



DA chief cites gains amid challenges in 2024, expects better performance next year

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. said that 2024 is proving to be a litmus test for the Department of Agriculture (DA) and lessons learned from recent challenges should push the agency to do a better job next year.

During DA's last management committee meeting this year, the DA chief described 2024 as a "perfect storm" of challenges that tested the mettle of various DA offices whose efforts and initiatives were praised by no less than President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. Aside from producing food despite climate and disease challenges, Sec. Tiu Laurel said what earned the most praise is the initiative to stabilize food prices and supply because it helped tame inflation.

Inflation decelerated further in September to a four-year low 1.9 percent due mainly to lower food prices, particularly rice. More stable food prices, including sugar, onion and fish, also helped improve the trust rating of President Marcos according to the latest survey of pollster Publicus Asia.

After a record rice harvest and creation of over half-a-million new jobs in 2023, he noted that the positive trend continued in the first half of the year, with the sector adding 8.5 million (M) tons of palay and 3.7 M tons of corn to its harvest. Sec. Tiu Laurel proudly ▶p.7

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NFA secures P9-B budget for palay procurement amid declining prices

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. said the Department of Agriculture-National Food Authority (DA-NFA) has secured the remaining P9 billion (B) budget for palay procurement this year. The funding could help government support rice farmers during

the wet season when palay prices typically decline due to increased harvests and limited drying facilities.

As the chairman of the NFA Council, Secretary Tiu Laurel confirmed that the Department of Budget and Management will release the budget in equal

installments over the final three months of the year. "The NFA will have enough funds to support rice farmers through the wet season, which is critical for their livelihoods during this challenging period," he stated.

NFA Administrator Larry Lacson said the timely release of the palay procurement budget will enable the agency to purchase approximately 7.2 million (M) 50-kilo bags of palay at a price of P25 per kilo. "This volume aligns well with the NFA's wet season palay procurement target of 6.4-M to 8.7-M bags," added Lacson, indicating NFA's commitment to meeting its procurement goals.

Recently, the NFA has adjusted its buying price range for palay, lowering from the

previous P25 to P27 per kilo. This change reflects the declining global prices of rice and aims to reduce cost of the food staple for Filipino consumers.

"We recognize the need to balance farmer support with consumer needs, and this adjustment is a step toward achieving that goal," the DA chief said.

Despite the lower buying price, Secretary Tiu Laurel assured that farmers would still see a favorable return on their efforts. "Even at this adjusted price, farmers will continue to benefit from their hard work, especially given the improved price range we implemented earlier this year," he noted.

In June, the NFA Council ▶p.7



Small wins, big milestones: The inspiring stories of SLOVEGA

by Maria Corazon Buala and Krystelle Ymari Vergara | photos by Myleen Subang

In San Lorenzo, Guimaras, a community of vegetable farmers thrives from a simple data-gathering initiative to a significant force in high-value crop production, contributing significantly to the province's agricultural setting.

Since its inception in 2015, San Lorenzo Vegetable Growers Association (SLOVEGA) has blossomed into something much more. Under the dynamic leadership of Raquel Tacadao, the youngest president in the history of the association, SLOVEGA has evolved into a key player in the province's vegetable production—a testament to the rich agricultural potential of San Lorenzo.

With 52 registered initial members, SLOVEGA faced its fair share of challenges. Only 36 members are currently active, and the association has struggled to maintain member engagement due to periods of inactivity and a perceived lack of progress. However, the active members have remained steadfast, consistently attending meetings, and collaborating on various projects.

Anthony Vilches, a 37-year-old eggplant farmer, is among the local farmers who have benefitted from SLOVEGA's various undertakings.

Inspired by farming vloggers, Anthony decided to plant eggplants in his farm due to their steady market price

“With the continued cooperation and hard work of SLOVEGA members, we are going to achieve greater heights, contributing to the agricultural success of San Lorenzo”

RAQUEL TACADAO

and frequent harvesting cycle. He achieved immense success due to his hands-on farming and with the help of extensive trainings in agriculture from a young age.

