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Headlines PCA confirms copra price slump; 500,000 farmers affected  
Bella Cariaso - The Philippine Star June 27, 2023 | 12:00am

The farm gate prices of copra ranged between P21 and P24 per kilo, according to PCA deputy administrator Roel Rosales. STAR / File

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA) yesterday confirmed the drop in farm gate prices of copra, with at least 500,000 farmers affected by the slump in prices.

The farm gate prices of copra ranged between P21 and P24 per kilo, according to PCA deputy administrator Roel Rosales.

“The phenomenon in the drop in the farm gate price of copra was due to the soft demand until now in the international market because of the effect of the pandemic, the Ukraine-Russian war,” Rosales said at a press conference yesterday.

He added that a large volume of imported vegetable oil is also available in the market.

“The retail price of palm oil in the market is cheaper compared to coconut oil, that is why many patronize it. The coconut oil is really geared as an export product. That is why coconut prices are affected by the movement of major players. That would explain why the farm gate price of copra is decreasing,” Rosales said. “The farm gate price of copra is expected to improve with the onset of the ‘-ber’ months, according to the PCA official. “We anticipate that as soon as the ‘-ber’ months start, the demand for the oil will increase,” he said.

Additional budget

Meanwhile, the PCA is seeking to raise its allocation by P11 billion from the coco levy fund next year to revitalize the coconut industry.

“We are asking for an additional P11 billion for reinvestment. We asked the Department of Budget and Management for a higher allocation, but we were given a ceiling of P1 billion,” PCA administrator Bernie Cruz said at the same briefing.

The PCA, as one of the implementing agencies of Republic Act 11524 or the Coconut Farmers and Industry Trust Fund Act (CFITF), receives an annual allotment of 15 percent or P5 billion to carry out the Coconut Hybridization Program.

The CFITF is managed by a management committee composed of authorized representatives from the Departments of Finance, Budget and Management, and Justice.

Cruz said implementing agencies of the P75-billion CFITF are facing challenges in hiring people or commissioning a study to improve the coconut industry because the coco levy fund does not cover the administrative costs.

He added the agencies also face the dilemma of using the coco levy fund to cover the administrative costs since this will be flagged by the Commission on Audit.

“That’s why we’re asking for a higher budget so that we can give the farmers their long-awaited funds that will help them faster,” the PCA chief said.

If its request is granted, the PCA will use the additional funds to put up seed gardens per coconut-producing province.

“We are asking for additional funds to establish seed gardens or seed farms per coconut-producing areas to address logistical problems because these seed gardens will be able to provide the seeds needed by that province,” Cruz said.

For example, coconut seeds coming from Bicol can only be planted within the province to contain the disease plaguing the area.

“Once the seed gardens are established, farmers will source their seeds. If the farmers will be able to replace the old trees, their produce will double,” Cruz said.

The PCA intends to use the additional fund to invest in new varieties of coconut that will replace old trees to raise productivity.

“We also import copra from Indonesia, Papua New Guinea as our production dwindles because our trees are already old. We are asking for additional funds so that we can replace the trees with better variety,” Cruz said.

“The current average is 44 nuts per tree per year. If we can double that to 80 to 100 nuts per tree annually, which is the average in India and Indonesia, farmers can double their income and maximize their operations,” he said.

Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority showed the country produced 14.93 million metric tons of coconut last year, up by 1.45 percent from 14.71 million MT a year ago.

Rosales noted that the funding would also support the PCA’s coconut salt fertilization program.

“Coconut trees are salt-loving, that is why we are proposing the salt fertilization program, where we

can also help the local salt industry while reinvigorating the coconut industry. Under the program, at least two kilos of salt will be provided for each coconut tree each year for three years. It will surely increase the production,” he said.

Under Executive Order 172 or the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Plan (CFIDP) issued by former president Rodrigo Duterte on June 2 last year, at least P5 billion each will be released from the coco levy fund to support the coconut industry, according to Cruz.

RA 11524 directed the transfer of an initial P75-billion coconut levy fund to be used for coconut farmers and the development of the industry.

Cruz said at least P65 million has been awarded to coconut farmers and organizations as part of the implementation of the CFIDP. — Danessa Rivera

PCA

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