

**CLIPPINGS FOR SATURDAY, DECEMBER 09, 2017**

**A. SEC. EFP QUOTED**

*No stories*

**B. DA FAMILY**

**MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT**

**Low harvests disappoint high demand for potato**

**MANILA BULLETIN**

**No need to import sugar until next August as supply is ample  
From ice drop vendor to UPLB chancellor**

**PEOPLE'S JOURNAL**

**BFAR clamps shellfish ban on 8 towns in Bataan**

**C. AGRI-RELATED STORY**

**MANILA BULLETIN**

**Two new superhot chillies developed BY East-West seed**

**THE PHILIPPINE STAR**

**Post-Brexit opportunities: Filipino on the radar of UK farm industry  
Inordinate delay: Surigao vice mayor cleared in fertilizer scam  
First person: Pork**

**TEMPO**

**Villar: Empower agriculture sector**

**REMATE**

**Benguet vegetable market sa Quinta Market pinasiyaan**

**D. FOREIGN STORY**

**MALAYA BUSINESS INSIGHT**

**Wheat eases, soybeans up**



## Low harvests disappoint high demand for potato

BY PAUL ICAMINA

LA TRINIDAD, Benguet - High market demand but low production and supply beset the country's multi-million peso potato industry.

And that means less income for upland farmers in the Cordilleras.

The semi-temperate region harvests most of the potato crop in the country, accounting for 99,981 metric tons in 2016. The tubers come mostly from Benguet (88,771 MT) with 88.8 percent of the total potato production in the region, followed by Mountain Province with (11,090 MT) 11.1 percent.

In 2007, the Philippines produced some 110,752 MT of potatoes, mostly in the Cordillera Administrative Region (85 percent), Davao (8.3 percent) and Northern Mindanao (5.7 percent).

Increasing demands – for example, for French fries and for feed – led to the importation of about 46,887 MT or a third of total demand; that was worth \$26.3 million, mostly sourced from Canada, the United States, Australia and China.

Along with the huge potentials for the

high-value crop, potato farming is currently faced with several problems, said Teresita Masangcay, a senior research specialist at the Benguet State University (BSU) and the Northern Philippines Root Crops Research and Training Center.

Production problems are also beset by insufficient seed supply and, when available, low seed quality. Bacterial wilt and cyst nematode infestation also contribute to low production, Masangcay said.

The use of non-conventional planting materials such as the pea-sized tuber and stem cutting as well as the use of the local potato variety called Igorota was recommended by Masangcay during the Technology Forum on Potato at the Farms and Industry Encounters through the Science and Technology Agenda (FIESTA) of the Highland Agriculture, Aquatic and Resources Research and Development Consortium (HAARRDEC) here.

FIESTA was co-hosted by the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCAARRD), Department of Science and Technology, to showcase research and de-

velopment from production to processing to technology transfer.

PCAARRD and its partners, in this case BSU and HAARRDEC, gathered scientists, farmers and small entrepreneurs to showcase technologies, innovations, products and services; assist the transfer of new technologies for better farming; and connect scientists and farmers.

Igorota is the variety developed in the highlands recommended for better production and income for the farmers, Masangcay said. "It also addresses the issue of low seed quality because it is high yielding and moderately resistant to late blight and leaf miner."

Although there are no available varieties resistant to these diseases yet, proper management can be used to limit the damage such as the use of clean planting materials, removal of infected plants, crop rotation and improved farm practices, she said.

One such practice is the use of *Trichoderma*, which is a beneficial microorganism and an effective natural control agent in managing potato diseases.

The Igorota along with the Bengueta

varieties were recently introduced by the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Agricultural Research and the Northern Philippines Root Crops Research and Training Center, initially for farmers in Mountain Province.

Some 30,000 stem cuttings of the high-yielding potato varieties are expected to double or even triple the yield compared to those produced with the use of traditional planting materials and varieties.

The Igorota and Bengueta varieties are considered the best by Cordillera farmers because these are well-adapted to local conditions, are high yielding, resistant to late blight and have favorable culinary qualities.

Farmers in Atok, Madaymen, Buguias and Mankayan in Benguet, and in Bauko and Besao towns in Mountain Province were trained in planting and managing the new varieties approved by the National Seed Industry Council.





