

## Mexico researchers show progress on drive to replace US corn imports

TEXCOCO, Mexico — Researchers at a top Mexican agricultural university this week showed the progress they had made in producing more non-genetically modified (GM) yellow corn seeds to help replace imported grain from the United States that is at the center of a major bilateral trade dispute.

Experts at the Autonomous University of Chapingo, on the northeastern flank of Mexico City, unveiled advances in developing seeds for planting to offset corn imports as Mexico battles with the United States, its top trading partner, over its plan to limit use of GM corn.

Three-meter-high corn stalks rose from the soil across an extensive field at Chapingo, early signs of a potential future alternative for food producers like Kellogg and Mexican brand Maseca, researchers said.

The fields, planted in May, were generating new strands of hybrid seed varieties to be tested in 2024 with release for planting in 2025, they said.

“What we’re going to do is make available to the producer the seed that they need... and the technological package to achieve the desired yields,” said Claudio Carballo, operational manager of Chapingo’s corn seed production project.

The project aims in two years to develop enough non-GM seed

varieties cultivable in Mexico to replace about 6 million of the 18 million metric tons of corn that the country imports from the US annually, most of which is GM yellow corn.

Mexico’s government wants to ban GM corn for human consumption, including its national staple, tortilla, on concerns about its health impact.

It still permits, for now, GM corn as livestock feed and in industrial use in some processed foods and cosmetics.

After months of tension over the policy, the US requested in August a dispute settlement panel under the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) trade pact, arguing that Mexico’s plan is not based in science.

President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has been vocal about the need to reduce Mexico’s dependence on US corn imports. However, his government has yet to significantly do so.

Still, Mexican Deputy Agriculture Minister Victor Suarez has said replacing 10% to 15% of corn imports is realistic.

“It’s like people’s income — if it’s not enough, then they’re dependent on someone. It’s that simple,” said Romel Olivares, a coordinator for the Chapingo project. “A country is the same.” — **Reuters**

## Rice inventory declines in early June; corn stocks edge up

THE rice inventory declined 18.1% year on year, while that of corn rose 1.5% at the start of June, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said.

In a report, the PSA said that the rice inventory during the period was 1.82 million metric tons (MT), with holdings of households, commercial warehouses and the National Food Authority (NFA) all declining.

“As of June 1, about 48.7% of the total rice stocks were from the households, 46.6% were

from the commercial sector, and 4.7% were from NFA depositories,” it said.

Household rice, dropped 15.7% to 885 thousand MT, while commercial warehouses held 848.11 thousand MT, 14.8% lower from a year earlier.

Rice held by the NFA amounted to 85.1 thousand MT, down 51.5% year on year.

On a month-on-month basis, the rice inventory fell 3.4% from May.

“Rice in the NFA depositories and household sector reg-

istered a monthly decrease of 15% and 11.0%, respectively... While (an) increment of 7.6% was noted in the rice stocks held by the commercial sector,” the PSA said.

Meanwhile, the PSA also said the corn inventory rose 1.5% year on year to 886.46 thousand MT during the period.

“Corn inventory in the household sector increased by 30.5%, while corn stocks from the commercial sector recorded an annual decline of 1.1%,” it said.

Corn held by commercial establishments was 791.96 thousand MT, accounting for 89.3% of the total.

Household corn, on the other hand, rose to 94.5 thousand MT, or 10.7% of the total.

Compared to a month earlier, the national corn inventory rose 32.6%.

“Corn stocks from the commercial and household sectors as of June 1 exhibited monthly growth of 35.4% and 12.9%, respectively,” the PSA said. — **Adrian H. Halili**

## LANDBANK disburses P2.2B in loans to rice farmers by end-July

LAND BANK of the Philippines (LANDBANK) said that it released loans worth P2.2 billion to 13,701 rice farmers and cooperatives in the seven months to July.

In a statement Sunday, the bank said the loans were disbursed from the Expanded Rice Credit Assistance under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund (ERCA-RCEF).

LANDBANK said that P1.1 billion in loans financed palay (unmilled rice) production for farmers in the Department of Agriculture’s (DA) Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture.

