Pest diagnostics startup hoping to expand beyond mango farms

AN AGRICULTURE startup helping diagnose pest problems in mango farms said it is hoping to help farmers of other high-value crops.

Founded in 2022, AGRI-Tips, Inc. provides mango farmers personalized scientific-backed farm input recommendations based on the farm's pests, growing stage, weather, and previous farming practices.

It does so via a mobile app generating personalized options to manage insecticide resistance.

Founder Karl Medina said agri-technology startups like AGRI-TIPS play a role in modernizing every part of the value chain — from propagation, crop management, pest management, to post harvest and processing.

"Multiply that by the type of crop that they would like to focus on. Add the globalization factor, the opportunities are limitless," he said in an e-mail.

The mango industry employs about 2.5 million farmers, according to the Department of Trade and Industry.

It's the third most important fruit crop based on export volume, after banana and pineapple, according to the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development.

It said pests and diseases and low rates of adoption of improved technologies are among the major challenges preventing the mango industry from maximizing its potential.

The main challenge for startups like AGRI-Tips is reaching out to as many farmers as possible, Mr. Medina said, citing the need to sustain farmer training and adoption.

The startup addresses the problem by partnering with industry partners including local agriculturist offices and farmer cooperatives.

"Agribusiness players can maximize available resources by partnering with academia and research and training institutions," Mr. Medina said.

"This can help in updating the knowledge of agribusiness players into new methods and technology that can be beneficial to their farms," he added.

"Since Agri-TIPS started with a specific crop, Mango, the prospects would be expanding to other high value crops with the goal of making all farmers an expert in decision making in farming," Mr. Medina said. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

SERGE LE STRAT-UNSPLASH

Cattle, buffalo products from Italy, France banned

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has issued a temporary ban on imports of live cattle and buffalo from France and Italy.

In Memorandum Order No. 43, the DA also banned byproducts like milk and milk products, embryos, skin, and semen from Italy.

The DA cited reports of an outbreak of lumpy skin disease (LSD) in Orani, Nuoro, Sardegna, Italy, on July 18, affecting domestic cattle.

"There is a need to prevent the entry of the LSD virus to protect the health of the local cattle and water buffalo population," according to the memo.

In Memorandum Order No. 44, the DA also said it is banning imports of live cattle and buffalo and their byproducts originating from France.

An outbreak of LSD was recorded in Chambéry, France on June 23, which affected domestic cattle.

However, importations of skeletal muscle meat, casings, gelatine and collagen, tallow, hooves, and horns may continue subject to terms and conditions.

Milk and milk products and meal and flour from blood, meat other than skeletal muscle, or bones from bovines and water buffaloes are allowed provided that they have additional attestation.

Imports of bovine and water buffalo hides are also allowed provided that their international veterinary certificate attests that the products were derived from animals that had undergone ante- and post-mortem inspections, dry- or wet-salted for at least 14 days, treated in salt and sodium carbonate for at least seven days, and dried for at least 42 days.

Imports of other bovine and water buffalo products are also allowed, provided that their international veterinary certificates attest that they were processed to ensure the destruction of LSD and that necessary precautions were taken after processing to avoid contact with potential sources of the virus. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

French court vetoes return of pesticide in farming law

PARIS — France's constitutional court blocked the re-introduction of a pesticide accused of harming bees, in the latest twist in a fierce political battle in the European Union's biggest agricultural producer.

The court said the re-authorization of acetamiprid, part of the neonicotinoid group of pesticides banned in France, as proposed under a farming bill passed last month did not provide sufficient safeguards on the use of the crop chemical.

The planned relaxation of France's neonicotinoid ban fueled opposition to the legislation, with a petition against it gathering over 2 million signatures, a record for a petition on the website of France's National Assembly.

The court's ruling is a setback for supporters, including most of France's farming unions and conservative politicians, including Senator Laurent Duplomb who gave his name to the bill.

They had argued that acetamiprid is authorized elsewhere in Europe, as it does not pose the same risks as other neonicotinoids banned at EU level, and without it crops like sugar beets and hazelnuts face severe disease losses.

However, the FNSEA and JA, two of France's main farmer unions, welcomed the court's approval of most of the legislation, including steps to simplify planning permission for livestock buildings and water reservoirs for irrigation. — ***Reuters***

Argentines grill up more beef in first half of 2025, reflecting higher wages

ARGENTINES are once again chowing down on beef, as an economic turnaround has allowed them to fork over more for steaks, a report from the Rosario exchange said on Friday.

