

Fisheries output drops 7.5% in Q3 on typhoon damage to aquaculture

FISHERIES production fell 7.5% year on year in the third quarter to 894,320 metric tons (MT), with aquaculture leading the decline after extensive typhoon and flood damage during the period, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

“Decreases in production were noted in aquaculture, marine municipal fisheries,

and inland municipal fisheries. Meanwhile, commercial fisheries posted production increments during the quarter,” the PSA said.

Aquaculture production fell 12.3% year on year in the third quarter, bringing the total production to 454,860 MT. The subsector accounted for 50.9% of the total fisheries production.

Commercial fisheries, which accounted for 25.1% of fisheries output, rose 4.7% to 224,560 MT.

Marine municipal fisheries production declined 9.7% in the third quarter, with production valued at 168,920 MT. The subsector accounted for 18.9% of total production.

Inland municipal fisheries production fell 0.6%

to 45,990 MT, equivalent to 5.1% of overall fisheries output.

The PSA added that of the 21 major species, seaweed production fell 15.7%, bali sardinella (*tamban*) 13.3%, and milkfish (*bangus*) 9.7%.

Output grew for skipjack (*gulyasan*) 15.9%, squid (*pusit*) 22.6%, and tilapia (3.1%). — **Vonn Andrei E. Villamiel**

Agri output likely fell in Q3 led by fisheries; ASF concerns continue

By Andre Christopher H. Alampay

AGRICULTURAL OUTPUT is estimated to have slowed or fallen in the third quarter after a sharp drop in fisheries volume, with analysts and industry officials also skeptical of the performance of the hog industry due to the continuing African Swine Fever (ASF) outbreak.

If borne out, their worries about the third quarter would check the momentum gained a quarter earlier, when output rose 5.7% year on year, the strongest performance in eight years.

Nevertheless, the crops subsector is expected to turn in a positive performance, despite the impact of typhoons and flooding during the period.

Former Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar said via Viber that crop output likely rose 1% despite the typhoons and two major earthquakes in Cebu and the Davao region.

“The growth would have been higher if not for these challenges and problems... farmers continue with dedication to plant rice,” he said.

He credits the Masagana Rice Industry Program and the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund in supporting farmers and farm production during this quarter.

Federation of Free Farmers National Manager Raul Q. Montemayor said via Messenger that output of palay (unmilled rice) will likely rise during the period, coming off a low year-earlier base of 3.33 million metric tons (MMT).

He added that the third-quarter 2023 volume of 3.8 MMT remains out of reach “due to reduced plantings because of low palay prices.”

The Philippine Statistics Authority’s own updated estimate based on the standing crop is 3.93 MMT, which would be up 18% year on year but down 9.7% from a quarter earlier.

Corn production is expected to come in at around 2.4 MMT for the quarter, down 0.4% year on year but up 62.1% from the second quarter.

Mr. Dar also said livestock and poultry were “not growing well”

or could post “minimal growth,” though he added that the poultry segment is “rebounding.”

Former Agriculture Undersecretary Fermin D. Adriano said via Viber that livestock production remains a worry due to ASF.

Mr. Adriano said official assessments of the ASF situation could be too optimistic.

The Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) reported a drop-off in the geographic scope of ASF outbreaks this year. As of Oct. 3, the BAI said the number of barangays with active ASF cases dropped to 31 from 505.

These reports, Mr. Adriano said, do not take into account the sharp decline in the swine population.

“At a certain level of decrease, decline will plateau. This does not mean we have checked for the spread of disease... It will undoubtedly be checked if there is an increase in swine population without a setback for a period of time.”

Mr. Adriano said that if an effective vaccine against ASF is not rolled out, farmers will have to resort to drastic isolation measures as did Spain and China.

Such a strategy “will have adverse consequences to backyard raisers who cannot afford the cost of biosecurity measures,” he said.

National Fisheries Research and Development Institute Board Member Norberto Chingcuanco said via Messenger that fisheries production will fall after storms affected major aquaculture sites like Taal Lake and Pangasinan.

Fisheries production had fallen 5.1% in the third quarter of 2024, also due to typhoons. The government announced this week that fisheries production by volume in the third quarter fell 7.5% to 894.32 thousand metric tons.

Mr. Chingcuanco said the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources need to find regions to farm fish that are not along the usual typhoon track.

He named Lake Mainit in northeast Mindanao, the Pantabangan Dam reservoir in Nueva Ecija, and Naujan Lake in Oriental Mindoro as potential sites to invest in.

Palay production up 12.6% in Q3 after increase in planted area

PRODUCTION of palay (unmilled rice) rose 12.6% year on year in the third quarter to 3.75 million metric tons (MT), aided by a 15.7% increase in the land planted to rice, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) said.

