Low onion inventories trigger import order for 4,000 MT

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said it approved imports of 4,000 metric tons (MT) worth of onions to ensure stable prices with stocks running low.

In a statement, Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr. said that the DA will permit shipments of 3,000 MT of red onions and 1,000 MT of white onions for delivery within two weeks.

He added that the imports will plug the supply gap until the domestic harvest comes in.

"We will not risk a potential shortage that traders could exploit to drive up prices, as we saw in the past. We do not want a repeat of the 2022 crisis," Mr. Laurel said.

In 2022, onion prices surged to as much as of P700 per kilo due to a shortage of domestic supply and delayed imports.

Last year, the DA allowed white onion imports totaling 17,000 MT, after delaying imports until August due to a bumper harvest.

The DA has said that the inventory of red onions from last year was expected to last until February, when the harvest starts.

According to Bureau of Plant Industry (BPI), the red onion inventory was 2,325.86 MT, with white onion stocks at 70,161 MT as of Jan. 31.

Monthly consumption of red onions was estimated at 17,000 MT and white onions 4,000 MT, the BPI said.

"While we were assured during our consultative meetings that there is still ample supply of onions, the BPI recommended minimal imports to prevent major price spikes," BPI Director Gerald Glenn F. Panganiban said.

"Also, due to the typhoons that hit late last year and prevalence of pests and disease, these imports are meant to be a buffer for possible supply gaps. This move is a preemptive measure," Mr. Panganiban added.

He said that the agency is projecting the onion harvest to reach 33,000 MT by March.

In 2024, onion production rose 4.7% to 264,322 MT, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority. — **Adrian H. Halili**

PHILIPPINE STAR/ MIGUEL DE GUZMAN

PHILIPPINE STAR/ EDD GUMBAN

Meat traders push to distribute MAV quotas

MEAT IMPORTERS are calling on the Department of Agriculture (DA) to allocate the pork and poultry quotas for the minimum access volume (MAV), which should have been released during the first week of January.

The Meat Importers and Traders Association (MITA) said in a letter to the DA: "the quotas for the MAV year 2025 have not been distributed. This is the second time this has happened."

The group added that since the start of the quota year on Feb. 1, the Systematic Distribution Process (SDP) has not been conducted.

"The SDP had been scheduled, rescheduled and then canceled until further notice," it added in its letter to Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel, Jr.

It said that the delay in SDP may disrupt the meat trade as happened last year, when MAV allocations were also delayed.

"Importers are concerned about a repeat of last year, and orders will be put on hold, delayed or canceled," MITA added.

Last year, the DA also postponed the distribution of MAV allocations.

"MITA strongly urges DA to allow MAV Secretariat (MAVSEC) to proceed with the distribution of the Beginning Year Pool," it said.

"In the meantime, MAVSEC should be instructed to issue Provisional MAVICs (MAV import clearances) to ensure continuity of trade," MITA added.

MAV grants trading partners guaranteed market access, subject to volume quotas. The MAV system is a feature of the World Trade Organization's trading system.

The Philippines has committed to admit imports of 54,210 metric tons (MT) of pork and 23,500 MT of chicken. — **Adrian H. Halili**

Seizures of counterfeit goods hit P41 billion in 2024 led by apparel, shoes, bags

THE National Committee on Intellectual Property Rights (NCIPR) seized P40.99 billion worth of counterfeit products in 2024, the Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines (IPOPHL) said.

"It is increasing year by year, and I would like to attribute it to the efforts of law enforcement agencies," IPOPHL Deputy Director General Nathaniel S. Arevalo told reporters on the sidelines of the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) Seminar on Thursday.

"It's an all-time high, (involving) our usual items like apparel, shoes, bags, food supplements, and toys. But most of them are apparel and shoes," he added.

According to IPOPHL, the estimated value is 52% higher than the P26.99 billion worth of counterfeit products seized in 2023.

"Last year's haul from the Bureau of Customs (BoC) accounted for the lion's share, totaling P34.70 billion," it added.

Two of the biggest operations of the BoC were a raid in Binondo which yielded P11 billion worth of counterfeit luxury goods, and an operation at a Divisoria mall, which resulted in the confiscation of counterfeits valued at P7 billion.

"BoC's haul was followed by seizures by the National Bureau of Investigation and Philippine National Police estimated at P3.42 billion and P2.83 billion, respectively," IPOPHL said.

"Meanwhile, the Food and Drug Administration seized P30.20 million worth of counterfeit drugs and health-related products," it added.

Mr. Arevalo said the agency is looking to further educate the public on IP issues and will seek amendments to the Intellectual Property Code.

"(We will continue) educating the public about the dangers of counterfeiting because it is not just an issue of fake goods, but also the dangers to public safety of counterfeit health supplements, medicines, and devices," he said.

He said the proposed IP Code amendments would give the agency "more teeth in the fight against piracy and counterfeiting."

On Monday, the IPOPHL, together with other members of the NCIPR, attended the JETRO Seminar for law enforcement agencies.

"This event is meant to enhance the competence and skills of the law enforcement agencies as far as the identification of the fake products," he said.

"That's why the brand owners from Japan are here, because they are the experts," he added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

PHILIPPINE STAR/ EDD GUMBAN

NBI EXEC. OFFICER Intellectual Property Rights Division Rodolfo Ignacio serves a subpoena to Chinese seller of Jiangsu Huihong Machinery Manufacturing Co., Ltd. who is allegedly exhibiting and selling counterfeit auto parts at a car show in Pasay City on July 6, 2024.

Full budget transparency seen taking time

THE PHILIPPINES is working on initiatives like procurement reform to achieve budget transparency, but it will take time to mainstream these initiatives, Budget Secretary Amenah F. Pangandaman said.

Ms. Pangandaman, who also chairs the Philippine Open Government Partnership (OGP) Steering Committee, said: "It's a long way to go before we can actually mainstream this across all National Government agencies."

OGP is a global initiative to make governments more transparent, accountable, and responsive to citizens. It is staging its regional convention in Manila this week.

The Philippines amended a decades-old procurement law via the New Government Procurement Act, which sets up an online marketplace where agencies can directly procure supplies and equipment from vetted suppliers.

"We have a medium like this for us to be able to push forward our commitment to open government," she said.

In the Philippines, six local government units including South Cotabato, Baguio City, Quezon City, Tagbilaran City, Borongan City and the Municipality of Larena, Siquijor actively participate in the OGP Local Program.

South Cotabato Governor Reynaldo S. Tamayo, Jr. said two pilot OGP projects are open contracting and open monitoring.

"In open contracting, we involve civil society organizations in the bidding process. They are part of the Bids and Awards Committee. They observe the process of bidding online," Mr. Tamayo said.

He also noted that the province created a Monitoring Committee, of 11 members, with a chairman and half of the committee belonging to civil society organizations.

"They are the ones who scrutinize, and monitor the project, and if the contractor has a 15 negative slippage or above, they cannot bid for another project for a year. They will be banned in our province," Mr. Tamayo said.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., who was attending the OGP event, said that the country can only truly participate in governance if they have access to information.

"This access is made possible by government transparency, digitalization, and the institutionalization of the Freedom of Information (FoI) through legislation, which is a constitutionally recognized principle," Mr. Marcos said.

He also said that the FoI is one of the many ways that the Philippines has been keeping its commitments to OGP.

Hosted by the Philippine Open Government Partnership chaired by the DBM, the 2025 OGP Asia and the Pacific Regional is taking place between Feb. 5 and 7. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**

BW FILE PHOTO