# No need to import sugar until next August as supply is ample

By **MADELAINE B. MIRAFLOR**

Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) said that there's no need to import sugar until August next year as there would be enough supply for the entire crop year.

This, while the agency expects mill-site prices to improve moving forward on the back of higher demand for local sugar.

As of November 19, the millsite price of domestic sugar is at ₱1,194.14 per 50-kilogram bag, while a week after that, or on November 26, it went up to around ₱1,246.78.

The improvement in prices, SRA Planning & Policy Department Manager Rosemarie Gumera said, will be backed by the "increasing demand on sugar."

But she also noted the volatility of the price trend.

"Domestic millsite price is improving but still we are cautious since the November 26 price is just almost the same as the November price of 1,246, then on November 12, it's down to

1,212.79, then on November 19, it was 1,194.14. There was suddenly declining trend until it increased to ₱1,246.78. I hope that the increasing trend of sugar millsite prices will continue," Gumera said in a text message.

To support the improving prices, Gumera said the country won't import for the entire crop year.

"SRA does not allow sugar importation this crop year because we have the needed supply," the official said.

"Sugar production is still running. Mindanao and Luzon mills have just started. Negros, Panay, Ormoc and Cebu are still grinding. In the past two crop years, we had a supply build up at the end of the crop year which is good for about 5 months. We have enough sugar until the end of the crop year," she added.

Crop year for sugar production usually starts in September and ends in August.

SRA Administrator Hermenegildo Serafica already told Business Bulletin this week that the agency already observed an improvement in sugar

prices.

According to him, "prices started to go up last week", with the domestic sugar price increasing by 80 to 93 pesos per 50-kg bag.

In a memorandum order issued last week, SRA told importers to seek approval for their high fructose corn syrup (HFCS) allocation prior importation in view of the current sugar situation of the country that has affected millgate prices of sugar.

They are likewise ordered to purchase 40 percent of local sugar equivalent to the approved volume of HFCS they imported or about to import.

"Please submit to the Regulation Department copies of delivery receipt, sugar release order (SRO) and other pertinent documents as proofs of purchase of local sugar from sugar traders," Serafica further said in the latest memo.

It was also last week when SRA temporarily stopped the importation of sugar into the country while it investigates the continuously declining sugar prices.





## NIGHT OWL

# From ice drop vendor to UPLB chancellor

By ANNA MAE YU LAMENTILLO

It has been five years since I found myself at a crossroad as I march, along with hundreds other, and wait for my chance to walk up the stage and get my diploma on Development Communication from the University of the Philippines Los Baños.

But somehow — in the middle of the week, somewhere along the way, I would still feel a sudden urge to just go back, stroll carelessly from St. Therese Dormitory to Freedom Park and just look at the stars. Certain days, I couldn't believe the proven or isaw in Raymundo or the choco milk in Animal and Dairy Sciences are now three hours away. Several years after, I still long for Elbi as if college was just a week ago. Food was not the only reason. The time I spent in the campus of over 14,000 hectares shaped me to the person I am today.

So whenever life allows me to visit the campus I'd refer to as home, I'd made sure to spend time with my mentors — one of which is Chancellor Ruben Villarreal - a professor who at 78 years old could still recall the scientific names of each of

the flower or plants in his garden.

Looking at him, I knew he loved what he was doing, and barely noticed it was work. It was not at all surprising that this man helped solve the Southern Leaf blight epidemic in 1970, a crisis that caused about one billion dollars in production losses.

But his greatest frustration still lies on the fact that the entire crisis could have been prevented had US corn breeders recognized the results of his research, which proved a direct relationship between the disease and the presence of the "Texas" cytoplasm, a man-made material used by plant breeders to simplify the process of hybrid corn seed production.

At that time, no one wanted wanted to recognize the work of a Filipino scientist with meager research resources. But Dr. Ruben remained insistent. After all, the former chancellor of UPLB was used to the most difficult circumstances.

While learning sentence construction and basic math, he had to deliver loads of unfinished shoes from small shoemakers to big factories for five centavos a pair. He would also sell ice drop



and buchi to finance his studies.