It added that P507.5 million went to cooperatives for relending to its rice farmer-members; while P394.1 million supported

rice traders and millers, and P222 million financed the acquisition of farm machinery and equipment.

LANDBANK President and Chief Executive Officer Lynette V. Ortiz said that “the ERCA-RCEF program forms part of our commitment to advance the agriculture sector and empower Filipino farmers.”

It said 4,783 beneficiaries were from Region 2, “particularly the rice-producing provinces of Cagayan, Nueva Vizcaya, and Quirino.”

Additionally, 1,858 were from Region 3; 1,463 from Region 6; 1,334 from Region 13; and 1,323 from Region 4-B.

Under the ERCA-RCEF program, rice farmers are allowed to borrow up to 90% of

the project cost, with a 2% fixed interest rate per year.

It said that loans may be used to purchase inputs for rice and rice seed production, machinery and equipment for production and post-production, working capital for rice and seed trading, as well as relending and rediscounting outstanding loans of small rice farmers.

LANDBANK said it will continue to give out P500 million in loans annually to cooperatives and rice farmers in the DA registry who are based in the 38 rice-producing provinces.

It added that the bank fully disbursed its allocated funding for the program between 2019 and 2022. — **Adrian H. Halili**

## Boats grounded, cattle grazing in dry reservoirs as drought grips Istanbul

ISTANBUL — Cattle now graze and sunflowers grow in the dried lakebed of the Terkos Dam outside Istanbul, where a drought this year has reduced water levels in the reservoirs of Turkey’s largest city to their lowest in nearly a decade.

In the 11 months to September, Turkey’s northwest received 23% less precipitation than average, according to the Turkish State Meteorological Service.

In August alone, it was 74% lower than average, and down 90% from last year.

At Terkos Dam — among the fullest of Istanbul’s 10 reservoirs — water levels are around 9%. Overall levels are under 25%, the

lowest since 2014, risking water rationing and jeopardizing some farming for its 16 million people.

Fishing boats are grounded along the dam’s old water line. Nearby, villagers have planted sunflower fields to cultivate land left where the lake once was.

Mehmet Emin Gergili, a 45-year-old shepherd, said the water had receded significantly since he first came to the Terkos Dam to graze cattle three months ago.

“There was no grass, it was all water. But now the cattle can go all the way to the other end. The water recedes every day,” he said, standing in the lakebed and pointing off toward the new water line in the distance.

Villagers in nearby Ormanli, which depends on Terkos Dam water, could not sow most of their rice fields this year due to a lack of rain.

Villagers at the local teahouse complained of subpar yields in 2023 that had slashed their income.

Farmer Cavit Gurbuz, 68, said residents had planted rice paddies here since 1958. They tried sowing different crops this year but the soil was not suitable.

“If you could see the field, it is cracked so wide your foot could go into it. It hasn’t rained for a year. There has not been drenching rain for a year,” he said.

Mr. Gurbuz, standing next to a dry former rice paddy that had not been left fallow, said 25,000 acres of soil would normally turn into a lake when floods arrived every year.

“We did not plant everywhere (this year) — only along the river where we could water them if needed. But we couldn’t even water those because there is no water and the river is not flowing,” he said. “We are very pessimistic (about coming years). Drought is raging everywhere.”

Tugba Olmez Hanci, head of the Strategy Development Department at Istanbul Water and Sewerage Administration (ISKI), said there was no need to be

alarmed about a water shortage yet, as there were sources outside the city that could supply.

“The changes in climate we are experiencing, the drought or very heavy precipitation we see in different years, is a problem arising all over the world,” said Ms. Hanci, also an environmental engineering professor at Istanbul Technical University.

She said authorities did not expect rain in September but that some models forecast precipitation in October.

ISKI has cut supply for watering gardens and landscaping since late August, but Olmez said there were no plans yet for further rationing.

Adding to Istanbul’s concerns is a sharp rise in summer water consumption, which averaged 3.25 million cubic meters per day this year compared to 3 million in 2022.

On some days in July, it surged to 3.5 million cubic meters, Ms. Hanci said. She attributed the rise to Istanbul’s swelling population and said the actual number of people living in the city is far more than the official 16 million, given the presence of unregistered migrants.