The domestic beef market has logged an uptick as wages soar past inflation, the exchange said. Average salaries for registered workers jumped 62.5% in the year to May 2025.

Consumer inflation was contained at 39%, although beef prices rose at a steeper 59% over the past 12 months.

While still a strain, the inflation rate is a significant drop from the triple-digit annual price increases of the recent past. Austerity policies of libertarian President Javier Milei's have helped cool inflation.

The bump in purchasing power went directly to the dinner table, according to the exchange. Consumers in the South American country went from eating an average of 47.6 kg (104.9 lb) of beef in the first six months of last year to 50.2 kg (110.7 lb) in the same period of 2025.

"As inflation begins to ease and allows the consumer's pocket to loosen up, albeit slowly ... beef consumption tends to recover the place of preference it has historically occupied within the local consumer's shopping basket," said the study.

The increased domestic beef consumption so far this year absorbed a supply glut, as exports fell 19% by volume, hurt by a volatile exchange rate, the report said.

"The question going forward is how long consumers will be willing to accept the increased supply without a price adjustment," the exchange said.

The country is famed for its beef-eating culture, with steakhouses and asado barbecues a frequent dining option.

Argentines had tightened their belts last year due to the high inflation, a recession and rising poverty and unemployment, turning from beef to cheaper meats. — ***Reuters***

OUTLIER

ICTSI shares rise on port developments, earnings

RAZON-LED International Container Terminal Services, Inc. (ICTSI) was the most actively traded stock last week, with its share price rising following reports of strong earnings and developments at its Luzon terminal, which is expected to be operational by 2028.

Analysts said investor confidence remains upbeat given the company's resiliency amidst global trade disruptions.

Data from the Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE) showed that ICTSI was the most actively traded stock from Aug. 4-8, with P4.23 billion worth of 8.77 million shares changing hands.

ICTSI shares closed at P488 apiece on Friday, higher by 7.3% from P455 on Aug. 1. The services index likewise grew by 4.6%, while the benchmark PSE index inched up by 0.5%.

Year to date, the listed port operator jumped 26.4%, outperforming the 11.2% growth in its sector and reversing the PSE's 2.9% decline.

Andrei Jorge G. Soriano, research associate at China Bank Securities Corp., said that beyond the strong earnings results, investors remain optimistic about ICTSI due to its resilience amid global trade developments.

He also noted the company's expansion prospects, including potential mergers and acquisitions, and an outlook for yields to stay above $200 per twenty-foot equivalent unit (TEU).

Some terminals are still anticipating upward tariff adjustments for the rest of the year, which could further uplift yields, he said in an e-mail.

Aside from its strong second-quarter results, Juan Alfonso G. Teodoro, an equity research analyst at Timson Securities, Inc., said that the market probably likes ICTSI's steady growth in cargo volumes, its global operations, and the long-term boost expected from the Luzon terminal project.

"Being a major player in a critical industry like ports makes it attractive to both local and foreign investors, which is why it's often one of the most actively traded stocks," Mr. Teodoro said in a Viber message.

He added that investors see it as relatively stable even when the broader market is choppy, which draws consistent buying interest.

Jash Matthew M. Baylon, an equity analyst at The First Resources Management and Securities Corp., similarly attributed the strong price action of the listed port operator to its expansion plans and earnings performance for the first half of the year.

He said the strong volume growth from its operations may be driven by robust trade prior to the effectivity of US tariffs.

"Meanwhile, the sector indices showed better performance fueled by lower inflation, which translated to higher consumer spending and boosted business confidence, resulting in significant growth across the industry," Mr. Baylon said in a Viber message.

For the second quarter, the global operator's net income climbed 16% to $244.31 million from $210.67 million in the same period a year earlier.

This brought first-half net income to $483.84 million, 15% higher than the $420.55 million in the first six months of 2024.

Meanwhile, gross revenues from port operations during the April to June period rose 11.8% to $764.63 million, while for the first half, it amounted to $1.51 billion, a 14.3% increase from $1.32 billion a year earlier.

"The jump in both income and revenues mainly came from higher cargo volumes and better operational efficiency across ICTSI's terminals," Mr. Teodoro said.

Additionally, the company benefited from strong performance in key markets and saw contributions from new and expanded port operations. Favorable exchange rates and cost control measures likely helped boost profits, Mr. Teodoro said.

"Overall, it's a mix of more business coming in, running operations more efficiently, and making the most out of its global network."

