



PHILIPPINE STAR/ED GUMBAN

Hog industry lobbied for pork MSRP removal — DA

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) said on Thursday its decision to discontinue the maximum suggested retail price (MSRP) scheme for pork was the result of lobbying by the hog industry, which argued that production remains constrained by African Swine Fever (ASF).

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel, Jr. clarified that the DA is withdrawing the pork MSRP “at the request of industry players.”

“While the industry tried to comply with the MSRP, the severe shortage in swine due to ASF, combined with strong consumer demand, has made it increasingly difficult to keep pork prices down,” he said.

The MSRP had been set at P300 per kilo for a whole slaughtered pig, P350 for pork shoulder and hind leg and P380 for pork belly.

Agriculture Undersecretary for Livestock Constante J. Palabrica said on Wednesday that vendors were not complying with the MSRP likely due to high farm-gate prices, reportedly as high as P290 per kilo.

Mr. Laurel said pork retail prices remain high, “with industry groups pointing to the ASF resurgence as a key factor disrupting supply and dampening production.”

Since the first outbreak in 2019, the national hog inventory has declined from about 13 million head to just 8 million, according to the DA.

DA spokesman Arnel V. de Mesa told reporters on Thursday that the hog industry cited the need for a “recovery period” from ASF.

The MSRP will be revised, he said.

Compliance with the pork MSRP was below 5% as of May 2, against 30% on April 1.

Alfred Ng, National Federation of Hog Farmers, Inc. vice-chairman said the MSRP “failed” because “less than 15% of retailers followed the MSRP, claiming higher transfer prices from middlemen who in turn blame farmers,” he told *BusinessWorld*.

He said the DA's failure to control the *vijeros* — the consolidators who link farms with dealers — was “the actual cause of the failed MSRP scheme.”

Mr. Ng said producers have to “sacrifice P2,000 per pig to cooperate with the DA.”

“How else will farms recover from the millions of losses the past year?”

“DA always says farmers have a 30% profit compared to *vijeros* with 10% and retailers 5%. In reality, farmers need a minimum of four to six months before they

can convert their pigs to cash,” he said.

He said the actual profit of pig producers is only between 5% and 7.5% because they have to deal with animal diseases.

Mr. Laurel, meanwhile, said the lifting of the pork MSRP will not lead to a sudden spike in prices as markets also deal in cheaper imported pork.

Pork imports hit 53.598 million kilos in February, up from 38.994 million kilos a year earlier.

The DA said it will focus on buying hogs from farmers for P230 per kilo and distribute these to key slaughterhouses.

The DA is piloting a direct-sourcing scheme involving Food Terminal, Inc. (FTI) and Charoen Pokphand Foods PLC (CP Foods).

State-owned FTI has been supplying a Caloocan slaughterhouse with 100 live hogs daily from CP Foods since April.

The DA is hoping to pursue similar arrangements with other farm companies like Pilmico Foods Corp.

Mr. Ng welcomed the direct-sourcing strategy but noted that “many farms” refuse to sell to the DA because of its 30-days-to-pay terms.

Mr. Palabrica on Wednesday described the mode of payment for the direct-sourcing program as a “credit on delivery” scheme.

He said about P5-7 billion is earmarked for the program, adding that the FTI sells the hogs at no markup, while the cost of delivery to slaughterhouses is absorbed by the partner company.

Meanwhile, Mr. Laurel said the DA has hit the minimum access volume (MAV) quota for meat imports.

“Same breakdown as last year,” he said, noting that the allocation remains the same pending tariff negotiations with the US.

“Whatever changes we will make to the MAV allocation, it will be in 2026,” he said.

Meat Importers and Traders Association (MITA) President Jess C. Cham told *BusinessWorld* he supports an increase in the MAV.

“After all the current volumes were set 30 years ago when our population was 50% less, with lower per capita consumption,” he said.

“In addition, we are facing production shortfalls due to animal diseases such as ASF,” he added.

He noted that the delayed release of MAV allocations has “affected greatly the purchasing decisions of the licensees.”

The DA in April said it was hoping to overhaul the MAV system, which it said was being “exploited by a small number of accredited importers.” — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

THE GOVERNMENT is currently negotiating power rates with Samsung Electronics that will help determine whether the South Korean multinational pursues an over \$1-billion investment in the Philippines, the Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) said.

