



policy updates

India looks for more private capital in farms to boost incomes (17 Jan)

As India's Prime Minister aims to double farmers income by 2022, the country is considering simpler regulations, incentives and zero barriers for enterprises' investing in the agricultural supply chain. A quarter of Indian farmers live below the national poverty line with 52 per cent of the farming households are indebted. Although agriculture contributes 17 per cent to the nation's economy, it has remained relatively untouched by reform. Higher investments by private companies could boost farmers' incomes faster with GDP expected to grow at 6.5 per cent.

[more](#)

Myanmar: State government and private sector to cultivate ginger in Rakhine (21 Dec)

Based on the discussion with the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI); the Myanmar Fruit, Flower and Vegetable Producer and Exporter Association (MFVPEA) and the Rakhine State of Chambers of Commerce and Industries (RSCCI) as well as local companies and farmers, the Rakhine Regional Government identified the cultivation of ginger and production of ginger-based goods to be a viable avenue for growth and economic development of the State, and developed a pilot project to set up a ginger plantation in cooperation with the private sectors. The pilot project will be conducted in March 2018 for investigating the viability of ginger plantation in the State.

[more](#)

Myanmar sees boost in private investment in agriculture (6 Jan)

The Myanmar Government positions agriculture as the country's core industry, and is stepping up support to facilitate investment in the sector such as improvements in agricultural finance. In response, investment in agriculture by private companies is increasing, raising expectations that the modernization of the sector will progress. Two companies have started investing by building rice mills and other infrastructure to support Myanmar's rice processing capacity. Although Myanmar is a leading rice producer in South East Asia, it has yet to develop processing infrastructure. In addition, the temporary closure of Chinese border due to clashes with ethnic minority fighters resulted in 20 to 30 per cent decrease in rice exports.

[more](#)

Cambodia: Biological pest control agents given green light by government (22 Dec)

Cambodian Ministry of Agriculture has launched a new registry for companies that wish to import biological control agents (BCA), effectively allowing the importation of these organisms which are widely used in other countries for pest control. The ministry official highlighted that BCA will help Cambodian farmers reduce their use of chemical pesticides, boost crop yields, and expand the sales of their products to the market abroad, particularly to organic buyers. He, however warned that due to the novelty of using BCA in Cambodia, there is a need for all stakeholders to cooperate to train farmers in their usage and to acquire the necessary equipment for their proper deployment.

[more](#)

Cambodia: Agriculture Ministry to request lower electricity costs for farmers (4 Jan)

The Cambodian Agricultural Minister addressed to businesses farmers and government officials at the annual ministry-led forum, that he would request Prime Minister to take action to help farmers compete against neighbouring countries, including further measures to address high electricity costs. He identified costs and access to markets as key impediments to the competitiveness of Cambodia's agricultural sector. Despite the government's efforts to reduce the costs of electricity and transport, electricity prices remain higher than in neighbouring countries.

[more](#)

Cambodia: New centre for agricultural research to help expand markets (18 Jan)

The Cambodian Agriculture Minister has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with a Chinese company Digital Agriculture Exchange to build an agricultural research centre to improve production and packaging standards of local fruit and vegetables. A project to raise demands for Cambodian fruit and vegetable is currently underway as the General Directorate of Agriculture has disclosed the plan to establish a centre. The new multifunctional centre is expected to focus on research on market demand, product quality, sanitary, labeling and packaging for export, targeting China as the main market destination, and will help increase the quality standards of Cambodian agricultural produces.

[more](#)

Philippines: Department of Agriculture considers policy changes to strengthen sustainability focus (9 Jan)

Agriculture Secretary of the Philippines disclosed his plan to propose policy changes and re-planning of agriculture to President Duterte, with aim to strengthen agriculture and fisheries of the country amid climate change challenges. Among the suggestions, the Department of Agriculture (DA) looks for cooperation with Department of Environment and Natural Resources and Department of Interior and Local Governments. The plan also includes the re-implementation of tree planting programme initiated by the former President.