“As the population rises, water consumption will rise. But together with this, we can also see certain increasing trends in water consumption that come with extreme heat.” — **Reuters**

## Nokia touts private wireless tech as productivity booster for miners

By **Adrian H. Halili** Reporter

NOKIA Corp. said mining projects, typically located in remote areas, stand to raise their efficiency with the connectivity provided by its private wireless networks.

“The mining industry is a sector that clearly needs mission-critical connections,” Nokia Philippines Head Carlos Alberto Reyes said in an interview.

He said communication networks with “low latency” — referring to the delay experienced in data transfer — ensures “continuous communication for the equipment in the mine.”

He said that the company is currently in talks with potential mining partners to roll out Nokia’s private wireless network.

“We are interacting with several partners and industries that are interested in going in that direction... there are several areas that are doing mining and we are working in that direction,” Mr. Reyes said.

Mr. Reyes said that in mining, “technology is becoming a key differentiator. To be more safe, efficient, and sustainable; technology is helping (the industry) improve.”

“This is possible by digitalizing all the processes in mining, (which can create) an environment that helps the

companies operate in a safer way,” he added.

“The solution that Nokia has designed for sectors like mining are specialized (technologies) dedicated to their operations,” Mr. Reyes said.

He added that Nokia’s private wireless network, is a “mini network” that links “all the elements; from the core, the processing, the data center, as well as the radio that connects to the mine.”

He assured that such networks are highly secure, with the system capable of handling “sensitive data reliably.”

“The mining industry is a sector that clearly needs mission-critical connections,” Mr. Reyes added.

## New site-blocking rules rolled out to counter piracy

THE Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines (IPOP) said it launched new rules governing site blocking that will disrupt access to sites offering pirated items.

In a statement, IPOP said Memorandum Circular 23-025, or the Rules on Voluntary Administrative Site Blocking, will improve the Philippines’ current ranking as third-worst in East and Southeast Asia in terms of levels of piracy.

Signed on Sept. 20, the rules on site blocking will take effect after two months from publication in a newspaper of general circulation.

“The Philippines now has an essential tool to protect the creativity that drives our economy and defines our cultural landscape,” IPOP Director General Rowel S. Barba said in a statement.

Mr. Barba said that the rules are aimed to replicate the success of Indonesia, where more than 50% of consumers stopped accessing pirate services as a result of blocking measures launched in 2019.

“We encourage rights holders to optimize this tool and protect the value of your creative assets,” Mr. Barba said.

Under the rules, a rights holder or a duly authorized representative may file a written request with the IP Rights Enforcement Office (IEO) which will then be given 10 working days to submit an evaluation report.

The report will carry a recommendation on the issuance of a site blocking order, to be elevated to the supervising director or deputy director general for approval within five working days.

The due process requirement will be met via the submission of the blocking request to the site administrator, or will be published on the IPOP website if no contact details are found.

If no protest is received from the website administrator within seven days from receipt, a site-blocking request to internet service providers (ISPs) will be issued, which in turn must be carried out in 48 hours.

On Wednesday, IPOP signed partnership agreements with the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) and ISPs to effectively implement the new rules.

Under the agreement with the NTC, IPOP’s oversight will be expanded to over 300 ISPs which are not part of IPOP’s current agreements with ISPs. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

## Newly upgraded Meralco Zapote Substation



Meralco recently upgraded its Zapote Substation located in Barangay Elias Aldana, Las Piñas City with the installation of one (1) three-phase 115-kV power circuit breaker, two (2) three-phase 115-kV disconnect switches, and various protection and control equipment. This is in conjunction with NGCP’s installation of a fifth 300-MVA power transformer bank in its Las Piñas Substation. This aims to provide additional capacity to serve the increasing power demand in Pasay City, southern parts of

the cities of Makati and Taguig, and portions of the cities of Parañaque, Muntinlupa, and Las Piñas. This project also reduces the normal loading of the Zapote Delivery-Point Substation which provides N-1 compliance during contingencies. Meralco is continuously working to improve its distribution system to deliver safe, adequate, reliable, and sustainable power service to its customers as part of its commitment to #KeepingTheLightsOn and #PoweringTheGoodLife.