As a young kid, he saw his father juggle three jobs as shoemaker, barber and carpenter just to make ends meet. Some days, he would fail still — despite the hard work and the perseverance. But everyone in the family, especially him, admired his father's persistence — his eagerness to fight for their upkeep day after day.

When Dr. Ruben was rejected admission to the Philippine Military Academy or when his

application for assistantship to the Department of Agricultural Engineering was declined, he saw it as a sign to pursue a career in Agriculture. Rightly so.

Over the years, Dr. Ruben has assumed key positions, including Chancellor of UPLB, Vice President of the National Academy of Science and Technology, Dean of the College of Agriculture, and Director of the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA), among others.

Whenever we meet, he would remind me that the more important question is not whether you have failed but rather

whether you are content with it. Failures, he said, are just milestones to success.

Six decades prior, Dr. Ruben scrubbed the hallways and cleaned the toilets of the

Institute of Plant Breeding. Today, he is one of the most revered authority in the scientific community in and outside the country.



## BFAR clamps shellfish ban on 8 towns in Bataan

**THE Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resource (BFAR) has prohibited the harvesting, selling, buying and eating of all types of shellfish and Acetes sp. or alamang from the coastal waters in eight municipalities in Bataan.**

The BFAR said the coastal waters of Mariveles, Limay, Orion, Pilar, Balanga, Orani, Abucay and Samal are positive for paralytic shellfish poison that is beyond the regulatory limit.

The BFAR also raised a red tide alert in some bays in the Visayas region.

The affected areas include the coastal waters of Daram Island, Irong-

irong Bay, Masqueda Bay, Villareal Bay and Cambatutay Bay in Western Samar; Matarino Bay in Eastern Samar; Carigara Bay in Leyte; Inner Malampaya Sound, Taytay in Palawan and Mandaon in Masbate.

The BFAR also reported that Hondoy Bay in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan is now positive for red tide toxin.

All types of shellfish harvested in the mentioned areas are not safe for human consumption.

However, the BFAR said that fish, squids, shrimps and crabs harvested from the areas are safe to eat provided they are

fresh and washed thoroughly and the internal organs such as gills and intestines are removed before cooking.

**Cory Martinez**





AGRI PLAIN TALK  
ZAC B. SARIAN

## Two new superhot chillies developed by East-West Seed

**T**wo new Habanero chilli varieties developed by East-West Seed are said to perform well under Philippine conditions both in the wet and dry seasons. This was learned from Ramil Panergayo, the company's product and market combination manager.

These are the Piquante Red and the Piquante Yellow which are claimed to be three times hotter than the company's current bestseller, Red Hot. These Habanero varieties produce bigger fruits than Red Hot. It takes only 100 to 120 fruits of the Habanero types to make a kilo whereas it takes more 600 fruits of Red Hot to make a kilo.

The Piquante Red has strong plant vigor and is considered early maturing at 75 to 85 days after transplanting. The fruits which are 4.5 x 3 cm are light

green when immature but bright red when ripe. Aside from its pungency, it is also prized for its very high aroma that connoisseurs usually look for.

Piquante Yellow also has strong plant vigor and good foliage cover that protects the fruits from sun scalding. Fruits are bright yellow when mature with high pungency and aroma. The fruit is 4.3 cm long and 3.3 cm wide.

Aside from being consumed fresh, the two varieties are good candidates for making hot sauces, powder and flakes.

The two varieties will be launched for commercial planting in East and West Africa this year and next year, according to Panergayo. It is not yet known when they will be released for commercial planting in the Philippines.



**SMALL, SWEET WATERMELON**  
- Allied Botanical launched its new watermelon variety at the recent Agrilink trade show at the World Trade Center in Pasay City. This is the Fairy hybrid developed by Takii Seed of Japan.

The new variety is remarkable for its sweetness as well as its small size of just over two kilos per fruit. Being small, it is very saleable in the market. The crimson red flesh is sweet and juicy. It can be consumed fresh, made into juice or used as ingredient in salads.

Fairy is ideal for growing in the home garden as well as in bigger farms. It can be allowed to crawl on the ground or on trellis. It is early maturing at 55 days after planting.