However, the water shortage due to the El Niño phenomenon posed significant challenges for

Anthony. He started to rely on deep wells to irrigate his plants every morning and afternoon to combat this. He also ensures that his land can access a stable water source prior to planting. His highest estimated income from a single harvest reached P10,000 for 300 kilos of

eggplants. He continues to invest in his farm, which has a capital of P80,000, and ensures fair wages for his staff, which consists of his uncle and cousin.

SLOVEGA helped Anthony gain valuable knowledge and support that have enhanced his farming practices. The association has also provided him a sense of community and a platform to share experiences and learn from fellow farmers.

Meanwhile, 39-year-old Cellymar "Nene" Gagante and husband Garry have turned their humble backyard into a thriving agricultural enterprise, providing sustenance and inspiration to their community.

Ma'am Nene has been farming for seven years, cultivating eggplant, okra, squash, cucumber, sponge gourd, tomato, chili pepper, corn, watermelon, and melon during summer. While farming is a source of income for their family, it is also a cherished hobby that brings joy and fulfillment, especially during harvest time. The Gagantes employ hands-on farming techniques, brainstorm crop selection, and meticulously manage their sales to ensure profitability. Their approach to farming, a blend of traditional practices and modern strategies, showcases their adaptability and resilience.

As active SLOVEGA members, the Gagante couple contribute to and benefit from the association's initiatives. They receive seeds from KADIWA, join training sessions, and share best practices with fellow farmers. Their produce also reaches customers through online sales, market selling through the KADIWA-Guimaras Electric Cooperative Office (GUIMELCO), and direct purchases.



With the support of the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Guimaras Provincial Office for Agricultural Services (POAS), SLOVEGA members were given the opportunity to attend seminars and training that equipped her with valuable knowledge and skills to enhance SLOVEGA.

Under Raquel's leadership, the association has embarked on several significant projects, including the establishment of communal gardens. The members received organic fertilizers, seeds, and garden tools, greatly enhancing their farming capabilities. The Municipal Agriculture Office (MAO) also supported SLOVEGA by setting up vermicomposting projects for sustainable farming practices.

"With the continued cooperation and hard work of SLOVEGA members, we are going to achieve greater heights, contributing to the agricultural success of San Lorenzo," Raquel added.

Recently, SLOVEGA took a significant step forward as it participated in a crucial validation and profiling session of the DA-HighValue Crops Development Program (HVCDP), the DA-Farm and Fisheries Clustering and Consolidation (F2C2) Program, POAS Guimaras, and the Office of the Municipal Agriculturist of San Lorenzo to ensure that it meets the minimum requirements outlined in the F2C2 guidelines for clustering under high-value crop programs. By meeting these guidelines, SLOVEGA gains significant support and resources, empowering its members to achieve greater productivity and success in their agricultural endeavors. 🌱

Story of the Month

Sowing seeds of learning at San Diego Elementary School's urban garden

by Gumamela Celes Bejarin | photos by Sean Palencia



Situated at the bustling streets of Barangay Batasan Hills in Quezon City, the San Diego Elementary School offers a unique learning experience not only for its students but for urban communities as well.

The school's lush, vibrant, and flourishing 800-square meter "Earth Garden" effortlessly attracts guests upon entering the main gate by showcasing urban agriculture technologies and practices including edible landscaping, biointensive gardening, vertical farming, containerized gardening, composting, aquaponics, and hydroponics.

Another school hotspot is the "Sky Garden" with an area of 800 square meters located

at the rooftop of the four-story main building. Defying spatial limitations, the creatively designed space produces vegetables, chicken, duck, turkey, tilapia, catfish, and more.

"Nagsimula ang Earth and Sky Garden dito 2007 noong binaba ng Department of Education ang memorandum para sa Gulayan sa Paaralan Program. Nag-start ng 40 square meters, unti-unti lumaki na ito nang 1,600 square meters," Master Teacher II and Earth and Sky Garden Focal Person Lydio Naputo recounted.

