

Mexican farmers fight drought amid water dispute with the US

JULIMES, Mexico — Dead animals lie scattered across the planes of this cattle ranching town in northern Mexico, victims of a long-term drought that is forcing farmers here to consider uprooting their lives to look elsewhere for land and water.

More than 64% of Mexico's territory is experiencing some level of drought, according to government data. Northern states are the hardest hit, particularly Chihuahua, with most of its territory engulfed by the most extreme levels of drought.

The struggles of farmers come as Mexico and the US are in tense negotiations over Mexican delays in delivering the quantities of water laid out in a 1944 treaty.

President Donald Trump has threatened tariffs and sanctions if Mexico does not increase water deliveries, which US officials say have devastated Texan farmers. The Mexican government says drought has ravaged its ability to comply.

In the agricultural town of Julimes in Chihuahua, farmers are wondering how much longer they can survive.

"I don't think we'll be able to hold out much longer," said cattle farmer Leopoldo Ochoa, 62, as he rode with his granddaughter on horseback behind his herd.

Farmers in northern Chihuahua have already had to move their herds out of the mountainous areas where they typically graze due to a lack of water and grass. Mr. Ochoa lives in Valle de Zaragoza, which is dependent on the strained La Boquilla Dam.

"If there is no more water, we will have to leave this ranch and look elsewhere. Imagine leaving here at my age, where I have lived all my life," said Manuel Araiza, 60.

"It is sad, but it is the reality that all of this is coming to an end," he added.

As diplomats negotiate water deliveries from Mexico to the US, farmers in Chihuahua consider their own futures.

"My children tell me this is no longer profitable and that I should sell the animals," said cattle rancher Esterberto Saenz Monje, 57. "The truth is, we've never seen anything like this before." — **Reuters**

Ukraine detains foreign vessel it says was exporting stolen grain

KYIV — Ukraine has detained a foreign vessel in its territorial waters which it alleges was involved in the illegal trade of stolen Ukrainian grain, the state security service SBU said on Friday.

Kyiv has accused Russia of trading stolen Ukrainian grain since the 2022 war in Ukraine began, allegations Russia denies.

Ship seizures, however, have been rare.

"The investigation found that the arrested vessel was part of Russia's 'shadow' fleet, which the Kremlin uses to sell looted Ukrainian grain to third countries," SBU said on the Telegram messaging service.

It said that at the end of 2024, the same vessel had exported from the Crimean port of Sevastopol 5,000 metric tons of wheat stolen from the occupied southern Ukrainian territory.

SBU said the vessel had carried out an illegal raid under the flag of an Asian country to export the grain. It gave no more details.

In July Ukraine seized a foreign cargo ship on the Danube River and detained the captain on suspicion of helping Moscow export Ukrainian grain from Russian-occupied Crimea.

Findings of its investigation into that case were not reported. — **Reuters**

Feed mill for aquaculture set up in Oriental Mindoro

THE GOVERNMENT has established an aqua feed mill near fish hatcheries in Oriental Mindoro, according to the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR).

The aqua feed mill in Bulaacao, the first of its kind by BFAR, is expected to produce between 250 to 300 kilograms of high-quality aqua feed per hour, BFAR said in a statement.

The plant, which will use "cutting-edge technology," is poised to support sorghum and corn growers in the area who provide raw materials for feed production, BFAR said, citing the need for a "symbiotic relationship between agriculture and aquaculture."

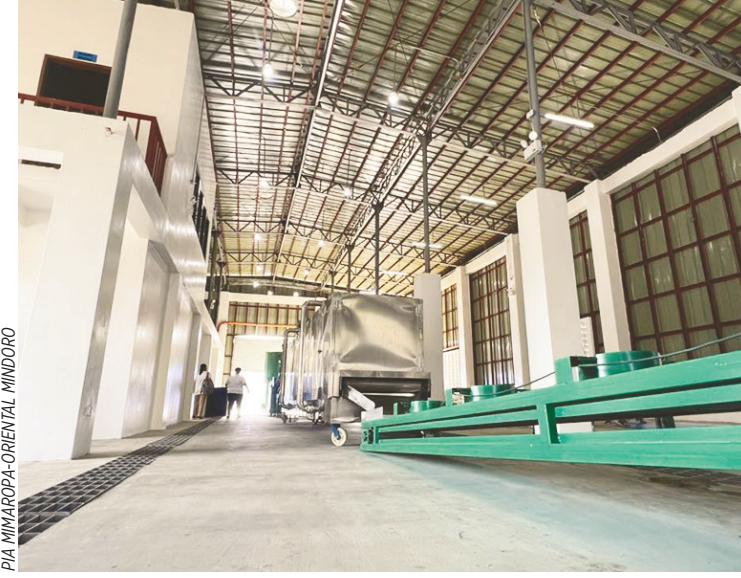
The facility is situated near a 161-hectare mariculture park as well as bangus and shrimp hatcheries in Oriental Mindoro.

"Its location also benefits from nearby port and airport access, facilitating the distribution of products," BFAR said.

"Bulaacao is in the heart of the region, and this plant will not only serve the locals but also cater to surrounding provinces," it added.

"It's a key development for the entire region's fisheries."

BFAR said it is also hoping to open aqua feed mill plants in other parts of the region. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**



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Nestlé slows US price hikes to win back consumers

LONDON — Household goods and packaged food makers are easing US price increases to avoid losing American shoppers to retailers' less expensive private-label brands as a global trade war tests the limits of their pricing power at grocery stores.

