



PEXELS.COM

ASF vaccine subsidy studied for small-scale hog farmers

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said that it is considering a subsidy for African Swine Fever (ASF) vaccines to be distributed to backyard hog farmers.

"We have talked about this in the DA. This would depend on the availability of our funds... we are already spending a lot, especially on hog repopulation," Agriculture Assistant Secretary for Poultry and Swine Constance J. Palabrica told reporters on Thursday.

Hog farmers have been battling for a more affordable ASF vaccine to minimize the impact on production costs, which could flow on to consumer prices.

The government has yet to release an official price for the ASF vaccine from Viet-

nam, pending the approval of a commercial rollout.

"It could be subsidized depending on the study of the DA. It would be for backyard (hog farmers) because they cannot afford it. The large farms will not be subsidized," Mr. Palabrica added.

The DA has allocated P350 million to procure 600,000 doses of ASF vaccine for limited release in test conditions during the quarter.

He said that five other companies have expressed interest in applying for vaccine certification from the Food and Drug Administration.

He said the companies are from the US, Vietnam, South Korea, and Thailand.

"They have a process to go through because we cannot approve it until we go through (it)... and prove that they could be effective," Mr. Palabrica said.

Additionally, the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) said it will need to collect blood samples before injecting the vaccine, which can be used only on healthy animals.

"Only healthy pigs will be vaccinated to prevent the spread of the virus and minimize possible virus mutation," the BAI said in a statement.

It added that local government units will be tasked with validating that biosecurity measures at hog farmers meet government standards before the vaccine is administered.

— Adrian H. Halili

PPA awards contract to draft master plan for selected ports

THE Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) has awarded a P32-million contract to develop a master plan for selected ports to help improve cargo operations in support of agro-industrial development.

In a notice of award, PPA said the joint venture of Science and Vision for Technology, Inc. and Syconsult, Inc. was awarded the contract to prepare feasibility studies and draft a master plan for the selected ports.

"The ports master plan study is initiated before we start constructing and implementing," PPA General Manager Jay Daniel R. Santiago said via Viber on Thursday.

The master plan aims to determine and assess the feasibility of constructing ports at designated locations, Mr. Santiago said, adding that the study also seeks to upgrade the ports to meet the needs of agro-industrial development.

The study is due one year after the winning bidder receives the notice to proceed, PPA said.

The PPA has identified the ports as Davila, Pasuquin, Ilocos Norte; Puerto Galera, Oriental Mindoro; Taytay, Palawan; Buenavista, Guimaras; San Carlos, Negros Occidental; Dumaguete, Negros Oriental; Lazi, Siquijor; Catbalogan, Samar; Zamboanga; and Cagdianao, Dinagat Islands.

The PPA reported that only two of the five consulting firms submitted bids to prepare the feasibility study and master plan for the 10 ports. — Ashley Erika O. Jose

Effort to attract technology investments hindered by red tape, energy issues

BUREAUCRACY and issues with energy remain the top challenges in attracting technology investment from China, according to the Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FFCCCI).

"In the Philippines, investors need to go through individual departments, and by the time they finish, it has already taken years," FFCCCI President Cecilio K. Pedro said at a forum on Wednesday.

He said in other countries, the equivalent process typically has one point of contact.

"They do everything to accommodate investors to make it simple; they simplify rules so that they can come in and invest," he added.

He said that the Philippines needs to attract manufacturing companies from China.

"We need companies like Apple to come in, but... they went to Vietnam... So there must be something good in Vietnam that we don't have," he added.

During the Manila Forum for Philippines-China Relations, Chinese Ambassador Huang Xilian said that he hopes the Philippines can replicate the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area concept in the cities and provinces around Manila Bay.

"Led by the ambitious goal of Chinese modernization, a more vibrant Greater Bay Area is to be expected. It is the closest neighbor to the Philippines, with only about 1,000 kilometers or a

two-hour flight from Manila Bay," Mr. Huang said.

