

US will spend up to \$1B to combat bird flu

WASHINGTON — The US will invest up to \$1 billion to combat the spread of bird flu, as well as increase imports of eggs in an effort to drive down high prices, Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins said.

A three-year bird flu outbreak in US poultry has killed 166 million chickens since 2022, according to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) data.

The virus has also infected nearly 1,000 dairy herds and almost 70 people, including one who died, since early 2024.

The USDA will spend up to \$500 million to provide free biosecurity audits to farms and \$400 million to increase payment rates to farmers who need to kill their chickens due to bird flu, Ms. Rollins said at a conference of state agriculture officials.

In a Wednesday *Wall Street Journal* column, Ms. Rollins said some of the money will come from cuts to USDA spending by Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency. But on a call with reporters later in the day, Ms. Rollins' chief of staff, Kailee Tkacz Buller, said the money was coming from the USDA's Commodity Credit Corp., a discretionary pool of funding available to the secretary.

The agency did not immediately clarify the discrepancy.

The USDA is exploring vaccines for chickens but is not yet authorizing their use, Ms. Rollins said. The poultry industry is divided on whether to vaccinate chickens because of potential trade implications.

"It could be a solution, but to push that out now and

require it, we're just not ready," Ms. Rollins said of vaccines when speaking to reporters at the White House on Wednesday.

Some industry groups expressed relief that the agency did not move to require vaccines, said Rick Phillips, director of poultry professional services veterinarians for drugmaker Boehringer Ingelheim, who was on the call.

"There was a little bit of a sigh that they didn't move fast on certain things like immediately going to vaccination until we better understand the nature of what we're dealing with," he said.

The administration plans to increase imports and decrease exports of eggs to boost domestic supply and combat record high egg prices, Ms. Rollins said. Turkey has said it will export 15,000 tons of eggs to the US through July.

This year, Turkey is expected to supply about 420 million eggs to the US, up from about 70 million normally, Ms. Buller said.

Egg prices have nearly doubled since last year. Scant supply is leading some consumers to "panic buy," said Virginia Tech economist Jadrian Wooten in an e-mail.

In May, the administration of President Joseph Biden allocated more than \$800 million to combat bird flu in livestock.

About \$450 million of that money is still available, a USDA official said Tuesday at the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture conference.

— **Reuters**



India March temperatures pose risk to wheat crop

NEW DELHI — India will have above-average temperatures in March across most regions following a warmer February, the weather office forecast on Friday, conditions that could threaten winter-sown crops such as wheat, chickpea and rapeseed.

Both maximum and minimum temperatures will be above average in most areas in March, D.S. Pai, a senior scientist at the state-run India Meteorological Department, told reporters.

India, the world's second-largest wheat producer, is counting on a bumper harvest in

2025 to avoid expensive imports, after three consecutive years of poor crop yields.

But higher temperatures could cut yields for the fourth straight year, trim overall wheat production and force authorities to lower or remove the 40% import tax to facilitate overseas shipments by private traders to tide over shortages.

Reuters reported Thursday that India was poised to enter the summer season with one of the warmest Marches on record, and above-

average temperatures through most of the month threaten to cut yields of the maturing wheat crop.

Heatwave days are expected over most parts of central regions, some adjoining northern areas of southern India and parts of northeastern and eastern regions, Mr. Pai said.

Indian farmers primarily grow wheat in the northern states of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and the central state of Madhya Pradesh. — **Reuters**

Tomato oversupply exposes logistics, storage shortcomings

By **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**
Reporter

THE GOVERNMENT needs to address logistics bottlenecks and build more storage facilities to avoid wasting the tomato surplus, industry representatives said.

The government needs to focus on "small- or medium-sized basic logistics infrastructure for clusters of production areas," according to retired agriculture professor Roy S. Kempis, who is now the director of the Center for Business Innovation at Angeles University Foundation.

The farmgate price of tomatoes in some parts of the country last week fell to as low as P4 per kilo due to excessive supply, with some volunteer groups having to connect producers directly to consumers online.

Mr. Kempis said in an e-mail that the Department of Agriculture (DA) could subsidize refrigerated trucks for produce that is bound to points of mass consumption.

He said the private sector should also be encouraged to operate small- to medium-

scale warehouses and invest in transportation assets like four-wheeled or six-wheeled vans.

With such investments, "Wasteage in the form of unusable and rotten produce like tomatoes can be minimized."

The government should also help farmers bring and sell their tomatoes wholesale to processing or manufacturing plants for products that use tomatoes.

Agriculture group SINAG told *BusinessWorld* on Sunday that there is still an oversupply of tomatoes, with the produce being sold for very low prices or given away for free in Nueva Ecija, Nueva Vizcaya, and Pangasinan.

It said a 22-kilo crate of tomatoes is selling for as little as P80. "Others are direct buying at P8-10 per kilo."

Rural Rising Philippines said Saturday that middlemen have been paying farmers only P2 per kilo in Nueva Ecija.

