

RP seeks to regain status as top shrimp exporter

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MANILA, Philippines- The Department of Agriculture expressed confidence that the Philippines will be able to double its shrimp production in the short-term and regain its status as one of the world's top exporters of *Peneaus vannamei* or Pacific white shrimp.

In a statement, the agency said the production of Pacific white shrimp is expected to double in five years.

The DA's move to lift the ban on the importation and culture of Pacific white shrimp into the country—upon the recommendation of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources —could spell the speedy rebound of the country's shrimp industry.

The importation and culture of Pacific white shrimp is strictly monitored by BFAR in tandem with the Southeast Asia Fisheries Development Center, which is headed by Dr. Joebert Toledo, to guarantee that only good-quality and pathogen-free broodstocks are produced in the country.

"Because vannamei matures faster, requires less production inputs and has strong resistance to diseases, it is projected that the country will be able to achieve an unprecedented shrimp production volume in excess of 100,000 metric tons in five years," said Paras during the recent Philippine Shrimp Congress Inc. that was hosted by Philippine Shrimp Inc. (PhilShrimp) in Bacolod City.

He said this volume is more than double the current production of some 30,000 MT of white shrimps and 24,000 MT of prawns or sugpo annually.

"This trend indicates that the 100,000 MT vannamei production target in five years can be easily achieved," Paras said.

About 60 percent of the country's shrimp production goes to domestic markets while the remaining volume is exported to Japan, Korea, USA, Canada and Guam, among others.

Malcolm Sarmiento, BFAR director, said that a year and half after the government allowed the importation of *P. vannamei* broodstocks, the Bureau has already accredited seven maturation, breeding and larval rearing hatcheries in strategic locations in the country and certified a total of 38 growout farms, or around 497 hectares production area.

Among the country's fishery products, shrimps and prawns make up the second highest foreign exchange earner, bringing in an average of \$100 million a year.

Sarmiento added that the Philippines had the distinct advantage of being recognized worldwide as the only shrimp-producing country that shuns the use of antibiotics in the control and prevention of diseases.

By highlighting this unique product quality through appropriate promotions, Sarmiento said "the Philippines stands a good chance of gaining a big market share in countries where consumers are increasingly becoming concerned with drug residues in the tissues of animals they consume."

In January last year, Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap signed Fisheries Administrative Order (FAO) No. 225 lifting the ban on the culture and importation of live shrimps and prawns in all stages of development, effectively paving the way for the entry of Pacific white shrimp brood stocks into the country.

This directive, which amends FAO No. 207, was issued following field verification trials and positive reports on the successful conduct of breeding and grow-out experiments of the *P. vannamei* shrimp by BFAR.

The DA banned the entry of *P. vannamei* into the country in 2001 to protect the local sugpo or black tiger prawn from the dreaded Taura virus that had nearly wiped out shrimp farms in Japan, Taiwan and Thailand at the time.

The Philippines, which previously ranked third as the world's top shrimp exporter, slid to 10th place in 2003, after being overtaken by the likes of Mexico, Brazil, Vietnam, and Bangladesh. The other big producers were Thailand, China, India, Indonesia and Ecuador.