He also said that ICTSI looks "financially solid" in the second half as earnings and revenues have been growing steadily and cargo volumes are on the rise, followed by projects in its pipeline. — **Abigail Marie P. Yraola**

FULL STORY

Read the full story by scanning the QR code or by typing the link
<tinyurl.com/bdd87w3w>

First Gen seeks 15-year extension of supply contract for Sta. Rita gas plant

LOPEZ-LED First Gen Corp. is seeking to extend its power purchase agreement (PPA) with Manila Electric Co. (Meralco) to continue supplying electricity from the 1,100-megawatt (MW) Sta. Rita gas plant in Batangas for up to 15 years.

First Gen President and Chief Operating Officer Francis Giles B. Puno said the contract for the Sta. Rita gas plant is due to expire by the end of the month.

"My view is that it should be extended, principally because we need to make sure that there is energy security," Mr. Puno told reporters last week.

First Gas Power Corp. (FGPC), a subsidiary of First Gas Holdings Corp., started full commercial operations of the plant on Aug. 17, 2000. The gas plant generates electricity for Meralco under a 25-year PPA.

Adjacent to the Sta. Rita plant is the 420-MW San Gabriel natural gas-fired power plant operated by First NatGas Power Corp. (FNPC). Its power supply agreement with Meralco for the facility expired last year and it is now operating on a merchant basis.

As the San Gabriel plant sells power to the spot market, it only earns well during high-demand periods.

"If there's no demand, [San Gabriel plant] won't operate. But when there is demand, at least the price is higher, so it can save up for the times when it is not running," Mr. Puno said.

If the contract for the Sta. Rita plant is not extended, he warned the company might need to consider ways to reduce operational costs, including "potentially temporary mothballing or shutting down the facility for a prolonged period."

"Can the grid live without 1,100 MW of reliable, efficient gas-fired capacity in the future? My position is it cannot," he said.

In its latest notice, the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) said it responded to the letters sent by the Lopez-led firm requesting confirmation of the term extension of its PPA with Meralco.

The ERC advised the company to follow the proper procedure when requesting an extension of the PPA, subject to comments and further deliberations by the members of the Commission.

"We cannot approve nor deny because that was only a letter. There should be a proper process," said ERC Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer Monalisa C. Dimalanta.

In the renewable energy sector, First Gen's subsidiary, Energy Development Corp. (EDC), plans to pursue around 70 MW of initial capacity for its Amacan geothermal development in Mindanao.

"Hopefully, by next year, we would be able to say we can develop a facility in Amacan, Mindanao," said EDC President and Chief Operating Officer Jerome H. Cainglet.

Mr. Cainglet said the company hopes to expand capacity to up to 120 MW.

"If we are able to confirm by next year that it's commercially feasible, then another two to three years to construct the 70-MW [capacity]," he said.

EDC has an installed capacity of 1,480.19 MW, representing around 20% of the country's total installed renewable energy capacity. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

Globe Telecom upbeat on second-half prospects

GLOBE TELECOM, Inc. said it expects better performance in the second half of the year as gross service revenue returns to growth, signaling a more stable footing for the company.

"If one takes a look from a quarter-on-quarter perspective, gross service revenue is now back in the growth area," Globe President and Chief Executive Officer Carl Raymund R. Cruz said at a briefing last week.

"This turnaround really indicates stability and solid footing for the company, with which we can build upon for better growth in the second half of the year," he added.

For the second quarter, Globe's attributable net income fell by 29.46% to P5.46 billion as weaker revenues and higher expenses weighed on earnings.

Its combined revenues for the second quarter declined by 1.92% to P43.47 billion from P44.32 billion in the second quarter of 2024, while gross expenses rose by 0.72% to P39.21 billion from P38.93 billion in the same period last year.

Quarter-on-quarter, the company's mobile service revenues improved by 2% to P28.78 billion from P28.29 billion in the first quarter of this year.

The Ayala-led telecommunications company said it expects operational efficiency and capital optimization to drive growth in the second half.

"We're ensuring that we have the right amount of capital for all our initiatives. This is part of our broader effort to diversify funding sources and optimize our capital structure, so we can manage the cost of funding while supporting strategic programs," Globe Chief Finance Officer, Treasurer and Chief Risk Officer Juan Carlo C. Puno said.

For the first half, the company's attributable net income dropped 14.5% to P12.44 billion from P14.55 billion in the same period last year, following lower revenue for the six months ending in June.

Globe's gross revenue for the January-to-June period declined by 2.68% to P87.23 billion from P89.63 billion a year earlier.

Additionally, ST Telemedia Global Data Centres (STT GDC) Philippines said it is on track to increase its capacity to over 30 megawatts (MW) by yearend through ongoing construction. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**