

## Philippines boosts domestic raw sugar export to the US to tackle the trade uncertainties

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The Department of Agriculture has approved the Sugar Regulatory Administration's plan to export 100,000 metric tons of raw sugar to the US in an effort to reduce domestic raw sugar supply, which was a result of last crops 130,000 tons increase in local farmer production, and help lift sagging farmgate prices.

Agriculture Secretary Francisco P. Tiu Laurel Jr. said allocating part of the record harvest for export under the US tariff-rate quota will help soak up excess raw sugar and ease downward price pressure that has plagued producers despite previous policy actions.

"We will export raw sugar under the US quota system as soon as possible to provide the industry immediate relief," said Secretary Tiu Laurel.

The export plan comes as the DA and SRA extended the moratorium on sugar imports until December this year, maintaining protection for domestic producers as raw sugar output improves and inventories remain elevated.

Even with the extended import freeze, however, local sugar prices continue to languish.

The US import quota was originally set at around 143,000 metric tons, but this season's available allocation was gradually reduced by the US Refiners to 100,000 tons due to delays in the country's decision to participate.

Quota prices under the US system are typically higher than world market levels, giving Philippine exporters a more lucrative outlet compared with selling on global spot markets.

Sugar Regulatory Administrator Pablo Luis Azcona said the export approval reflects significantly higher output this crop year and is a timely step in balancing supply and demand.

“Since the new administration entered, our raw sugar production has been increasing, and we have activated the US exports. It will be the third year now, and the volume exported is growing as well, from 33,000 tons to 66,000, and now 100,000 tons. The last two years exports of raw sugar has helped increase our farmer prices, and this year, this is a much needed step that our farmers need. We cannot take the suggestion of just sitting and doing nothing. Our farmers are the backbone of this industry, they need our intervention.” Azcona explained.

Azcona also flagged a surge in artificial sweetener and other sugar substitute imports, which have effectively doubled to volumes equivalent to roughly more than 500,000 metric tons of raw sugar. Officials warn these substitutes are diluting demand for locally produced sugar and further contributing to price softness.

Secretary Tiu Laurel said the DA will closely monitor the importation of artificial sweeteners and sugar substitutes and might consider regulating the entry of such, as chemical sweeteners whose sweetness is 200 times that of regular sugar if market disruptions persist.

He also plans to ask the Department of Health to review potential public health implications of widespread use of intense sweetening agents, which are often hundreds of times sweeter than sugar. Recent guidance from the World Health Organization suggests non-sugar sweeteners may not offer clear long-term benefits for weight control and could carry health risks.

The export approval is viewed as a pragmatic short-term response to rebalance supply and demand while tapping relatively higher U.S. quota prices. But broader policy adjustments such as managing substitute sweetener inflows and strengthening domestic demand may be needed to achieve sustainable price stability for the sugar sector going forward.

“There are a lot of long term solution suggestions, but we need a short term solution to quickly help the farmers now. All the suggestions sent to us will be looked into and considered, as it entails time, and our farmers cannot wait” Azcona added