[more](#)

Philippines: DA proposes to use US funds for dairy programme (26 Dec)

The Department of Agriculture (DA) of the Philippines plans to utilize P1.5 billion under the US Public Law 480 (US PL 480) programme into their 2019 budget. The US PL 480 or the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act was enacted in 1954 to help developing countries such as the Philippines addressing their agricultural productivity and food security. Since it was launched, the Philippines has received hundreds of millions of dollars worth of grant from the US under PL 480, which includes loan agreements meant to fund agricultural projects such as Farm-to-Market Roads (FMR). But due to lack of programmes, some funds that were injected to US PL 480 only got stuck at the National Treasury over the years. In 2018 DA budget, the fund is proposed to be directed for the country's dairy programme.

[more](#)

Indonesia agriculture minister boasts rice self-sufficiency amid import controversy (15 Jan)

Indonesia has successfully avoided import of medium rice during 2016-2017. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Agriculture, the country has also achieved self-sufficiency in onion and corn, signified by import discontinuation of the two. Furthermore, Indonesia has exported shallots to six other countries and currently plans to export corn grains. Given the self-sufficiency in several commodities, the upcoming rice import plan has raised controversial discussion among public.

[more](#)

U.S. Grains Council (USGC) explores potential for ethanol use in Indonesia and Thailand (28 Dec)

Representatives from the U.S. Grains Council (USGC) visited Indonesia and Thailand to discuss, with ministry and industry officials, the opportunities for and challenges to expanded ethanol use in both markets. The US Grains Council (USGC) aims to engage with government and industries in these countries to assist in developing biofuel policies with a role for ethanol trade. The USGC considers that ethanol can support Indonesia's goal to use renewable energy representing 23 per cent of its energy mix by 2025. Meanwhile, Thailand could be a good collaborator to discuss biofuels policy and engine technology with regional partners as the country successfully introduced policies to incentivize the use of biofuel and produced flex-fuel vehicles for its own domestic market and for export to regional markets.

[more](#)

Global push planned for Thai farm sector (5 Jan)

The National Strategic Committee on Country Competitiveness has handed over initial draft strategic plan to the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) to push Thailand to become a super power in global agricultural market. As one of the world's leading rice exporters, the country has comparative advantage in the farm sector. The Committee Chairman highlighted that the challenge is to boost the income of small farmers through turning commodities into high value products. Boosting investment and trade connection with Myanmar and India; as well as advancing the Eastern Economic Corridor Project are also among efforts to support the implementation of the strategic plan.

[more](#)

Viet Nam: Agriculture ministry acts to streamline administrative procedures to lure more investments (11 Jan)

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) of Viet Nam, announced its efforts to attract more investment to the sector, such as to review and cut out several administrative procedures to improve business environment, particularly for hi-tech and organic agriculture. In 2017, MARD actively implemented Resolutions to support the development of enterprises and to improve business and national competitiveness by the year 2020. In response, many major companies developed hi-tech and organic agriculture, with increasing number of novel enterprises established in 2017.

[more](#)

Viet Nam plans 500 hi-tech agricultural cooperatives by 2020 (18 Jan)

Vietnamese Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) announced a plan to assist establishing 500 hi-tech agricultural cooperatives by 2020 aiming to increase production five times higher. It is planned to have 60 per cent of the cooperatives in the main agriculture production areas with at least 3 hi-tech agricultural cooperatives in each city and province. Training opportunities on high-tech farming will be provided to the cooperatives' members, including those in the Republic of Korea and Japan.

[more](#)

Brunei to provide land, market for youth interested in hi-tech farming (16 Jan)

A senior official of Brunei Department of Agriculture announced that young Bruneians interested in hi-tech farming will be provided with a hectare of land as a start-up. Local farmers are also given the assurance that a local company will purchase their products. On the other hand, the youth are required to have passion and knowledge for hi-tech farming. The department will assist in terms of training on technical and fertilizing methods and collaborate with relevant companies to provide guest trainers from abroad.