**PAMPANGA IS AMPALAYA COUNTRY** - Much of the ampalaya production in Luzon is in Pampanga. Leading the other towns is Floridablanca where no less than 250 hectares are devoted to this pinakbet vegetable year-round. Other towns producing ampalaya are Lubao, Arayat and others.

One of the big planters in Floridablanca is Brgy. Captain Ronnie Capulong of Brgy. San Ramon. He has been growing ampalaya as early as when he was just 11 years-old. His father and grandfather were growing ampalaya as far as he could remember. Today, he is planting the Mestiza variety because it is resistant to the Namamarako disease and is high-yielding. The light green color of the Mestiza fruit is well liked in the market because it is perceived to be less bitter than the very dark varieties.

**WHAT'S WRONG WITH AGGIE GRADS?** - That's what a lady farm owner was asking our group in a meeting. She said that a Los Baños graduate whom she expected to make her farm profitable resigned after just a few weeks. He gave up his job as

farm manager and accepted a job as instructor in an agricultural school. Maybe, he will teach his students not to become hands-on agricultural practitioners?

The lady farm owner finally ended up with a girl who finished high school but who has attended seminars on the production of vegetables and other crops as well as hogs and chickens. The lady farm owner now thinks women make better farm managers even if they are not college graduates.

We also remember a fishpond owner in Negros who hired an all-women work crew. His reason? The girls don't go to the beer garden at night and get drunk. Women are also more conscientious in doing their job, according to him.



Date: December 9, 2017 Page: B-8



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PART 2 of 3



**HOT AND AROMATIC** - This is the Habanero Piquante Red hybrid hot pepper recently released by East-West Seed for commercial cultivation in East and West Africa where the market is big. This variety was field tested in the Philippines and the result is very positive. The plant has strong vigor and is high-yielding. It can be planted in both the wet and dry seasons. There's no known date yet, however, when this variety will be launched for commercial planting in the Philippines.



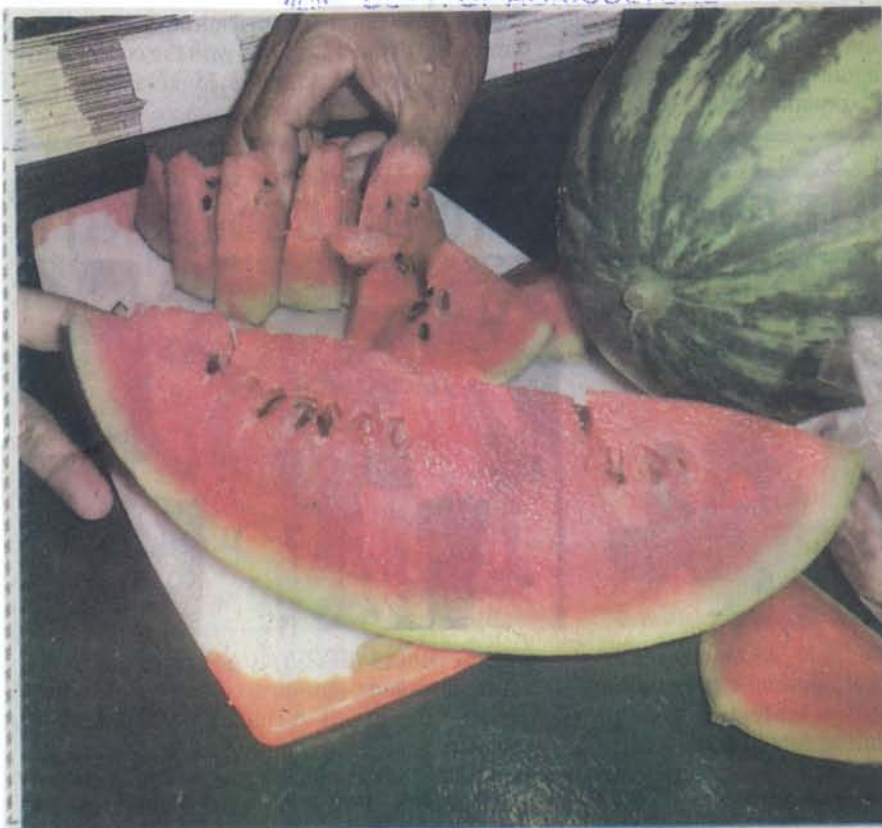
**FRUITFUL WITH GOOD FOLIAGE COVER** - This is the Habanero Piquante Yellow which is very pungent and aromatic. The plant is very vigorous and can be planted in both wet and dry seasons. It is claimed to be three times hotter than East-West's Red Hot variety which is the current bestseller.





