect farmers' earnings, fight malnourishment and promote healthy food alternatives, as officials cite a "fork-to-farm" strategy to foster the consumer demand necessary for farmers to plant it.

"We have to inform the next generation that it is good for the environment and also for farmers," said Arabinda Kumar Padhee, principal secretary of Odisha state's Agriculture department who is heading the millet mission.

"We want to revive millet not only in farms but also on the plates of the consumers. We want it on their menu," he said.

Similar efforts are taking root in Africa's largest millet producing nation, Nigeria, where the government is including biskin gero, a couscous-like dish served with spicy fish sauce, in school menus for children in the northern region. — **Thomson Reuters Foundation**

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Vietnam offers rice price cut as DA urges India to lift ban

AGRICULTURE Senior Undersecretary Domingo F. Panganiban said on Friday that private traders have received lower price quotes for Vietnamese rice, while the Department of Agriculture (DA) is asking the government of India to relax its export ban on white rice.

"We are pleased to inform the public that upon the directive of President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. to open talks with Vietnam, some Vietnamese exporters have quoted our private traders prices that are \$30-40 lower (per ton)," Mr. Panganiban said in a statement released by the Palace.

He added that the DA is working with India — one of the world's top rice exporters — to allow exports of white rice to continue on humanitarian grounds.

Last month, India banned exports of non-basmati white rice to ensure domestic availability and curb prices.

Vietnam, on the other hand, announced a plan to reduce rice exports to four million tons a year by 2030.

"We hope this will pave the way for the country to get better terms for the additional 300,000 to 500,000 metric tons (MT) in rice imports for this year," Mr. Panganiban added.

A farm industry official said a \$40 reduction in Vietnamese rice prices will result in Philippine rice prices that are still expensive.

"If it's \$40, landed cost will fall P3 per kilo," Raul Q. Montemayor, national manager of the Federation of Free Farmers, told *BusinessWorld* by phone.

"But it depends on (which part of the transaction) the \$40 will be reduced... Vietnam rice is now at \$630, \$640 per ton so even though you take out \$40, it will still be expensive," he added.

The Philippines needs to import at least 700,000 MT in the lean months of August and September to ensure adequate rice inventories, Mr. Montemayor noted.

Danilo V. Fausto, president of the Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food, Inc., said the impact of the lower quotes from Vietnam could result in a retail price decline of about P2 to P3, which he described as small but welcome, he said via phone.

At any rate, consumers may have to wait until the harvest in September for domestic rice prices to decline. "When we harvest in September, the stock will be replenished and prices will go down because local supply will now be available," Mr. Fausto said.

Mr. Montemayor said the harvest may show up in markets by October due to delays caused by recent typhoons.

"The typhoons could have affected the crops that are to be har-

vested in September... (farmers) affected will harvest and replant around October," he said.

According to the DA, agriculture damage from Typhoon Egay (International name: Doksuri) was P4.66 billion, with lost volume estimated at 158,995 MT.

"By that time, (prices) will decrease as the new harvest comes but it will not go down to the previous levels of P38 because although stocks are ample, traders will be looking at the competing imports," Mr. Montemayor said.

According to DA price monitors domestic well-milled rice was sold for between P42 and P52 on Friday, while regular-milled rice fetched between P38 and P49.

Imported well-milled rice sold in Metro Manila markets for between P45 and P46. The Philippines does not import regular-milled rice. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

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