Despite being in the city, the Grades 4, 5, and 6 students of San Diego Elementary School can directly learn, experience, and enjoy agriculture for their




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Hindi po hadlang ang walang area o walang pagtataniman para sa gulay para magkaroon ng pagkain sa kusina ang pamilya. Maski iyong mga sementadong lugar, mga balcony, mga terrace ay pwedeng mapagtaniman. Kailangan lang po sila mag-benchmark, mag-visit dito sa model garden kung kailangan nila ng training para matutunan iyong basics ng urban gardening.

LYDIO NAPUTO
Master Teacher II and Focal Person
Earth and Sky Garden



Story of the Month

Edukasyong Pantahanan at Pangkabuhayan (EPP) and Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) subjects through the Earth and Sky Garden.

Naputo's students clap and scream with excitement every time he tells them they will have a class at the garden.

"Ibig sabihin iyong response ng bata doon sa programa ng Gulayan sa Paaralan ay very positive. Gustong-gusto nila matuto tungkol sa gulayan. Itinuturo namin iyong teknolohiya. Iyong technology transfer napakahalaga sa mga

bata, iyong basic knowledge ng pagtatanim, management ng gulay ay napakahalaga sa bata matutunan," he shared.

The students are not the only ones having experiential learning at the Earth and Sky Garden.

Naputo also leads the school's training sessions on urban agriculture with faculty members, non-teaching personnel, parents, barangay officials, and other community members and stakeholders who are interested in maximizing limited spaces for food production.

In addition to serving as a model for urban gardening, the Earth and Sky Garden also plays a critical role in supplying fresh and nutritious produce for the school's feeding program that benefits at least 1,500 students yearly.

"Sa mga bata na undernourished, wasted, and severely wasted children, meron kaming feeding program kung saan iyong mga gulay diyan ang inihahain. Monggo, malunggay, merong pakbet, iba-ibang gulay ang ipinapakain sa mga bata sa feeding program," San Diego Elementary School Principal Emely Pelobello said.

Last month, the Department of Agriculture (DA), through the National Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture Program (NUPAP) and the Agricultural Training Institute (ATI), awarded the San Diego Elementary School. It won the title for the Best Macrogarden Category at the 2024 National Search for the Best Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture Garden and received P150,000 cash prize and Special Citation for Promoting Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture for the Youth.

The Search aimed to honor community-based gardening champions, celebrate their innovation, sustainability, and dedication, and strengthen partnership for the production of accessible, affordable, safe, and nutritious food in urban areas.

"Iyong recognition ng DA sa amin ay napakalaking blessing at tulong sa aming eskwelahan. Iyong effort ni Mr. Naputo at iyong mga TLE teachers ay na-recognize dahil nagbunga ang kanilang pagsisikap na maayos ang garden. With the support of the DA through ATI, BPI, BFAR, talagang ramdam namin iyong suporta at recognition sa

efforts namin ay sobra-sobra na para ma-inspire kami," Principal Pelobello said.

With the Earth and Sky Garden's regular income from marketing agri-products and the school's cash prize, Pelobello shared that they have prepared their work and financial plan to improve and ensure the Gulayan Program's sustainability.

"May work plan na. Pinalista iyong mga dapat tustusan. Properly accounted iyong pondo. Ilalagay talaga sa project na pang-matagalan," she added.

The team behind Earth and Sky Garden has allotted a budget for the procurement of agri supplies, maintenance and improvement of garden structures, establishment of new facilities, management of the composting, recycling, and materials recovery facility, and development of training programs.

"Ako ay nagpapasalamat sa DA lalo na sa NUPAP, sa ATI, sa kanilang mga suporta dito sa San Diego Elementary School. Iyong mga technical assistance saka mga gamit na naibibigay for the implementation of the school's Gulayan sa Paaralan Program. Hindi sila nagpapabaya sa amin sa teknolohiya na ibinibigay, sa suporta sa seedlings, at iba pang gamit na ibinibigay sa amin," Naputo expressed.

He also attributed the Earth and Sky Garden's success to the unwavering support of the school administrators.

