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Philippines Sugar Industry urges regulation of artificial sweeteners to protect local cane sugar demand

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Philippines Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Sugar Regulatory Administration (SRA) have received a unified manifesto from the Philippine sugar industry, urging the regulation of artificial sweeteners and stricter policies on sugar substitutes that are reducing demand for locally produced cane sugar. This manifesto, signed by major sugar federations from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao, as well as millers, refiners, and allied groups, represents an uncommon consensus in a sector often divided by competing interests.

The issue was first identified in 2024 when the DA and SRA flagged the increasing use of sugar substitutes as a threat to domestic sugar demand. Under DA Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. and the SRA Board, a policy framework was initiated to monitor the importation of sugar substitutes and assess their market impact. Secretary Tiu Laurel emphasized the manifesto as a call for government action to regulate the importation and use of artificial sweeteners, describing them as an "extraneous force" affecting sugar demand. He noted that the DA and SRA are committed to addressing this issue to support the local sugar industry.

SRA Administrator Pablo Luis Azcona highlighted the significance of the industry's unified stance, pointing out that the matter had been raised with local governments, including Negros Occidental, a major sugar-producing region. He expressed

satisfaction at the industry's collective effort, noting that such unity is rare and underscores the seriousness of the issue.

Both the DA and SRA have acknowledged the manifesto as a clear signal of the need to address the challenges posed by sugar substitutes while balancing consumer preferences, food manufacturing requirements, and the long-term sustainability of the domestic sugar sector.

The manifesto reflects growing concerns within the sugar industry about the economic impact of sugar substitutes. With sugar demand under pressure, stakeholders are pushing for regulatory measures to protect the livelihoods of sugar farmers and the viability of sugar production. The DA and SRA have been working to address these concerns through consultations with industry leaders, which have now culminated in this broad-based call for action.

The manifesto is seen as a pivotal moment for the sugar sector, as it unites various factions in advocating for government intervention. Secretary Tiu Laurel and Administrator Azcona have both emphasized the need for a balanced approach that considers the interests of consumers and the food manufacturing industry while safeguarding the domestic sugar industry. The issue has also drawn attention at the local government level, particularly in sugar-producing areas like Negros Occidental, where the economic stakes are high.

The DA and SRA now face the challenge of formulating policies that address the manifesto's demands while navigating the complexities of agricultural trade and consumer behavior. The manifesto underscores the urgency of this task, as sugar substitutes continue to gain traction in the market, posing a direct threat to the economic stability of sugar producers. This development places sugar substitutes firmly on the government's agricultural policy agenda, requiring a coordinated response to ensure the sustainability of the sugar industry while accommodating evolving consumer and industry needs