“What they want to assure is the power rates; that is what is being fixed. But the fiscal incentives have already been ironed out,” PEZA Director General Tereso O. Panga told reporters.

“They have presented prevailing rates in Vietnam, China, and South Korea, and those are going to be used as a benchmark. We can approximate the rates we can give them based on those,” he added.

Asked how much lower Samsung wants power rates to be, he said, “They are being reasonable; that is all I can say, and we have the capacity to provide it.”

He said another government agency is involved in the rate negotiations.

“Their other asks can be addressed through administrative interventions, like water; that one we are doing it from our end,” he added.

According to Mr. Panga, the new investment would expand Samsung’s operation in Calamba Premiere Industrial Parkway in Laguna.

PHL, S. Korea sign deals on critical minerals, EVs

TRADE Secretary Ma. Cristina A. Roque signed a strategic partnership agreement involving critical minerals and electric vehicles (EVs) with South Korean Minister for Trade, Industry, and Energy Cheong In-Kyo, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said.

In a statement on Thursday, the DTI said the memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed in South Korea on Wednesday is expected to accelerate trade, drive industrial transformation, and support the transition to green energy.

“This MoU is the embodiment of President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.’s mission to build a nation propelled by strategic global partnerships, environmentally responsible development, and a dynamic industrial sector,” Ms. Roque said.

“They have been with PEZA ever since. They will still manufacture multi-layer ceramic capacitors (MLCCs),” he said.

The MoU covers renewable energy, electric vehicles, and the value-added processing of critical minerals for battery production in the interest of advancing both countries’ green industrial revolution.

Also on Thursday, Ms. Roque inaugurated the DTI SME Showroom at the President Hotel, offering a showcase for export-ready Philippine products.

“This launch is a concrete step towards bringing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) closer to the global market,” Ms. Roque said.

“By providing this physical presence overseas, we break through geographical barriers for our SMEs and build the trust that international buyers seek,” she said. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

He added that the expansion involves a multi-story facility.

Incentives for investments under P50 billion are governed the Corporate Recovery and Tax



PHILIPPINE STAR/RYAN BALDEMOR

THE PHILIPPINES can hit visitor arrivals of 6 million this year, even with its key source markets roiled by currency volatility, Leechiu Property Consultants said.

“I think the Philippines can still book 6 million visitors by year’s end, but of course there are risks,” Alfred Lay, director for hotels, tourism, and leisure at Leechiu, told *BusinessWorld*.

“Risks for this year are all mainly external, namely the uncertainty in the global economy, airline disruptions, and exchange rate volatility in our top source markets, which can both have positive and adverse effects,” he added.

The Department of Tourism reported that the Philippines booked 5.95 million visitor arrivals last year, well off its target of 7.7 million.

Mastercard Chief Economist for Asia-Pacific David Mann said that inbound tourism to the Philippines is recovering slowly compared to the outbound segment of the business.

“We have seen outbound spending rise 6% versus 2019, with the majority traveling to Japan, Korea, and Vietnam,” Mr. Mann said in a virtual briefing on Thursday.

“The inbound recovery has been a bit slower, at less than three-quarters (72%) recovered to 2019 levels, likely due to some of the slower recovery in the air capacity and reliance on long-haul markets,” he added.

He noted the slowdown in arrivals from Northeast Asia but added that visitors from Singapore, the US, and Australia, as well as overseas Filipinos, have been helping support the recovery.

The Philippines recorded 2.1 million visitor arrivals as of May 1, down 0.82% year on year.

South Korea, the top source market, accounted for 22.25% of arrivals, or 468,337, down 18% from a year earlier.

The other top source markets were the US, Japan, Australia, and Canada.

“While the dip in South Korean arrivals is notable, it’s too early to call it a lasting trend,” Mr. Lay said.

“Encouragingly, we’re seeing steady growth from the US, Australia, Japan, and parts of Europe — markets showing healthy demand that can help offset the shortfall,” he said.

However, he said the decline in arrivals “highlights the ongoing need for both the private and public sectors to continue improving our infrastructure and services.”

“The regional market is very competitive, and we need to keep adding more focus, resources, and funding to our tourism sector to ensure we stay relevant,” he added.

