

Philippines weighs temporary rice import curbs to shield farmers ahead of wet-season harvest

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The Philippines is considering a temporary tightening of rice imports as policymakers attempt to balance food security concerns with mounting pressure on domestic farmgate prices, underscoring the increasingly delicate economics of agricultural trade management across Asia.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) is evaluating a proposal to limit rice import volumes for 90 days beginning in June, a move aimed at preventing a further collapse in palay prices during the country's wet-season harvest cycle. The policy discussion comes as farmgate prices in key rice-producing provinces such as Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Isabela, and Cagayan have reportedly fallen to as low as P16 per kilogram, intensifying concerns over farmer profitability and rural income stability.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said the government is considering calibrated import controls from June to August in an effort to maintain adequate domestic supply while cushioning producers from excessive price volatility. "Rice imports remain necessary but must be carefully managed to avoid further depressing local prices," Laurel said, adding that previous import management measures had helped ensure that nearly 70 per cent of the harvest was sold at more favourable price levels.

The DA is also targeting a farmgate price of P22 per kilogram for the upcoming wet-season harvest between September and November, positioning the period as a critical recovery window for rice growers navigating volatile market conditions and rising production costs. In parallel, the National Food Authority (NFA) has increased its procurement price for dry palay to as

much as P30 per kilogram and plans to intensify purchases in areas where prices have weakened sharply.

To strengthen farmer access to government procurement systems, authorities have introduced a direct purchase order mechanism allowing producers to sell to the NFA prior to harvest. The government is also expanding logistical capacity, including the procurement of an additional 150 trucks this year to address transportation bottlenecks and improve access to buying stations.

The DA further indicated that it is accelerating investments in storage and warehousing infrastructure as part of a broader strategy to reinforce national food reserves through 2027. Current rice inventory levels are estimated to cover approximately 70 days of national consumption.

Beyond procurement and import controls, policymakers are also exploring rice blending strategies that combine imported and locally produced grain in an effort to stabilize retail prices without undermining domestic producers. Industry stakeholders have reportedly been invited to recommend blending ratios that could support local rice competitiveness.

The policy debate reflects broader regional anxieties surrounding food inflation, climate volatility, and geopolitical disruption. Escalating tensions in the Middle East have already contributed to higher fertilizer and fuel costs, while forecasts of a possible El Niño event during the second half of 2026 are raising fresh concerns over crop yields and livestock production across Southeast Asia.

At the same time, Manila continues negotiations with key rice-exporting countries for longer-term supply arrangements, while discussions involving potential shipments from India are also understood to be underway. "The priority remains price stability without harming farmers, securing an adequate supply into next year," the DA said.

The Philippines remains among the world's largest rice importers, making its policy shifts closely watched by regional commodity markets already grappling with supply uncertainty, climate-related disruptions, and evolving trade dynamics.