[more](#)

Kazakhstan set to increase agricultural products exports (4 Jan)

Kazakh Vice Minister of Agriculture addressed that the government was working on a special road map for the development of the export of agricultural products. An analytical study on export issues was conducted with the participation of all parties - business, government officials, experts and others, for investigating the situation, understanding the problems and finding ways to solve them. At the same time, Kazakhstan signed protocols with China to open new markets for products that were never exported before, such as fish products, pedigree horses, frozen lamb, honey, wheat, wheat bran, soybeans and slaughtered horses. Kazakhstan continued to develop agreements with Iran, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia for expanding agricultural exports.

[more](#)

China makes big step forward in rural reforms (28 Dec)

Chinese rural reforms have shown remarkable progress for the past five years through the supply-side reform, rural land ownership reform and the 'battle' against rural poverty and pollution. Amongst others, the supply-side reform facilitates access to new markets, and the rural land ownership reform supports farmers to access collective land in villages. For the battle against poverty, policymakers pledged to work to ensure the quality of poverty reduction efforts, focus on helping special groups and eradicate abject poverty. The country also strategizes the control of soil pollution, aligned with their plan to reduce chemical fertilizer use by at least 20 per cent by 2020, particularly for fruit, vegetables and tea production in rural areas.

[more](#)

China to pump up support for rural startups (17 Jan)

China will roll out more measures to support rural startups in order to further promote rural vitalization, according to a decision at a State Council executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang. It was decided at the meeting that financing services and land-use support will be bolstered for rural entrepreneurship, so will the guarantee policies. Empowered by the initiative of massive entrepreneurship and innovation, these business startups will open new channels for employment, inject new impetus to the development of agriculture, rural areas and farmers.

[more](#)

Japan is planning to forge information sharing network for rice exports (29 Dec)

Japan's Agriculture Ministry plans to forge spiderweb-like connection between the domestic rice producers and exporters. By settling networks at nationwide scale, the system will allow rice farmers in over 200 localities communicate with 40 exporters who can find international buyers that best suit the type and yield of each producer. Japan is aiming four times higher shipments not only to China, Singapore and other Asian countries, but also to the U.S. and the European Union by 2019, in an effort to support producers to offset the effects of decreasing market in Japan.

[more](#)

Fijian farmers urged to practice climate smart agriculture (9 Jan)

The Fijian Agricultural Minister emphasized the significance of climate-smart agriculture as one of the key drivers mitigating climate change impact. The government provides various assistance programmes to farmers (e.g. providing agricultural machinery and facilitating the grouping of small farmers to receive technical assistance). The climate issue also led the government to stress on the Green Growth Framework, including the provision of the 10-year tax moratorium to investors venturing into biofuel production using agricultural commodities.

[more](#)

Iran: Government to address soil degradation as neglected crisis (27 Dec)

Iranian government, under President Rouhani, has prepared a bill for promoting soil conservation, addressing the two main problems - erosion and contamination. In Iran, soil erosion occurs from natural causes (wind and water) and those resulting from human activities such as farming, mining, construction, cutting trees and overgrazing, as well as excessive use of groundwater resources. Contamination adds threats to the limited soil resources in Iran, due to excessive use of pesticides and fertilizers, industrial pollutants and use of salty water. A bill has been submitted to parliament to enable the effective management of soil resources and more control over polluting activities. Other efforts to contain soil erosion and contamination include strict bans on groundwater withdrawal, preparing an atlas of soil pollutants and land usage, plans to fight deforestation, the use of drainage systems to reduce salinity, the use of standard fertilizers and the increase of vegetation.