Palay output comes in below the PSA’s adjusted estimate of 3.93 million MT issued last month.

Cagayan Valley was the top producer of palay with 499,700 MT or 13.3% of the total. The Western Visayas produced 489,640

MT (13.1%) and Central Luzon 385,100 MT (10.3%).

The three regions accounted for 36.7% of the national total during the quarter.

The harvested area in the third quarter was estimated at 916,770 hectares, up 15.7% from a year earlier.

The Western Visayas accounted for 15.8% or 145,100 hectares of the total palay harvested area, followed by Soccsksargen and the Cagayan Valley with 102,200 hectares (11.1%)

and 100,080 hectares (10.9%), respectively.

The yield per hectare of palay in the third quarter declined 2.7% year on year to 4.20 MT.

Cagayan Valley was the top yielding province with 4.99 MT per hectare, followed by the Ilocos Region and Davao Region with yields of 4.95 MT and 4.92 MT, respectively.

The PSA estimates fourth-quarter palay output at 7.06 million MT, which would represent a decline of 2.3% from a year earlier. — **Vonn Andrei E. Villamiel**

‘Lifeline’ subsidized-power program could expand with more consumers being classified as eligible

MORE low-income electricity consumers could be admitted to the power subsidy program with the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) considering adjustments to the eligibility threshold for availing of “lifeline” rates.

In a statement on Wednesday, the ERC said it is conducting consultations on a proposed uniform national lifeline subsidy rate which will expand the coverage of the Lifeline Subsidy Program.

Under the proposal, qualified end-users consuming 50 kilowatt hours (kWh) per month or less will get a 100% discount on their electricity bills.

Qualified beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) whose power consumption does not exceed the 50-kWh threshold will automatically be enrolled in the program and enjoy the lifeline rate.

According to Republic Act No. 9136 or the Electric Power Industry Reform Act, the ERC must offer subsidized electricity to qualified low-income consumers unable to pay their electricity bills at full cost.

At present, lifeline rate discounts vary depending on the prevailing rates of distribution utilities (DUs) or electric cooperatives.

Within the franchise area of Manila Electric Co. — the country’s largest private distribution utility — qualified lifeline consumers using 20 kWh per month or less are granted a 100% discount on generation, transmission, system loss, distribution, supply, metering, and other charges.

To fund the discounted rates under the enhanced program, a one-centavo per kWh lifeline subsidy rate will be collected. A

lifeline subsidy fund will be created, which will be administered by state-run Power Sector Assets and Liabilities Management Corp. (PSALM).

DUs, retail electricity suppliers, and the National Grid Corp. of the Philippines will collect the subsidy rate and remit all proceeds to PSALM.

The ERC said it will conduct an annual review of the subsidy rate, consumption threshold, and sufficiency of the fund.

“We are conducting public consultation to gather valuable insights from all stakeholders. This participatory approach ensures that the proposed uniform national lifeline subsidy framework is not only aligned with the law, but is fair, transparent, and responsive to the needs of the marginalized electricity consumers,” ERC Chairman and

Chief Executive Officer Francis Saturnino C. Juan said.

In a position paper dated Nov. 5, the National Association of Electricity Consumers for Reforms, Inc. (Nasecore) said the ERC should observe “equity and cost-of-service principles across all consumer classes,” instead of offering subsidies.

“Continuing to rely on the Lifeline Program to mask unfair pricing perpetuates dependence on cross-subsidies and hides inefficiencies, while punishing millions of non-lifeline households who dutifully pay but receive no protection,” Nasecore President Petronilo L. Ilagan said.

Gerry C. Arances, convenor of People for Power Coalition, said that the expansion of the program will only provide a “fraction of the relief needed by consumers as electricity costs soar.” — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

OPINION

From paper to portal: The SEC’s digital leap

The government continues to align its regulatory frameworks by steadily adopting technology to streamline public services and ease doing business. As such, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) issued Memorandum Circular (MC) No. 3, Series of 2025, requiring the use of the Zuper Easy Registration Online (ZERO) system for registering corporations. This initiative aims to modernize corporate registration, reduce red tape, and foster a more efficient, transparent, and accessible business environment.

In 2021, the SEC launched the Electronic Simplified Processing of Application for Registration of Company (eSPARC). This system replaced the older Company Registration System (CRS) and was designed to simplify and digitize the registration of domestic stock and non-stock corporations with up to 15 incorporators. eSPARC also facilitated registration applications for partnerships and for foreign-corporation licenses to do business.

eSPARC features two main subsystems: Regular Processing and OneSEC (One-day Submission and E-registration of Companies). Under Regular Processing, applicants begin by reserving a proposed company name and entering the proposed company’s details online for the SEC’s review, which typically takes up to seven working days. Once pre-approved, they then upload the notarized and authenticated or apostilled documents to the portal, pay the registration fees via eSPAYSEC, and receive a digital Certificate of Incorporation (CoI). However, applicants must still submit hard copies of signed and notarized documents and proof of payment before they can secure the physical CoI. With the numerous back-and-forth in-

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teractions on the portal, as well as the additional time and cost required for notarization and authentication, this process can be tedious and prone to red tape, which may result in delayed registration.

