

Keyword: climate-change

Headline: El Niño seen to take its toll on PH rice production

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Published Date: 12:48 AM June 11, 2015

Section: business

Word Count: 388

Content:

Australian climate experts on Tuesday said sea surface temperatures rose in the past two weeks and would continue to rise in the weeks ahead, suggesting that the El Niño weather disturbance could prevail for the rest of the year.

"The 2015 El Niño continues to develop," the Australian Bureau of Meteorology said in its latest climate advisory. "International climate models ... suggest further warming of the tropical Pacific is likely, with sea surface temperatures forecast to remain above El Niño thresholds for the remainder of the year."

The bureau, which issues fortnightly weather advisories, added that most oceanic and atmospheric indicators were consistent with El Niño.

"Sea surface temperatures in the tropical Pacific have continued to warm, and trade winds have been consistently weaker than average," the agency said.

According to the latest projections of Agricultural Market Information System (Amis), the volume of global milled rice production for 2015 improved slightly despite climate experts' outlook that the El Niño might strengthen toward the end of the year.

Amis said in its Market Monitor report that rice production inched up by one million tons to 501 million tons from last month's figures.

"Rice production in 2015 may scale up slightly on improved prospects for China and western African countries," said the agency, which is a unit of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Amis added that global conditions related to rice production remained mixed. India, Brazil, the United States and Argentina enjoy favorable conditions while there are concerns of excessive rains in south China and of dry conditions in Thailand and Nigeria.

"In the Philippines, planting of the wet season crop has begun," the agency said. "Harvest has concluded for the dry season rice and conditions are slightly poor."

Last Friday, the National Food Authority turned to Vietnam for the importation of 150,000 tons of milled rice to shore up supplies during the coming lean months of domestic rice production.

In a government-to-government auction held at the NFA headquarters, the agency awarded a contract worth \$61.5 million (about P2.74 billion) to Vietnam Southern Food Corp.

Joseph dela Cruz, chair of the bidding committee, said that latest importation would be delivered by July 15.

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