"Doon po ito nag-succeed. Lahat sila supportive. Hanggang ngayon, ini-improve pa rin ng aming principal para pagandahin pa lalo ang Gulayan sa Paaralan," Naputo stressed. 🌿



Technology and Innovations



Mallig Dairy Cooperative: Driving Economic Growth and Agricultural Innovation in Isabela

by Ira Cruz | photos by Gian Carlo Luague

Mallig is a small, fourth-class municipality in Isabela with a population of approximately 33,000. Despite its modest size, the municipality possesses abundant potential for agricultural development.

The town is recognized as one of the largest producers and exporters of rice, corn, and tobacco in the Mallig Plains Region of Isabela, a province known as the “Rice and Corn Granary of Northern Luzon.” However, since rice and corn farming is seasonal, the local government unit (LGU) of Mallig has proposed dairy farming as an alternative source of income for local farmers—hence the birth of the Mallig Dairy Cooperative (MADACO).

Conceptualized in 2019 and officially registered with the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) in 2020, MADACO’s primary purpose is to provide an alternative

livelihood for Malliguenos and eventually to operate the Isabela Dairy Enterprise processing plant. From 31 farmer-members involved in dairy farming and processing, the membership grew to 67 active members in 2024, including tobacco farmers.

“Kahit sino puwede mag-miyembro basta ikaw ay taga-Mallig, basta kasama ka sa supply chain, kasi more than sa capital share, paano mo matutulungan na mag-grow din ang business, kaya isa rin ito sa tinitingnan naming criteria,” said incumbent Mallig Mayor Jose Philip “JP” Calderon.

MADACO boasts of its management and operation as it started through the spirit of volunteerism. The interim officers, who are LGU employees, served the cooperative pro bono to ensure the viability and sustainability of its financial resources.

With the assistance of the

Department of Agriculture-National Dairy Authority (DA-NDA), the cooperative established modern facilities to boost production, such as a cattle shed, a herringbone milking parlor, and a large bunker that can store 360,000 kilos of corn silage, as well as a mechanical hoof trim. Since its inception, MADACO started with 25 initial imported cows given by DA-NDA and has flourished to 300 head in 2024.

The Municipal Agriculture Office of Mallig reported that the co-op can produce 300 to 350 liters of milk a day, making them an important element of the School-Based Milk Feeding Program in the town.

Through the assistance of other government agencies such as the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), good manufacturing practices and good animal husbandry

practices were also established for the cooperative. To ensure steady food supply for livestock, MADACO also collaborated with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for the management of forage area production.

Cooperative members routinely inspect the milk, udder, and overall health of cows for any signs of mastitis—an inflammation of the mammary gland—to ensure that the raw milk collected is free from bacteria and contamination. The dairy farm also takes pride in using its herringbone milking parlor and machines for efficient, safe, and comfortable milking of cows.

Mayor Calderon also stated that they are focusing on expanding silage areas for food storage, deeming it necessary for the sustainability of the dairy farm.

Technology and Innovations

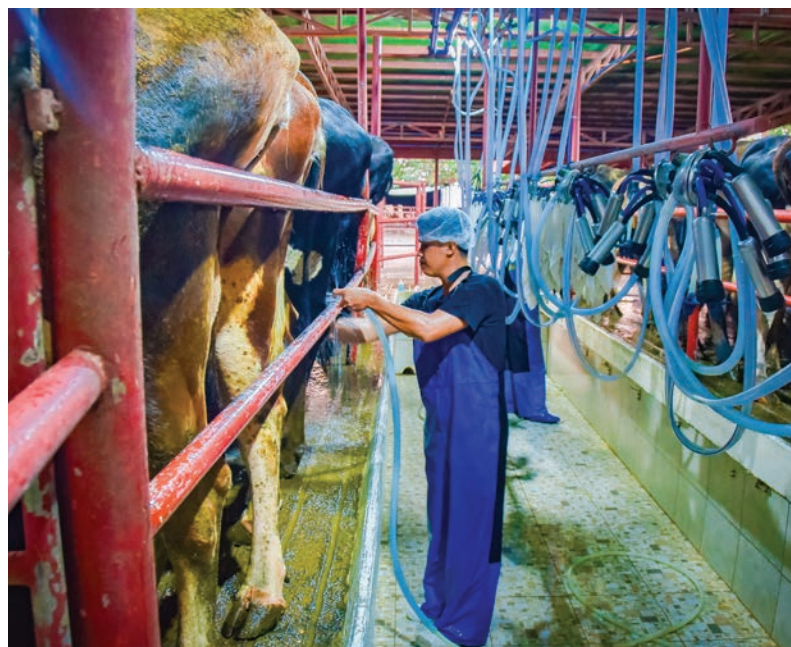
"Ang pinaka-importante sa dairy farm ay pagkain talaga ng mga baka, kaya number 1, we aim for the expansion of the silage areas. Number 2, dagdagan ang equipment sa planta. Isa lang iyong delivery van/freezer van, kaya't kami ay nagplano na makakuha pa ng isa," he stressed.

