SENATE HEARING ON DEPT. OF AGRIâ€™S INABILITY TO SOLVE ISSUES

Monday, 22 February 2021

Â PAGASA was invited once more to join the on-going hearing on 22 February 2021 by the joint Senate Committees on Agri, Food & Agrarian Reform chaired by Sen. Villar to find the root causes of the decreasing supply and increasing prices of pork and chicken meat. The 3-hr. session tried to reconcile the different import figures of the Department of Agriculture (DA) vs. the Bureau of Customs with regards to hog meat, the amount of havoc ASF has wreaked upon the local hog raisers and the need for DA to come up with a roadmap for the livestock industry. One hundred ten participants attended this virtual hearing via Cisco WEBEX including Senators Villar, Binay, Go, Hontiveros, Marcos, Pangilinan, Pimentel and Poe. Stakeholders included KMP (Kapisanan ng mga Magsasaka ng Pilipinas) Chairman Rafael V. Mariano, Consumer Group advocates Atty. Mario Victorio Dimagiba of Laban Konsumer, Inc. and Ricardo C. Samaniego of Phil. Coalition of Consumer Welfare, the National Anti-Poverty Commission's Salvacion N. Basiano and PAGASA's Steven T. Cua aside from all the heads of the various hog-raisers' & chicken-growers' Associations. DA Sec. William Dar's team presented their short-term solution via importation of meats and their long-term approach to repopulate the local hogs via loans to farmers with the help of the Philippine Crop Insurance Corp. but this was interrupted several times by the participants yearning for a more realistic and detailed elaboration of what was perceived as motherhood policy statements in the presentation. P28B in loans to be made available to hog farmers were questioned as DA is only putting in P500M from its budget while the P27.5B will be sourced via banks/financial institutions. The required testing of imported meats was also put to the test as ASF and Avian Flu is still rampant in foreign countries. Finally, the recent appointment of Atty. Jane Bacayo, who was involved previously in the fertilizer scam, as Chairperson for DA's Minimum Access Volume (MAV)- a scheme where permits to import meats at preferred tariff rates, was directly questioned.