"Manila Bay, we hope, will be the Manila Greater Bay Area in the future. We warmly welcome our friends from the Philippines to the Greater Bay Area, to explore and experience it for yourselves," he added.

The Greater Bay Area is built around economic centers in the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong Province, including the former European colonies Hong Kong and Macau as well as the manufacturing powerhouse of Shenzhen.

According to Mr. Pedro, the ambassador "sees the potential" in linking Bataan and Cavite more closely with greater Manila and Bulacan."

He said a Greater Bay Area-style integrated economic region in the Philippines has the potential to attract more investment.

The Greater Bay Area in China has a \$1.98-trillion gross domestic product, making it among the fastest-growing regions in China.

Evariste M. Cagatan, executive director for the Board of Investments' Investment Promotions Services arm, described a Greater Bay Area in the Philippines as feasible even with the Luzon Economic Corridor in the pipeline.

"The areas that were mentioned, which can be potentially part of that — Manila, Bulacan, Bataan, and Cavite — are also the high-growth areas of the country. So, I think this is possible," Ms. Cagatan said. — Justine Irish D. Tabile

Budget dep't approves P3.68-B release for free Wi-Fi project

AN ADDITIONAL P3.68 billion will be released to help build digital infrastructure to support the free Wi-Fi program, according to the Department of Budget and Management (DBM).

This is on top of the P2.5 billion earmarked under the Free Public Internet Access Program expected to be fully obligated this month, the DBM said in a statement.

The funds will help build and maintain towers and data centers to improve internet access in schools, libraries, parks, and transportation hubs. The government hopes to build 13,462 Access Points nationwide, according to the DBM.

"We understand that our countrymen need this. With the budget released, we are hopeful that the DICT (Department of Information and Communications Technology) can proceed swiftly with the fund disbursement and expedite the program's implementation," Budget Secretary Amenah F. Pangandaman was quoted as saying.

The allocation is chargeable against the Special Account in the General Fund — Free

Public Internet Access Fund in this year's P5.768-trillion national budget.

"By approving this additional budget within our calibrated fiscal program, we reaffirm our commitment to prioritizing inclusive and accessible internet for all," she added.

A 2022 report by the World Bank showed that only 33% of Philippine households have access to fixed broadband, while 70% of the population have an active mobile broadband subscription.

Broadband internet remains costlier in the Philippines than in neighboring countries, with the annual charge for fixed broadband equivalent to 11% of per capita gross national income.

This represents twice as much as the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) average, the World Bank said.

In June, the National Economic and Development Authority Board headed by President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. approved the P16.1-billion Philippine Digital Infrastructure Project, which also seeks to bring faster internet in disadvantaged locations. — Beatriz Marie D. Cruz



Disaster risk financing for PHL to hinge on closer collaboration within region

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources said on Thursday that it is seeking closer collaboration with regional partners to improve the Philippines' access to disaster risk financing.

"We hope to deepen and broaden these ties with our bilateral and multilateral partners, as well as those that we would like to strengthen within the region," Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said in a briefing for the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (APMCDRR).

She added that the conference may increase the Philippines' access to disaster risk financing tailored for its circumstances.

"What is important for us is to choose and design, and access these financing schemes to suit the local context and the needs across the various sectors," Ms. Yulo-Loyzaga added.

Last year, the Philippines was chosen to host APMCDRR which is expected to draw in 2,500 delegates from over 60 countries.

The conference seeks to assess progress in implementing the Sendai Framework, which hopes to reduce the impact of calamities on mortality, health, economies, and infrastructure.

She said the Philippines needs to develop an integrated approach to disaster risk financing to include ecological, social and economic impacts.

"Disaster risk financing does not just cover development financing as

a whole, but risk financing as insurance in the way we handle subnational, which she described as "one of those areas which we need to actually build on."