US President Donald Trump has imposed broad tariffs on several countries around the world in recent months, sparking worries that the US economy will be pushed into recession, with commodities and basic utilities becoming more expensive.

Mr. Trump met with major retailers, including Walmart and Target, to discuss the tariffs' impact on their imports.

"Some political decisions, economic decisions taken have rather undermined already soft consumer confidence," Nestlé CEO Laurent Freixe told journalists on Thursday during an earnings call. Nestlé, the world's biggest packaged food company and maker of Nescafé and Kit-

Kat, cut prices in the US, its biggest market, by 1%.

"When it comes to pricing, we have to take into account the customers, the consumers, competitors' moves," Mr. Freixe said. "We are trying to take as much price as we can to cover our costs while being mindful of the consumer response."

Dove soap maker Unilever, which also reported earnings on Thursday, noted "declining consumer sentiment" in North America, where it raised prices by only 2.1%.

Nestlé, Unilever and other makers of household products and packaged food need to show caution with price hikes to avoid alienating American shoppers who are worried about having less money to spend on groceries, industry consultants and investors said. In grocery stores, these companies compete head-to-head with retailers' private label products, which are generally lower priced.

"Consumer confidence is down. We can see consumption patterns are changing, and it will remain competitive," Kris Licht, CEO of Reckitt, said on an earnings call on Wednesday. He added that, in that context, the maker of Durex condoms in the first quarter raised prices by just 0.9% in North America compared to 3% in Europe and 3.9% in emerging markets.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, consumer goods firms lost market share to store brands made by retailers like Walmart and Target.

Rob Holston, EY's global and America's consumer products sector leader, said consumer companies selling major brands of everyday products had raised prices as much as they can in recent years.

"There's a large percentage of people that will just move into private label" options, Mr. Holston said, adding that his consumer goods clients have said they're on "war-footing" with private label brands now.

Data pulled for Reuters by research firm NielsenIQ showed that as recently as in the first quarter, makers of major household goods brands on average kept price increases roughly flat at 2% when compared with faster price hikes of about 4% from private label brands for the same basket of goods that included categories from coffee and soap to baby food and tampons. Private label goods are still cheaper on average by at least roughly \$1, according to the NielsenIQ data.

The US Consumer Price Index increased 2.4% in March on a year-on-year basis, above the 2% rate at which big brands were recently raising prices, according to the NielsenIQ data.

McKinsey partner Patricio Ibáñez said shoppers are bracing for costs to rise because of tariffs, and a survey led by the consulting firm showed 60% of people plan to shift their consumption habits by buying things that are cheaper or by switching to wholesale clubs or going to online retailers. — **Reuters**

Collectibles maker Pop Mart considering PHL food venture

POP MART International Group, a Chinese maker of toy collectibles, said it is interested in starting a food business in the Philippines alongside permanent retail stores, the Philippine Franchise Association (PFA) said.

PFA Chairman Sam Christopher Lim said the company is interested in operating its own store network.

"I know they have been doing pop-up stores, but now they want to do permanent stores," he told reporters on the sidelines of the Franchise Asia Philippines 2025 Conference and Expo last week.

"That is one of the key things they were discussing with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), so that is more on a retail level," he added.

"In Beijing, (Pop Mart) actually has a theme park with a bakery that's doing very well," he said.

"They said it can be replicated outside a theme park. So, they are looking for partners, but they are still (developing) their strategy. But what I am proud of is that they said that if they launched a food brand, they are looking at the Philippines as possibly one of their first (overseas) markets," he added.

He said Pop Mart views the Philippines as a strong consumer market.

"Nothing is confirmed yet ... I think they were just here to really explore the market a bit more. We are supporting them and giving them insights. I also let them meet some of our food companies," he added.

Pop Mart operates pop-up stores in SM Makati and SM Mall of Asia. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

DBM calls for gender and dev't budget review

BUDGET Secretary Amenah F. Pangandaman called for a review of gender and development (GAD) budget policy amid growing challenges, while also pushing for an inclusive budget process.

In an e-mail interview, Ms. Pangandaman, the first Muslim woman to lead the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), said such a review is needed "a consideration of the growing gender-related challenges and demands of our society, and mindful of our limited fiscal space."

Government departments and agencies are required to allocate a minimum of 5% of their annual funding to gender programs, projects, and activities.

The Philippine Commission on Women reported that P807.64 billion, or 23% of the budget of government agencies including state universities and colleges, was allocated for GAD in 2023.

The actual GAD utilization however was only 13%.

"Being a woman in a leadership role, especially in governance and finance, requires a profound commitment to making every policy and program uplift the quality of life of every Filipino, especially women," she said.

The administration's budgeting practices have come under fire from former President Rodrigo R. Duterte, who alleged that the 2025

General Appropriations Act passed with a number of items left unfilled — leaving the government a so-called "blank check" for unspecified spending items.

The DBM rejected such claims as "fake news," while President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. said it is impossible to pass budgets with blank items.

Ms. Pangandaman said the DBM is advancing transparency and inclusive citizen participation in the budget process.

"We continue to leverage Open Government Partnership (OGP) as a platform for safe, inclusive, and constructive citizen participation in the budget process," she said.

"The Philippines has long been recognized as a regional and global leader in this area, consistently earning high marks in the International Budget Partnership's Open Budget Survey," she said.

Ms. Pangandaman chairs the Philippine OGP and belongs to the organization's global Steering Committee.

"In addition, the economic team is exploring the inclusion of civil society representatives in the Development Budget Coordination Committee — a move that could significantly deepen public participation throughout the entire budget cycle, from planning to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation," she said. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**



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