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PART 3 of 3



**SMALL AND SWEET WATERMELON** - Fairy is the name of a new watermelon that was first launched at the recent Agrilink trade show at the World Trade Center in Pasay City. The variety is sweeter than most varieties in the market and is early maturing - the fruits can be harvested in 55 days after planting. The flesh is an attractive crimson red.



**FLORIDABLANCA IS AMPALAYA COUNTRY** - The town of Floridablanca in Pampanga is often referred to as the ampalaya capital of Central Luzon because no less than 250 hectares are devoted to this crop year-round. One of the big planters is 44-year-old Brgy. Captain Ronnie Capulong who is planting the Mestiza hybrid, a high-yielding variety that is claimed to be resistant to the Namamarako disease. Photo shows Capulong flanked by Eric Hojilla and Ric Reyes of East-West Seed. In front of them is a big pile of Ronnie's harvest of Mestiza ampalaya.





## Post-Brexit opportunities

# Filipinos on the radar of UK farm industry

MILTON KEYNES, England (Reuters) – Britons who voted for Brexit in the hope of slashing immigration seem set for disappointment. In the farming and food industries at least, any exodus of Polish and Romanian workers may simply be followed by arrivals of Ukrainians and Filipinos.

From dairy farms to abattoirs, employers say not enough Britons have an appetite for milking cows before dawn or disembowelling pig carcasses – jobs often performed by workers from the poorer, eastern member states of the European Union.

With unemployment at a four-decade low of 4.3 percent, even Brexit supporters acknowledge the industries will need some migrant workers after Britain leaves the EU in 2019, ending the automatic right of the bloc's citizens to work in the country.

Employers praise eastern European staff for their skills and work ethic. "They are a massively valuable part of our workforce and a massively valuable part of the food industry overall," said Adam Couch, chief executive of Cranswick plc, a meat processing group founded by pig farmers.

Food and drink is the largest UK manufacturing sector, with a turnover of 110 billion pounds (\$147 billion) in 2015, government figures show. Much of it depends heavily on staff from elsewhere in the EU, mainly the post-communist east.

For example, the British Meat Processors Association says 63 percent of workers in the sector come from other EU countries and in some plants it can be as high as 80 percent.

The proportion has risen partly due to increased demand for more labor intensive products such as boneless meat. Association members have found it impossible to recruit the additional employees needed from Britain, the BMPA says.

Pro-Brexit campaigners say Britain needs to reduce its reliance on EU workers. "Our sights should be firmly set on raising the skill level of our own domestic workers, employing domestic whenever we possibly can and automating," said Owen Paterson, a member of parliament for the ruling Conservatives.

But Paterson, who as a former environment secretary was responsible for UK agricultural policy from 2012-14, added: "Where there is a clear shortage and no technological solution, by all means bring in labor but the good news is we wouldn't be limited to the EU. We will have the whole world to choose from."

### MONEY FOR A MONTH

On the meat production line, Romanian Dumidru Voicu explained the attractions of working at Cranswick's plant in Milton Keynes, a town northwest of London.

"I just want to do something with my life, save some money and make my own business. The money for a week here is the money for a month in Romania," said Voicu, who arrived in the country about the time that Britons voted to leave the EU in June last year.

An estimated 27,000 permanent staff from elsewhere in the EU worked in British agriculture last year, House of Commons staff noted in a

briefing paper for members of parliament. This figure is swollen at times by around 75,000 seasonal workers.

A further 116,000 EU citizens worked in food manufacturing. The Food and Drink Federation predicts the sector, which employs about 400,000 people, needs to recruit another 140,000 by 2024.

The government, which wants to reduce immigration sharply, has yet to announce its post-Brexit policy but farm minister George Eustice has recognized employers' concerns. "Leaving the EU and establishing controlled migration does not mean closing off all immigration," he told parliament in earlier this year.

