Regulator to intervene in sugar market to prop up millgate prices

THE Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said that it is considering a sugar purchase program to prop up declining millgate prices.

SRA Administrator Pablo Luis S. Azcona said that the direct purchase of sugar from farmers is one of the options to address the recent drop in the millgate price of raw sugar.

"We just have to find a way to ensure stable supply to keep millgate prices steady," Mr. Azcona told reporters.

Mr. Azcona said that three sugar producer groups have called for intervention in light of the low millgate price.

The SRA had called on traders to voluntarily purchase domestically produced sugar to stabilize farmgate and retail prices. Participants will be eligible for allocations in a future sugar import program.

"We will talk with the Department of Agriculture on the possible (solutions). Voluntary purchase and putting sugar in reserve is of course one of the things that we are thinking about," he added.

Mr. Azcona said that producers are breaking even at the current millgate price or could be suffering losses.

"As I said, we no longer follow supply and demand. The supply numbers are far behind, the supply numbers have a bigger difference than the demand difference," he added.

He said that sugar supply has declined in response to the drop in production.

According to the SRA, as of Dec. 1, the raw sugar inventory was 171,736 metric tons (MT), while refined sugar stocks totaled 308,554 MT.

The SRA has estimated that sugar production this crop year will drop 7.2% to 1.78 million MT. — **Adrian H. Halili**

Meat imports up 16.8% in 10 months to October

THE volume of meat imports increased 16.8% in the 10 months to October, driven by higher beef and pork shipments, according to the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI).

The BAI tallied imports of 1.19 billion kilograms of meat during the 10 months, against 1.02 billion kilos a year earlier.

Meat Importers and Traders Association President Emeritus Jesus C. Cham said that imports continue to grow are on track to breach the 1.2 billion kilos of meat imports last year.

"All this has happened despite the volatility of the exchange rate, whose effect will be felt in the new year. With imports still arriving as seen from the utilization rate of the container yards and the slow rate of return of empties, the importers will take stock of the remaining inventory after the Christmas sales and hope the market will remain exuberant," Mr. Cham said via Viber.

Making up 14% of total imports, beef shipments increased 38% during the period to 51.53 million kilos.

"Beef may end the year with a 50% increase. Clearly, we see the markets appreciating more the value of this red meat," Mr. Cham added.

Beef from Brazil amounted to 70.86 million kilos, followed by Australia (44.02 million), and Ireland (14.5 million).

Shipments of pork rose 18.6% to 598.28 million kilos during the 10 months, accounting for about 50.2% of all meat imports during the period.

"With the exception of carcasses, all pork items performed strongly with pork meat growing at 25% but offal registering smaller growth at 12%," he said.

He added that African Swine Fever continues to impact domestic pork production while the lower duty on pork meat is making offal less attractive.

Brazil supplied around 154.51 million kilos of pork, followed by Spain (144.45 million) and Canada (85.82 million).

Shipments of chicken totaled 389.95 million kilos during the period, up 8.6%. They accounted for 32.6% of meat imports.

Mr. Cham said that poultry imports could post an overall increase of 30%, amid higher shipments of chicken leg quarters and mechanically deboned meat.

Brazil remained the top supplier of chicken with 195.32 million kilos, followed by the US (126.91 million) and Canada (14.49 million).

Turkey imports more than tripled to 1.16 million kilos during the period, accounting for 0.10% of the total.

Shipments of buffalo, duck, and lamb continued to decline during the 10-month period.

Imports of duck fell 21.5% to 198,339 kilos, while lamb dipped 9.7% to 603,906 kilos, and buffalo fell 1.9% to 33.01 million. — **Adrian H. Halili**

Ukraine ready to step in after Russia suspends food shipments to Syria

KYIV — Ukraine, a global producer and exporter of grain and oilseeds, is ready to supply food to Syria following the fall of Bashar al-Assad, Ukrainian Agriculture Minister Vitaliy Koval told Reuters on Friday.

Russian and Syrian sources said earlier that Russian wheat supplies to Syria had been suspended over uncertainty about the new government and payment delays.

Syria imported food from Russia during the Assad era and it is unclear how relations between Damascus and Moscow will take shape under the new government.

"Where it is difficult, we have to be there with our food. We are open to supplying our food and if Syria needs food — then we are there," Mr. Koval told Reuters.

Ukraine's exports were buffeted by Russia's February 2022 invasion, which severely reduced shipments via the Black Sea.

Ukraine has since broken a de facto sea blockade and revived exports from its southern port of Odesa.

Kyiv traditionally exports wheat and corn to Middle Eastern countries, but not to Syria.

Traders say that only about 6,000 metric tons of Ukrainian corn reached the Syrian market in the 2023/24 season, out of a total corn export volume of 29.4 million tons.

However, small parcels of Ukrainian-origin grain may have reached Syria from neighboring countries, which were not captured by those statistics, analysts said.

Since the fall of Assad, a close Russian ally, Kyiv has voiced a desire to restore relations with Syria.

Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha said Kyiv was ready "to pave the way for the restoration of relations in the future and reaffirm our support for the Syrian people." — ***Reuters***

Meet SwagBot, the AI-powered robot cattle herder

CANBERRA — With four wheels and a bright red paint job, SwagBot is not your average cow.

But researchers at the University of Sydney say this autonomous robot is on its way to becoming the world's first "smart cow," able to make cattle farming more efficient and environmentally friendly.

First launched in 2016 as a simple herding robot capable of traversing rugged terrain, SwagBot has been updated with sensors, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning systems.

The battery-powered SwagBot can now determine the health, type and density of pasture and monitor the health of livestock.

It then uses this information to autonomously herd cattle to the best pastures and move them before land is overgrazed and soil becomes degraded. It can also feed data back to farmers.

"Once the cattle are used to the robot, they will follow the robot around," said University of Sydney professor of robotics and intelligent systems, Salah Sukkarieh, whose team made SwagBot.

"You want to move the animals to the right part of the pasture where there is good protein, good carbs," he said. "You want to be able to do that in a very fluid manner without fences." — ***Reuters***