Dangerous pesticides in Niger

Farmers in Niger are using dangerous, black-market pesticides, with potentially severe health consequences, according to allAfrica.com.

“In the Maradi Region, central Niger, farmers have no fear. It’s horrific. They know the pesticides are dangerous, but they won’t take precautions,” said James Litzinger, a pestcide expert and agricultural consultant who is assessing pesticide usage for an NGO in Maradi.

“They don’t die immediately, so they don’t worry. They want to see the pest die directly after they spray – that takes some very strong materials,” he said.

The pesticides in wide use are organophosphates. First developed as insecticides, these chemicals were produced as chemical warfare agents in Nazi Germany. Known as nerve gases, they have been used in several wars since, including Vietnam and the Iran-Iraq conflict.

Manou Baguie, head of the agriculture department, said the ministry did not have enough agents in place to survey each region. Control posts have been set up in Niger to detect the types and quantities of pesticides arriving, and to curtail entry of banned products. - Staff reporter

Philippines to buy rice on tender

The Philippines plans to import 800,000t of rice, according to its agriculture minister, quoted by Reuters.

“It is government that is importing and there will be a bidding,” said Agriculture secretary Proceso Alcala. “I hope we can make a final decision (on the tender) before the end of the month.”

Purchases by the Philippines, one of the world’s biggest buyers of the grain, could support falling rice prices elsewhere in Asia, with Vietnam and Thailand likely to compete aggressively for any new deal.

A rice trader in Vietnam said the Philippines’ state grains procurement agency, the National Food Authority (NFA), was expected to hold the tender soon.

The NFA can buy rice from Vietnam, Thailand or Cambodia – the only three countries with which it has government-to-government supply agreements.

“We’ll not import more than is needed,” said Alcala when asked whether a volume of 800,000t would be enough to meet the desired buffer stock and curb increases in local rice prices.

The Philippines missed its end-2013 rice self-sufficiency and inventory targets following natural calamities, including strong typhoons late last year. — Staff reporter

Uncertainty in Ukraine

US officials are closely watching the political tension in Ukraine, but it is still too early to know how it would affect markets, according to AFXnews.com.

According to the USDA, Ukraine is expected to be the fifth-largest wheat exporter and the third-largest maize exporter in the current year.

It was forecast to export 18.5 million tons of mainly yellow maize in the current marketing season – 16% of global trade – and 10 million tons of wheat.

“IT (Ukraine) has seen some real growth in the last few years, especially as we had this higher-priced grain,” said Iowa Agriculture Secretary Bill Northey. “We saw some infrastructure improvement and some organisation around agriculture so that more areas are now productive.”

It is uncertain whether political events in Ukraine will decrease maize production or disrupt shipments out of its two largest grain gateways, the ports of Nikolayev and Odessa, Northey said. - Staff reporter

Bird flu curbs China’s soya bean purchases

Chinese soya bean importers have cancelled 600,000t of South American soya bean cargoes, on the back of an avian flu outbreak in China, and negative crush margins, two trade sources told Reuters.

US soya bean futures slid to their lowest level since 24 February on worries about waning demand from China.

Buyers were negotiating with suppliers to delay or cancel more shipments, sources said.

“There is a glut of soya beans in China right now,” said one Singapore-based trader.

“They’ve washed out 10 panamax cargoes and want to cancel 30 more.” — Staff reporter

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