As one of the founders of the co-op, Calderon shared that he and other members aim for Mallig to be known as the number one supplier and producer of raw milk in the entire Cagayan Valley region.

"Gusto namin na kami ang

magiging number one supplier/ producers ng raw milk sa buong Region 2. Kaya nga pina-expand ko lahat iyan. Minimum of 400 na cows ang target for milking para hindi kami maubusan. Three hundred cows lang ang capacity ng aming planta, kaya ngayon nakapag-avail na kami ng isang lote para magpatayo pa ng isang planta; this time, 500 to 1,000 na baka na ang capacity," he said.

A food safety compliant, MADACO was recognized by the DA-NDA and hailed as the Outstanding Ruminant Farm by Livestock Philippines in 2024. 🌿



NFA secures P9-B budget... from page 1

had raised the buying price of palay to a range of P17 to P30 per kilo, up from last year's P16 to P23 per kilo. This price adjustment was essential for helping the NFA compete with private traders and bolstering the country's rice buffer stock.

Administrator Lacson pointed out that the NFA's recent decision to increase the selling price to the Department of Social Welfare and Development and other government agencies to P38 per kilo, along with the projected savings from the purchase of palay contained

in farmers' sacks, could lead to additional funds for palay procurement.

"These measures could save hundreds of millions of pesos, enabling us to purchase more grains from rice farmers," Lacson said.

As the NFA moves forward with its procurement plans, it remains focused on supporting the agricultural sector while ensuring food security for the nation. The availability of the P9-B budget will play a pivotal role in achieving these objectives during a critical time for rice production. 🌿

DA Chief cites gains... from page 1

announced that "for the first time in nine years, the National Food Authority has ample supplies of palay."

The DA chief acknowledged pressing issues affecting the sector, including high fuel and input costs, drought, floods due to La Niña, and disruptions in the value chain. However, he noted that these obstacles did not prevent the sector from achieving remarkable gains in livestock, poultry, and crop production, raising hopes for 2025.

"I expect that we should perform much, much better next year," said Sec. Tiu Laurel, adding that the DA must be ready "to tackle whatever comes its way without excuses."

In addressing food security, the agri chief cited the importance of actions taken against illegal activities in the agricultural sector.

"Even before Congress passed the Anti-Agricultural Economic Sabotage Act, the Department, through the Inspectorate and Enforcement Office, took action against smugglers, resulting in the seizure of hundreds of millions of pesos worth of illegally imported goods," he said. The DA chief asserted that efforts against smugglers, profiteers, cartels, and hoarders would only intensify with the passage

of the new legislation.

The DA secretary also discussed ongoing initiatives to combat animal diseases affecting the poultry and livestock industries. "We're taking steps to actively address animal diseases aiming to reduce importation and attract new investments in these subsectors of agriculture," he explained.

Moving forward, Sec. Tiu Laurel stressed the need for continuous review and adaptation to the challenges posed by climate change and evolving technology. "Our success should be measured by how well the sector responds to the incentives and support we provide—initiatives funded by taxpayers' money," he said, stressing the importance of effective resource management.