However, a government document leaked in September showed that restrictions for all but the highest-skilled EU workers were under consideration.

Such a possibility alarms farm employers. "Without EU labor there will be no British pig industry as we know it," said Zoe Davies, chief executive of the National Pig Association.

British farmers have relied on foreign labor for a long time, at least around harvest time. A Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme was introduced shortly after World War Two.

The government ended it in 2013 before Romanians and Bulgarians won the automatic right to work in Britain, arguing that there were now enough EU workers to fill farm vacancies.

With EU citizens to lose that right on Brexit, the National Farmers' Union (NFU) wants

the scheme – or something similar – reinstated. This may mean going back to the time when people from beyond eastern Europe filled farm jobs.

Michael Oakes, chairman of the dairy board at the NFU, says older colleagues remember when people from countries such as the Philippines worked on British farms.

"There are other countries in the world that would help to solve the problem but at the moment because they are not within the EU they are not necessarily able to come in and work."

Filipinos already work on New Zealand farms but such an idea could prove politically difficult in Britain as the pro-Brexit side fought the referendum on promises to curb immigration.

Many of the 17 million Britons who voted to leave are likely to be unhappy if they find eastern Europeans simply replaced by non-EU workers such as Filipinos or Ukrainians.

"Perhaps we need to broaden out the opportunities but a lot of people voted for Brexit because of immigration reasons, so it is a tricky one for the government," said Oakes.

### MAKING SACRIFICES

Any new seasonal scheme could still recruit in the EU, but might be forced to widen its scope to get the required numbers.

Net migration to the UK fell to 230,000 in the year to June, far from the government's ambition of arrivals "in the tens of thousands." Still, EU citizens accounted for three quarters of the 106,000 drop, the Office for National Statistics reported.





## Inordinate delay: Surigao vice mayor cleared in fertilizer scam

By ELIZABETH MARCELO

Another local government official has been cleared of graft in connection with the fertilizer fund scam due to the "inordinate delay" in the investigation by the Office of the Ombudsman.

In a 15-page resolution released yesterday, the Sandiganbayan's Fifth Division dismissed the charges filed against Surigao Vice Mayor Alfonso Casurra, saying there was "no justifiable reason" for the ombudsman to take more than 11 years before filing the case in court.

Former city treasurer Leonardo Edera Jr., accoun-

tant Jocelyn Monteros and bids and awards committee members Maria Geotina, Armando Elumba and Carlo Reynaldo Lozada Jr. were also cleared of the charges.

The case, which was filed before the Sandiganbayan only last Sept. 15, stemmed from the city government's alleged anomalous purchase of fertilizer amounting to P4.998 million when Casurra was mayor in May 2004.

Graft probers said the contract was awarded to Rosa Mia Trading without public bidding. The fertilizer was also found to be overpriced by P4.495 million.

"The lengthy and unwar-

ranted delay...caused prejudice and anxiety to the accused. There is also prejudice if defense witnesses were unable to recall accurately the events of the distant past," the resolution penned by Associate Justice Maria Theresa Mendoza-Arcega read.

The court also noted that the Commission on Audit issued a notice of disallowance on the purchase as early as June 14, 2006.

The prosecution failed to show that the delay was caused by the respondents as they had "timely" filed their respective affidavits and supporting documents, the court said.

"Excessive delay in the disposition of cases renders the rights of the people guaranteed by the Constitution and various legislations inutile," the ruling stated.

The Sandiganbayan had earlier dismissed the charges filed against former governors Robert Lyndon Barbers of Surigao del Norte and Salvacion Perez of Antique; former congressmen Eduardo Zialcita of Parañaque, Abraham Mitra of Palawan as well as Antonio Cuenco and Antonio Yapha Jr. of Cebu and Masbate Gov. Antonio Kho over what it described as "capricious, vexatious and inordinate" delay in the investigation.



## FIRST PERSON

ALEX MAGNO

### Pork

There is another dimension to this unfolding scandal over the Sanofi vaccines that might tend to be underplayed: the outrageous fact that the drugs were distributed following the typical lines of the pork barrel.

