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Philippines identifies and evaluates constraints affecting Philippine banana exports to Japan

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Philippines Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr., accompanied by a high-level delegation and representatives from the Philippine banana industry, recently met with Japanese importers in Tokyo to address challenges to countryâ??s banana exports in lucrative Japanese market.

Though the Philippines still holds the largest share of the Japanese market, supplying three out of every four bananas consumed, this figure has declined from a peak of nine in every 10. The Japan Banana Importers Association (JBIA) attributes Japanese consumersâ?? preference for Philippine bananas to their superior freshness and taste.

Bananas are a staple for Japanese consumers, who import over 1 million metric tons annually to meet demand. The forum with Japanese banana importers, which included representatives from the Pilipino Banana Growers and Exporters Association (PBGEA), focused on quality standards, tariff concerns, and ways to support the industryâ??s growth.

â??The banana industry is a lifeline for thousands of farmers and workers, especially in Mindanao, where it serves as a major economic pillar,â?• said Secretary Tiu Laurel. â??To sustain and expand this industry, we must push for tariff reductions on our bananas. This will not only attract greater investment in banana production but also drive poverty alleviation, job creation, and security in Mindanao.â?•

As Japan is the largest market for Philippine bananas, the fruit remains a vital export for Mindanao, generating over USD1 billion in annual sales and providing livelihoods to more than 700,000 Filipinos.

A major challenge for Philippine banana exporters is the high tariff under the Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA), which was signed in 2006. Japan collects an 18 % tariff on bananas exported by the Philippines from April to September and a lower 8 % tariff from October to March.

In contrast, Japan imposes zero or preferential tariffs on bananas imported from and Cambodia, Laos, Mexico Vietnam. Aleli Maghirang, the Philippinesâ?? agricultural attache in Tokyo, expressed optimism about ongoing trade negotiations between the two countries, which are promising for Philippine banana exports.

Secretary Tiu Laurel also assured continued support for banana growers battling Fusarium wilt, a soil-borne fungal disease that has significantly affected production.

Bananas were prominently featured at the Philippine Pavilion during FOODEX Japan 2025, where 32 Filipino companies showcased their high-quality, export-ready products, reinforcing the Philippinesâ?? commitment to strengthening trade ties with Japan.

Additionally, during the visit, Secretary Tiu Laurel met with Japanâ??s State Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, Hirofumi Takinami, and Liberal Democratic Party Secretary-General Hiroshi Moriyama to discuss a potential review of JPEPA in light of shifting global economic conditions.

Secretary Tiu Laurel commended the Philippine Embassy in Japan and the Office of the Agriculture AttachÃ© in Tokyo for their continued efforts in promoting Philippine agricultural exports, particularly bananas. â??This official trip mainly aims to address the pressing issue of declining competitiveness of our Philippine bananas in Japan, which is of utmost importance to the DA. We hope to come up with a common solution with stakeholders to address the tariff issue and negotiate mutually beneficial terms with the Japanese government under the JPEPA,â? he said.