"With that, you can pay only for the rent of the tricycle that brought your tomatoes to a market and a meal at a *carinderia*," according to the group, which has been facilitating rescue buys.

"It costs the farmer more to harvest it than to sell it."

Tomato retail prices hit P360 per kilo last month amid tight supply.

Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. Chief Economist Michael L. Ricafort said in the face of supply bottlenecks that result in huge increases or decreases in vegetable prices, "digitization of agricultural trade is the way to go."

Digitizing the trade would democratize the marketplace and efficiently bridge perishable agricultural products from sellers with surplus to buyers or areas with tight supply, he noted in a Messenger chat.

"Digitization would help address the gaps in the marketplace, with cold storage facilities and processing facilities among the intervention measures," he said.

"Digitalization is the means, but we still need the human connections to make it work," Ateneo de Manila economics professor Leonardo A. Lanza said via Messenger chat.

"The best way is to send experts across the different regions to determine the barriers and the solutions," he added.

Mr. Lanza noted that the distribution problem largely stems from the country's archipelagic landscape, and it did not help that

the government has failed to "develop institutional mechanisms that can reduce transportation and transaction costs."

"We need to strengthen our institutions that can correct these geographic and cultural challenges," he said. "What separates a developed and a developing country is the quality of institutions."

Meanwhile, Mr. Kempis also pitched price support for farmers dealing with low farmgate prices of their produce.

"The amount of price support can be recovered from the price differential when tomatoes are sold at a higher wholesale price in areas where final consumption happens," he said.

The DA last week urged tomato farmers to work with municipal or regional agriculturists for direct market linkages, noting that the government can market their produce in nearby markets or Kadiwa centers.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Arnel V. de Mesa cited the need for cold storage facilities due to the seasonality of agricultural commodities like tomatoes.

The DA is hoping to inaugurate a 5,000-ton capacity cold storage facility in Taguig City by 2026.

US beef prices could rise as Canada ranchers reduce cattle herds, fearing Trump tariffs

WINNIPEG, Manitoba — Canadian farmer Jon Vaags quit buying beef cattle in November after the election of US President Donald Trump made tariffs on Canadian exports seem like a serious risk.

Now there are more than 1,000 empty spaces on his feed-

lot, where cattle are fattened on grain before being slaughtered for beef.

"We stopped buying feeder cattle altogether," said Mr. Vaags, whose family's feedlot has room for 3,000 cattle and is usually full from November until the summer.

After years of drought raised feed costs, North American farmers culled animals and did not rebuild their herds, so the beef cattle population on both sides of the border had been declining even before the threat of US tariffs on Canadian exports.

Canada, the world's No. 8 beef exporter and 10th largest cattle producer, exports more than half its beef production, with 75% going to the US.

The Trump administration has repeatedly listed lower food prices as a major objective. But at US grocery stores, beef prices have already risen due to the smallest US cattle

herd in 74 years and the smallest Canadian herd in 36 years.

The average price of ground beef in US cities has risen 43% since the beginning of 2020, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. Global beef prices are up 34% according to the International Monetary Fund.

Historically, cows, calves, breeding stock, slaughter animals and beef-in-boxes have flowed across the US-Canada border as if it were not there. Canada imports many young cattle from the US, fattens them, slaughters them, then sends the meat back to the US. Tariffs would upset this process. — **Reuters**

Honda to launch new HR-V by March 9

HONDA CARS PHILIPPINES, Inc. (HCPI) is set to launch its new HR-V model, further expanding the car manufacturer's full-hybrid lineup in the Philippines.

"This solidifies the company's commitment to improving people's way of life by reducing their carbon footprint," HCPI said in a statement over the weekend.

The new HR-V, HCPI's third hybrid model in the Philippines, will have its official consumer launch at SM North EDSA The Block Atrium on March 9, HCPI said.

It will be priced at P1.45 million for the 1.5 S CVT, P1.52 million for the 1.5 V CVT, and P1.8 million for the 1.5 RS e:HEV E-CVT, available across HCPI's 38 dealerships nationwide.

Depending on the variant, the model comes in six colors: Ignite Red Metallic, Platinum White Pearl, Premium Opal White Silver Pearl, Meteoroid Gray Metallic, Crystal Black Pearl, and Sand Khaki Pearl.

However, Platinum White Pearl and Premium Opal White Silver Pearl will cost an additional P20,000.

According to HCPI, deliveries of the new HR-V will begin this month.

The model will also be showcased in mall tours at SM Megamall from Feb. 27 to March 5, SM North EDSA from March 7 to 9, and Festival Mall from March 14 to 16.

For 2025, HCPI is targeting a 3-5% sales growth from the 15,518 units sold in 2024. Last year, its

sales accounted for 3.32% of total industry sales.

According to HCPI President Rie Miyake, growth will be driven by new model launches and dealership expansions in 2025.