I take the cue from the admission of the previous health secretary that she considered stopping the vaccination program but was "bullied" into continuing with it by congressmen. These congressmen, strangely, will be the ones conducting a public hearing on possible corruption accompanying the rush purchase of P3.5 billion worth of vaccines and the indecent haste with which the immunization was carried out on unsuspecting children.

The pork barrel culture is deep-set. It dictates how goodies and freebies from the state are distributed. This is the reason we have "district" hospitals and why undermanned and substandard state colleges proliferate.

Recall that incident years ago when the Congress decided to distribute El Nino assistance supposedly to help alleviate the effects of the drought. It was a thinly disguised program to supplement congressional pork. The fund was distributed evenly to all the districts whether they required alleviation or not.

Deep well projects abounded — and of course quickly dried up because they were drilled so close to each other. The metropolitan area was threatened with subsidence, requiring the deep wells to be plugged.

This was a huge waste of money. But it allowed the politicians to make a show of bringing home the bacon to their constituencies. They do not much care for the efficiency of public investments.

I recall the time when I was helping design the nautical highway (ro-ro) system to improve the country's logistics backbone. A group of provincial governors called on me to complain about why their areas were not directly benefited by projects relating to this system. Obviously, their areas were not aligned with the system under design.

Apparently, they then brought their complaints to then President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Shortly after, Arroyo asked a copy of the ro-ro map to be set up in her office in order to enlighten politicians about the concept.

I have always maintained the principal reason why our nation's infra backbone is so incoherent and chronically deficient is the pork barrel culture.

Instead of the state spending its scarce economic investments in strategic infrastructure that will spur local economies, those investments were cut up and evenly distributed according to districts. The result is an abundance of "micro" infra projects such as bus stops and fabulous arches demarcating the boundaries between towns. Investing state funds in strategic infra such as, for instance, modernizing the Manila airport to support trade and tourism would have lasting economic multiplier effects. Building marble arches to demarcate one poor town from the next one yielded no economic benefit.



Former Senator Ramon Revilla Sr. is a classic in this regard. He spent the major portion of his pork barrel dotting the province of Cavite with overbuilt (and possibly overpriced) bus stops. Many of those structures have since been torn down to make way for road widening or simply because they were considered aesthetically disagreeable.

Some of us might recall that gregarious totally concrete and over-lighted "park" along Edsa leading to the Bonifacio Monument in Caloocan. It was torn up shortly after a change in the administration of the city, mainly because it ate up precious lanes of Edsa and caused terrible traffic jams. They could have used the money to build new schools.

When I was doing research on pork barrel spending during the nineties, I encountered a strange, technocratic-sounding item of spending that recurred across congressional districts. The item specified "multi-purpose solar driers." On inspection, these turned out to be basketball courts, used during the harvest to dry grain and on other occasions to host local festivities. Of course, all of them duly advertised the names of the politicians who made them possible. It was indelible as political advertising.

I could go on and on. But the point has been made. Over the years, we have wasted billions, probably trillions, of pesos building useless "micro" infra instead of strategic ones. This is because politicians, not engineers or economists, determined how the public money would be spent.

The same pork barrel mentality pervaded over the vaccination program apparently. Instead of limiting the program to specific areas where the incidence of dengue was high, the vaccines were distributed across nearly all districts. Therefore, the procurement of the vaccines had to be in huge volume and the program hurriedly implemented. It was hurriedly implemented because the elections of 2016 were quickly closing in.

Of course, if kickbacks happened in this humungous P3.5 billion single purchase, then scale was a good thing. It did not matter if this huge program was haphazardly undertaken or if the vaccine proved to the detriment of some of the children.

This has all the hallmarks of the previous administration.

The Aquino III administration was pork barrel driven. Recall that it tripled the size of the pork barrel to win political support, until the Supreme Court ruled against the practice. It freely moved around funds in defiance of the Congress' power over the purse, a practice the Supreme Court ruled to be patently unconstitutional. It used supplemental pork allocations to impeach Chief Justice Renato Corona and otherwise freely dispensed with the "savings" it commandeered.

Noynoy Aquino was by no means an epidemiologist, yet considered massive vaccination an urgent thing to be done. And indeed the thing was done. Decided upon in December 2015, the vaccines were bought, delivered and disseminated by April 2016.