He underscored DA's commitment to establish robust national food security and increase the income of farmers and fisherfolk. He urged all bureaus and agencies to evaluate how their current programs align with these primary objectives. "It should be clear to everyone that the means to achieve these national objectives will be determined by each unit, bureau, and agency under this department," he added. 🌿

PITAK FILIPINO

Ensuring Safe and Quality Meat for A Healthy Philippines

ni Ela Arciaga

Ang malinis na karne ay nararapat para maiwasan ang anumang sakit at kontaminasyon. Ang tamang paghawak at pag-iimbak (handling and storage) ng karne ay mahalaga upang mapanatili ang kaligtasan at kalusugan ng bawat isa.

Ang simpleng paghuhugas ng kamay, pag-iimbak ng karne sa tamang temperatura, at paggamit ng hiwalay na sangkalan para sa hilaw at lutong karne ay ilan lamang sa mga praktikal na pamamaraan upang mapanatili ang pagiging sariwa ng karne at mapigilan ang pagkasira nito.

Ang National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS), isang attached agency sa ilalim ng Department of Agriculture, ang may pangunahing layunin na tiyakin ang kaligtasan at kalidad ng hilaw na karne at mga by-product nito.

Kabilang sa kanilang mga pangunahing gawain ang regular na pagsusuri sa mga meat processing plant at

slaughterhouse upang matiyak na sumusunod ang mga ito sa mga pamantayan ng kaligtasan. NMIS din ang nagse-sertipika sa mga establisyemento na tumutugon sa mga pamantayang ipinapatupad.

Isinusulong ng NMIS ang ligtas na karne para sa lahat sa pamamagitan ng pagbibigay ng impormasyon tungkol sa wastong paghawak at pagluluto ng karne. Nagbibigay din sila ng kaalaman at pagsasanay para sa mga meat handler at iba pang mga stakeholder tungkol sa tamang mga pamantayan sa kaligtasan ng karne. Kabilang na dito ang pagpapatupad ng mga regulasyon at batas ukol sa meat inspection at safety.

Sa pagdiriwang ng Meat Safety Consciousness Week ("Ensuring Safe and Quality Meat for A Healthy Philippines"), naglulunsad ang NMIS ng mga kampanya upang itaas ang kamalayan ng publiko ukol sa kahalagahan ng kaligtasan sa pagkain, partikular sa karne.

Ang mga gawain na nakatuon sa pagpapanatili ng malinis na karne ay tumitiyak na ang mga pagkain na inihahain sa pamilya o komunidad ay ligtas at masustansya, para sa malusog na Bagong Pilipinas. Marapat lamang na makiisa ang lahat, at itaguyod ang pambansang kampanyang ito.



Batid ba ninyo?

Mga Gabay sa Ligtas na Pagbili at Pagkonsumo ng Karne

ni Ira Cruz

Ayon sa World Health Organization (WHO), kada taon, tinatayang 600 milyon o halos isa sa 10 katao ang nagkakasakit mula sa mga kontaminadong pagkain, na nagdudulot ng humigit-kumulang 420,000 pagkamatay. Kabilang dito ang mga nakakahawang sakit mula sa kontaminadong karne, tulad ng salmonellosis at E. coli infections, na maaaring magresulta sa malubhang komplikasyon, lalo na sa mga bata, matatanda, at mga may mahihinang pangangatawan at immune system.

Dahil dito, ang tamang pagluluto ng karne sa wastong temperatura ay napakahalaga. Halimbawa, ang karne ng manok ay dapat maluto sa hindi bababa sa 75°C (165°F) upang masiguro ang pagpatay sa mga mapanganib na bakterya.

Isang malaking panganib din sa kaligtasan ng pagkain ay ang cross-contamination, kaya mahalagang iwasan ang paghalo ng hilaw na karne sa lutong pagkain. Dapat gumamit ng hiwalay na chopping board at utensils para sa bawat uri ng pagkain.

Ang mga mamimili ay dapat maging mapanuri at basahang mabuti ang mga label sa karne na naglalaman ng mahalagang impormasyon tulad ng expiration dates at storage instructions. Piliin lang din ang mga mayroong safety seal mula sa National Meat Inspection Service (NMIS) upang masiguro na ligtas at malinis ang bibilhing karne.

SCAN ME