Defense Secretary Gilberto C. Teodoro, Jr. said that the Philippines can benefit from working with more governments on its resiliency goals.

"We would also like to work with other governments... we can't do it alone, and our aim really is resilience," Mr. Teodoro said, citing the need for an inter-agency approach to tackling disaster risk reduction.

Last year, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. ordered the creation of the APMCDRR Inter-agency committee. The conference will be held on Oct. 14 and 17. — Adrian H. Halili

Clark food hub bill clears House panel

A HOUSE of Representatives committee approved a bill on Tuesday seeking to establish a national food hub at the Clark airport complex in Central Luzon, which is intended to streamline the food logistics system.

The House trade and industry committee endorsed House Bill No. 10678, which proposes to set up a food hub within the Clark Freeport Zone.

"Establishing a national food hub in Clark will play a crucial role in shortening the supply chain from producer to consumer," Cagayan de Oro Rep. Rufus B. Rodriguez said in a statement on Thursday.

"(It) will not only standardize logistics but also ensure the efficient movement of food products, thereby enhancing overall efficiency," he added.

The 62-hectare Clark food hub will contain state-of-the-art food warehouses, cold storage facilities, and wholesale and retail market space.

The first phase of the P8.5-billion food hub project is expected to be completed by the end of 2027, Clark International Airport Corp. (CIAC) President Arrey A. Perez said in July.

The CIAC, which operates the 2,300-hectare Clark aviation complex, will also operate the food hub.

"As soon as this proposal becomes a law, it will bolster

agro-logistics as support to our country's robust agricultural production," Mr. Perez said in the same statement.

"It will also enhance freight transport services, mobility, and access to key economic zones, toward seamless logistics and efficient supply chains," he added.

The food hub will also help develop the so-called Luzon Economic Corridor, Mr. Perez said, noting the project will help better position the Philippines as a "regional hub for agribusiness and logistics in Asia-Pacific."

The approval of the bill at committee level is a step towards improving food logistics, Special Assistant to the President for Investment and Economic Affairs Frederick D. Go said in the same statement.

"We continue to pursue initiatives that contribute to increasing agriculture production, and improving the food logistical chain," he said. "The Clark National Food Hub is a step in this direction, and we look forward to its successful establishment as a sustainable food security solution."

The bill will be debated next by the House appropriations and ways and means committees for the measure's funding and tax incentive provisions. — Kenneth Christiane L. Basilio

Small Business Corp. offering new loan products — Trade dep't

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said the Small Business Corp. (SBC) will tap a P10-billion fund in offering new loan products directed at micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

The loan products include purchase order financing, check discounting, factoring, and franchise financing, the DTI said.

At the Metro Manila Business Conference on Thursday, Acting Trade Secretary and SBC Chairman Cristina Aldeguer-Roque said MSMEs, despite being the backbone of the Philippine economy, still face financing challenges.

"Access to finance, limited market reach, and the adoption of new technologies are just a few of the hurdles that they must overcome," Ms. Aldeguer-Roque said.

"Thus, the DTI is committed to addressing these challenges head-on and creating an enabling environment where MSMEs can flourish," she added.

She said the loan products will be offered in collaboration with Banco de Oro, Union Bank,

and the Bank of the Philippine Islands.

"Now there's P10 billion for the MSMEs to be loaned, but there's actually more funding that will be coming in," she added.

"The new loan products are all available now in SBC, so we encourage the MSMEs to use them because the interest on the loans is very low," she said.

"We also just approved the P200-million startup fund for MSMEs," she added.

The DTI also aims to streamline the loan application process for MSMEs, she said.

"It used to take months for the application to be processed; now it's 19 days, but I am lowering it by one week," she said.

One of the goals of the DTI through SBC is to boost manufacturing, which is considered to have the potential to generate the most jobs.

"We need to strengthen the manufacturing industry in the Philippines because once it's strengthened, it will create a lot of jobs," she said. — Justine Irish D. Tabile