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## Villar: Empower agriculture sector

Sen. Cynthia A. Villar has called for concerted efforts to empower Filipino farmers and fisherfolk who have remained the poorest in the country.

Speaking at the 11th Bright Leaf Agriculture Journalism Awards, Villar recognized the officials and members of the PMFTC Inc. – the Philippine affiliate of Philip Morris International – who were behind Bright Leaf for their commitment to promote and create awareness on agricultural issues, including best farming practices, environmental care, safety, and crop sustainability.

“You are a big help, together with the media practitioners, in increasing the general public’s attention and awareness on the plight of the agriculture sector,”

said Villar during the awarding ceremony at the Fairmont Hotel in Makati City.

She also acknowledged the important role that agricultural journalists play in promoting agricultural development as well as progress in the countryside.

Villar said news about current events provide valuable insights and information to agricultural industry players and stakeholders as well as regulators, decision-makers, and legislators. She said features, especially about success stories, provide inspiration.

Because of this, Villar said it is only fitting that outstanding agricultural journalists are given recognition and tribute as they continue to be the agriculture sector’s partners for change.





## Benguet vegetable market sa Quinta Market pinasinayaan

**PINASINAYAAN** kahapon ni Mayor Joseph "Erap" Estrada ang "Benguet vegetable market" sa bagong Quinta Market sa Quiapo, Maynila na siyang magtitinda ng mga murang gulay na abot-kaya sa publiko lalo na sa mga Manilenyo.

Ayon kay Estrada, malaki ang maitutulong ng "farm direct" sa mga vendor dahil mas malaki pa ang kanilang kikitain at mababawasan na ang mga middle man na siyang nagpapamahala sa mga ibinebentang gulay.

Ang lahat ng mga vendor ay maaaring umangat sa Benguet vegetable market kung saan nakatitiyak na malinis at maganda ang kalidad ng mga gulay.

Iginiit naman ni Dax Gazmin, chief executive officer ng Farm-direct, ang pagbubukas ni Estrada ng oportunidad sa mga magsasaka ng Benguet ay indikasyon na sabay-sabay ang pag-unlad ng mga magsasaka at vendors ng mga gulay.

Dagdag pa ni Gazmin, layon din umano nilang mapasok ang iba pang lugar sa Metro Manila upang magkaroon ng mga pagpipilian ang publiko sa kanilang pamimili at maaari rin itong isa sa mga solusyon na maibsan ang daloy ng trapiko sa Kalakhang Maynila.

Nagpasalamat naman si Gov. Crescencio Pacalso, Provincial Governor ng Poblacion, La Trinidad, Benguet, kay Estrada makaraang aprubahan nito ang direktang pag-aangkat ng farm direct sa Quinta Market upang magkaroon ng ibang alternatibo ang mga mamimili dahil bukod sa Divisoria ay maaari na rin silang bumili ng murang gulay sa nasabing pamilihan. **JAY REYES**





## Wheat eases, soybeans up

SINGAPORE- Chicago wheat futures slid for a fourth consecutive session on Thursday, hitting the lowest in more than two weeks as abundant supplies weighed on the market, with the latest data from Canada showing higher than expected production.

Soybean edged higher, rising for a fourth session out of five as concerns over dryness in Argentina supported the market.

The decline in wheat was unsurprising given slow US exports, said Tobin Gorey, director of agricultural strategy at Commonwealth Bank of Australia.

"The catalyst seems to have been a higher estimate of Canada's wheat crop by the local official statistician," he said. "The estimate was

the best part of 10 percent higher than where analysts were pegging the number, so it was a big shock."

Canadian farmers harvested larger crops than expected this autumn, reaping record-large canola output and a surprisingly big wheat crop, a Statistics Canada report showed on Wednesday.

Canola production topped 21.3 million tons, 8 percent higher than Statscan's September estimate. The all-wheat harvest at 30 million tons exceeded Statscan's previous estimate by 10.5 percent.

The Chicago Board of Trade most-active wheat contract fell 0.1 percent to \$4.24-3/4 a bushel after dropping earlier in the session to \$4.23-1/2 a bushel, the weakest since Nov. 21. —**Reuters**