He said the opportunities in Philippine tourism still lie mainly in the domestic market. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

Puregold sees Vis-Min expansion helping more small businesses

PLANS to expand in the Visayas and Mindanao will help encourage the growth of small businesses, supermarket chain Puregold Price Club, Inc. said.

Puregold Vice-President for Operations Antonio G. Delos Santos II said that the company, whose core market is *sari-sari* store owners buying inventory to sell to consumers, has a new-store target of 25 locations.

“What we want is to put up stores in places that do not yet have Puregold,” Mr. Delos Santos told reporters on the sidelines of Puregold’s Tindahan ni Aling Puring (TNAP) Convention on Thursday.

“Very soon we will be opening in Pantukan, Davao de Oro and in Sindangan, Zamboanga del Norte,” he added.

He said there are also plans to open stores in the north, Metro Manila, and Bicol.

“We want Aling Puring’s footprint (to be nationwide) because we believe that it is not only the National Capital Region that needs the help of Aling Puring,” he said.

“We want Aling Puring to reach all places in the Philippines, especially Visayas and Mindanao, to help entrepreneurs in these regions,” he added.

He said that the company’s goal is to help businesses succeed by selling the right products.

“If more Puregold stores open, more jobs will be created,” he added.

Puregold President Ferdinand Vincent P. Co said the company’s business impact is not limited to the number of locations.

“When a *sari-sari* store thrives, a family moves forward, a community strengthens, and the economy grows from the ground up. By enabling our ‘Ka-Asensos’ (sharers in prosperity) to succeed, we are paving the road to thriving communities,” he added.

It said the TNAP program has become a “nationwide platform for micro-entrepreneurship.” — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

SC ruling nullifying LGU mining bans sets bad precedent — environmentalists

By **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**
Reporter

A SUPREME COURT (SC) ruling striking down local-government mining bans sets a bad precedent for conservation, according to environmental groups.

The ruling also exposes the flaws of a 1995 mining law, they added.

Alyansa Tigil Mina (ATM) said the ruling has “clear repercussions for efforts to stop destructive and irresponsible mining.”

It called for a balanced interpretation of laws on local

autonomy and minerals management.

“In the real world where mining corporations and political dynasties rule economic decision and management of our natural resources, this is not a just interpretation, in our view.”

The ruling nullified a 25-year moratorium on large-scale mining by the province of Occidental Mindoro and the municipality of Abra de Ilog in that province, with the SC saying it violated Republic Act (RA) No. 7942 or the Philippine Mining Act of 1995.

It stemmed from a case filed by Agusan Petroleum and Min-

eral Corp., which argued that the ban violated its exclusive rights to mine in Mamburao and Abra de Ilog under a government-approved Financial or Technical Assistance Agreement (FTAA).

ATM said the ruling constrains the police powers of LGUs, though it notes that instead of blanket bans, it found that LGUs can decide to approve or disapprove of specific mining applications.

“We are asking public interest law organizations to review and give a briefing to environmental and climate justice networks and affected communities as soon as possible, so we may be able

to draft our responses with concerned LGUs,” it said.

Occidental Mindoro elevated the case filed by Agusan to the SC after a regional trial court voided the ordinances imposing the ban.

The province argued that the ordinances were a valid exercise of its police power since their purpose was to protect the environment and the lives and safety of residents.

The SC said large-scale mining and exploration of mineral resources are legal under the Constitution and the Philippine Mining Act of 1995, adding that it is the State’s duty to promote these activities “to support na-

tional development, while also ensuring environmental protection and safeguarding the rights of affected communities.”

Local ordinances are not considered “laws” that can prohibit mining under Section 19 of RA 7942, according to the ruling.

The power of LGUs to issue ordinances comes from Congress, and interpreting “laws” to include local ordinances would, in effect, allow LGUs to override Congressional authority to regulate mining, it said.

The ruling noted that RA 7942 gives LGUs the power to approve or deny individual mining applications

based on their effects on the environment, livelihoods, and land rights.

“However, the law does not authorize them to impose a blanket ban on all large-scale mining in their area,” the court said.

Kalikasan People’s Network called the ruling a “dangerous move.”

“This ruling... is a direct assault on the autonomy of local governments and the collective right of the people to a balanced and healthful ecology, as enshrined in the Constitution,” it said.

The group called on the 20th Congress to repeal RA 7942 and pass a “people-friendly” mining bill.