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NFA PLAN TO STOP SALE OF CHEAPER RICE HIT

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The National Food Authority (NFA) is once again in hot water for allegedly proposing to stop the sale of its cheap rice variant at P27 per kilo and instead focusing on the sale of its higher priced P32 per kilo variant.

Industry groups Bayan Muna and Samahang Industriya ng Agrikultura (Sinag) have criticized the proposal, saying this runs counter to the mandate of the agency to stabilize the sup-

ply and prices of rice in the farm and consumer levels.

Antipoor

"This is really antipoor and the height of insensitivity as well as an added burden to consumers who are already overburdened by the skyrocketing prices of other commodities due to the TRAIN (Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion) law," said Bayan Muna Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate.

"You cannot ensure food security and stabilize prices by taking out the supply of affordable rice. On the contrary, this

would create instability and further hardships to consumers," he said.

"It would be best for the NFA to drop this plan as well as their importation racket and concentrate on helping farmers increase their yield," the solon went on.

Sinag, for its part, has been cynical of the agency's recent pronouncements.

"Everything that the NFA has been saying for the last two to three weeks does not make sense," Sinag chair Rosendo So said in a text message. "If their

claim is that there is shortage in their buffer stock, the rice variant doesn't matter. Rice coming from the NFA should not be available at all."

"If there really is a shortage, they should have acted with care and prudence. Imagine, the rice agency itself announced that there is a rice shortage," he said.

'Just my personal opinion'

But NFA Director Rex Estoperez, who was quoted in the reported proposal, said there was no move from the part of the NFA to remove its cheap rice

variant in the market.

"There is no proposal at all," he said. "We were talking about subsidies during the interview and the buying prices of rice came up. That was just my personal opinion but if [economic managers] want to study that, then that depends on them."

The director explained that the current absence of rice sold at P27 per kilo in the market was due to the shortage on the part of the agency.

According to NFA spokesperson Rebecca Olarte, cheaper subsidized rice will be available

to consumers once the shipment of the imported rice arrives by the first week of June.

After the NFA announced that its buffer stock could only fill the national requirement for two days, its policymaking council approved the additional importation of 250,000 metric tons of rice.

It blamed the council's delayed approval of its proposal to import, adding that it would be already too late for consumers to enjoy available rice for the next few months. (See related story in Business, Page B1.) INQ

→ national food authority (NFA)