In contrast, OneSEC is a fully automated system designed for domestic stock corporations, including OPCs (One Person Corporations). It uses pre-filled templates. The entire process — from name verification to issuing the Digital CoI — can be completed within just one day. Similar to Regular Processing, the original CoI is released only after submission to the SEC of the digital CoI, proof of payment of assessed fees, and the originally signed and authenticated or notarized registration documents. While OneSEC offers speed and convenience, it is limited to domestic corporations and OPCs, and only covers 81 approved industry classifications. Additionally, because the system is fully automated, applicants cannot customize their Articles of Incorporation or By-laws.

In 2024, the SEC continued its digital evolution by introducing the Electronic SEC Universal Registration Environment (eSECURE), a digital identity verification and credentialing platform that serves as a “digital passport” for accessing the SEC’s various online services (e.g., eAMEND, eSEARCH, etc.). In the same year, the Electronic Submission Authentication Portal (eSAP) was launched to enable the digital authentication of documents, effectively remov-

ing the need for physical signatures and notarization, as well as the submission of hard copies.

Building on these advancements, SEC MC No. 3, Series of 2025 now requires the use of the new SEC ZERO system, an application within the eSPARC system that integrates both the eSECURE and eSAP platforms. Through SEC ZERO, applicants can digitally authenticate registration documents via eSAP, eliminating the need for traditional wet signatures and notarization of the registration documents. This not only streamlines the process and reduces the delays caused by the notarial and authentication/apostille process, but also reduces the costs associated with notarial, authentication, and apostille services. Moreover, the submission of hard copies is no longer required, enabling a fully digital, end-to-end registration process.

To initiate the registration process through SEC ZERO, each incorporator and signatory must first create and credential their individual eSECURE accounts. This involves paying a credentialing fee (P400 for initial credentialing that is valid for two years or P250 for renewal of credentialing account) and uploading either a PhilSys ID or any two valid government-issued IDs. The incorporators and signatories will have to undergo a liveness check in order to fully verify their accounts.

After all incorporators and signatories have completed the credentialing process in eSECURE, applicants may proceed with registration by accessing the eSPARC portal and selecting either the regular option with ZERO processing or OneSEC with ZERO processing option on the eSPARC portal. These options function similarly to their stan-

dard counterparts but include an added feature: digital authentication of registration documents.

Once all required company information is entered, the system automatically generates the necessary documents (e.g., Cover Sheet, Articles of Incorporation, By-Laws, and supporting documents). These documents are then digitally authenticated by the incorporators and signatories through eSAP.

Upon successful authentication, the Payment Assessment Form is then issued and may be paid through eSPAYSEC. Once payment is confirmed, an eOR will be issued and the system generates a digital Certificate of Incorporation, which holds the same legal validity as that of a physical certificate.

In accordance with the Memorandum, ZERO processing applies to domestic stock corporations (except lending and financing companies), whether fully Filipino-owned or with foreign equity, including OPCs and corporations with two to 15 incorporators. On the other hand, OneSEC with ZERO Processing is available exclusively for fully Filipino-owned domestic stock corporations with two to 15 incorporators.

The Memorandum also provides that all other types of corporations not listed above (such as lending companies, financing companies, and foreign corporations, including branch offices and representative offices) will eventually be processed through SEC ZERO after three months from its effectivity. However, pending the SEC’s issuance of the official notice announcing their integration to the system, applications for these types of corporations will continue to be under the regular processing option.

The implementation of SEC ZERO marks a pivotal step in the Philippines’ journey toward full digitalization of government services. By centralizing and digitizing the registration process through SEC ZERO, the SEC enhances operational efficiency and reinforces its commitment to accessibility and innovation.

This digital-first approach not only simplifies compliance but also minimizes delays, making it easier for entrepreneurs, investors and corporations to start and grow their businesses in the Philippines.

By forgoing the need for notarization and authentication/apostille of documents, as well as removing the submission of hard copies of the documents, SEC ZERO significantly reduces the time, costs, and effort required to register a company, thereby accelerating business formation and improving ease of doing business.

Through these comprehensive initiatives, the SEC is championing a landscape where efficiency, growth, and digital innovation are at the forefront, heralding a new era for corporate registration in the Philippines.

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