"For the succeeding years, our direction is to expand the hybrid (models). Today, I cannot mention any specific models or timing, but our direction is always to shift to hybrid," she told reporters in January.

"Considering the current market situation, we believe the hybrid model is the best solution for Filipino customers to contribute to carbon neutrality. So our direction is to bring in more hybrid (models)," she added. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

MGen expects to surpass RE target ahead of 2030

MERALCO PowerGen Corp. (MGen), the power generation subsidiary of Manila Electric Co. (Meralco), expects to surpass its 1,500-megawatt (MW) renewable energy (RE) target well before 2030, citing a strong project pipeline.

In the next two years, MGen's RE portfolio is expected to reach 3,397 MW, a substantial increase from its current net sellable capacity of 334.5 MW, according to the company.

With the anticipated expansion, MGen President and Chief Executive Officer Emmanuel V. Rubio signaled plans to scale up further.

"We're setting a new target," he said at Meralco's briefing last week but did not provide further details.

MGen, through its renewable energy unit MGen Renewable Energy, Inc. (MGreen), expects to add at least

82 megawatts alternating current (MWac) of capacity this year from three solar plants.

MGreen recently energized the 19.8-MW Bongabon Solar Power Project in Nueva Ecija. It is also developing a 50.1-MWac solar plant in Cordon, Isabela, and expanding an existing solar facility in Baras, Rizal, by 12.6 MWac.

By next year, solar projects with a combined capacity of 2,200 MWac are expected to come online, including the 450-MW Lasso Solar Project and Phase 1 of the MTerra Solar Project, which will add 1,750 MWac.

By 2027, MGen expects an additional 750 MWac from Phase 2 of the MTerra Solar Project, further strengthening its portfolio.

For other technologies, MGen is set to deliver an additional 73 MW by 2028 from the expansion of its

existing coal-fired power plant in Toledo, Cebu.

With a current net sellable capacity of 800 MW, the company is projected to reach 1,570 MW by 2030 through the gas-fired power projects of its subsidiary, PacificLight Power Pte. Ltd., in Singapore.

As part of its strategic investments in liquefied natural gas (LNG), MGen is expanding its latest portfolio of 2,475 MW with the expected completion of a 432-MW expansion of Excellent Energy Resources, Inc. by 2029.

This follows MGen's investment in the country's largest and most expansive LNG facility in partnership with San Miguel Corp. and Aboitiz Power Corp.

In 2024, MGen delivered a total of 15,300 gigawatt-hours of energy, a 7% increase from the previous year. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

Rotary donates Human Milk Bank Pasteurizer to PGH

On February 6, 2025, the Neo Natal Intensive Care Unit of the Philippine General Hospital (PGH) received a Human Milk Pasteurizer and Blast Chiller through Global Grant (GG) #2454069 as approved by The Rotary Foundation. Said GG was supported by donations from the Rotary Club of Makati Jose P. Rizal, its sister club from Rotary International District 3620 — RC of New Daegu (RCND Korea), and Bryan Distributors and Services Inc., represented by its President-Emeritus Carol Suy, Past President (PP) of RCMJPR.

This donation signifies the organization's unwavering commitment to supporting healthcare facilities in providing essential medical equipment for their patients and aims to enhance the hospital's capabilities in handling and pasteurizing human milk for infants in need, ensuring their health and well-being. It is a testament to the spirit of cooperation and goodwill between the two Rotary Clubs through the years. By joining forces, the two clubs are able to make a meaningful impact on the healthcare sector, particularly in the Philippines; help improve the hospital's capacity

to care for vulnerable infants; and reinforce the importance of global partnerships in advancing healthcare initiatives that benefit communities in need. The Deed of Donation was signed by Dr. Aurora Gloria Labadia, PGH Head of Lactation & Human Milk Bank Unit, RCMJPR President Lourdes "Dee" Lisondra and Immediate Past President (IPP) Josie "Jos" Teano; as well as RCND President Kim Eun Tae.

Present at the colorful ribbon-cutting ceremony highlighting the donation were Rotary International (RI) District 3830 Governor Prescy Yulo, Immediate Past District Governor Jay Tambunting, Presidents Kim and Dee, IPP Josie, the formal deed signing and unveiling of a marker at the PGH Guazon Hall were witnessed by members of both clubs. The ceremony was made possible with the generous support of the Rotary Club of Makati Valero, Rotary Club of Makati Ayala West, Rotary Club of Circuit Makati, and Rotary Club of Business and Servant Leaders Global. This Global Grant dubbed as "GATAS MO, BUHAY KO — ALAY NG ROTARY — Version 2.0 - 2023" will continue to strengthen and extend the operations of the hospital's Human Milk Bank Facility to meet specific needs of indigent adults, and infants for whom human milk is prescribed, in support of Rotary's Area of Focus on MATERNAL & CHILD HEALTH; project THE CHILDREN'S FIRST ONE THOUSAND DAYS; and this year's RI Theme "THE MAGIC OF ROTARY."