[more](#)

India rice exports seen surging to record as Bangladesh boosts buying (10 Jan)

The increase in India's rice export was triggered by active purchase from Bangladesh after flooding that damaged their crops. Bangladesh's purchases lifted India's non-basmati rice exports by 38 per cent in 2017 to 8.4 million tonnes and total exports to 12.3 million tonnes. Bangladesh imported 80 per cent of rice from India in 2017 and other South Asian nations' imports also remained high. Two sorts of rice are exported from India; non-basmati to African, Asian countries; and premium basmati to Middle East, US, and UK. Non-basmati rice is the main exporting products in 2018 for India given the stable tendency of this rice and has made India achieve high productivity

[more](#)

Nepal: Government fails to meet paddy production target (21 Dec)

Paddy farming in Nepal covers an area of 1.5 million hectares across 73 districts. In the ongoing fiscal year, the government failed to meet its paddy production target of 5.4 million metric tonnes. The production only reached 5.15 million metric tonnes this year mainly due to adverse monsoon. To boost the production, the Ministry of Agricultural Development (MoAD) emphasized on the need to promote commercial farming of paddy, proper implementation of the Prime Minister Agriculture Modernization Project, ensure timely supply of seeds and fertilizers, adequate irrigation facility and farmer subsidy.

[more](#)

Asia coffee-demand falls in holiday week, Vietnam's 2017 exports down (29 Dec)

Due to the heavy rain last December which devastated 15 to 20 per cent of coffee beans reserved in 2017, Vietnam's export of coffee products is expected to decline 20 per cent from last year. In spite of this discount prices of Robusta coffee, trading was slow due to the year-end holiday. Harvested coffee from Vietnam Central Highlands were ready for export, trading was delayed due to the Christmas holidays and a larger discount of less quality coffee at the London ICE March.

[more](#)

Rep of Korea: Number of agricultural corporations rises amid market opening (12 Jan)

Agricultural corporations in the Republic of Korea has significantly increasing over the past decade with statistical data from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs showing a jump from 5,307 in 2006 to 19,413 in 2016. The joint efforts between the government and farmers was attributed to this increase as a response an influx of agricultural products from overseas. The total employees in agricultural corporations were 122,000 in 2016, consisted of 98,000 regular employees and 24,000 temporary employees, up 5.7 per cent from a year earlier. Total sales have increased 4.7 per cent and average sales per corporation increased 1.2 per cent in 2016. In the same year, the average assets in each corporation grew 7.7 per cent, whereas average liabilities were raised 5.6 per cent.

[more](#)

case stories

Agriculture vs industry: India's agrarian sector is a success story; here is the truth (4 Jan)

Indian agricultural sector breaks the general stereotype of agriculture being a primitive, backward and crisis-prone sector. This sector has risen as the country's growth driver in terms of output and shares in the economy. In 2014, India was second rank in agricultural output (8 per cent global share). Meanwhile, it ranked 11th and 12th in services and manufacturing sector, respectively. Despite the below-two-hectares-size, Indian farms have expanded various produces through self-engineered innovation and sustainable agriculture farming model.

[more](#)

Sri Lankan tea farmers sense trouble brewing over Glyphosate ban (9 Jan)

As the second-largest tea exporter in the world, Sri Lankan tea farmers find the Glyphosate ban threatening the trade development of Sri Lankan tea. The ban was initially imposed in 2015 under the presidential order for being partially responsible for an epidemic chronic kidney disease. Amidst contrast viewpoints of Glyphosate's impact on health, the ban has caused around \$100 million crop loss in the first 18 months afterward. Facing many disadvantages due to the ban, farmers expect the government re-authorizing Glyphosate use in agriculture or giving an alternative to Glyphosate.

[more](#)

How less than \$20 can reduce seasonal food insecurity in Bangladesh (20 Jan)

Among the two seasons in Northern Bangladesh, the first half has enough foods and the other half people suffer from lack of food due to very little farming. 'No Lean Season' initiated by Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS) Bangladesh and Evidence Action (a non-government organization) provides loan without interest (of Tk1,500 in cash - roughly \$19) to rural poor to travel and get a job in urban areas. It opens from September to November which is the toughest period for getting job and food. The number of borrowers largely increased indicating the prevalence and success of this project. Moreover, there are exemptions from settling the debts for the labors who cannot travel because of inevitable reasons.

[more](#)

Research for agricultural insurance in South Asia: A regional dialogue (16 Jan)

The increasing unpredictability of rain timing and intensity means the higher production risks that farmers must encounter. Although insurance may be potential to mitigate the risks, adverse selection and moral hazard have been causing the low demand for conventional insurance. The agricultural research community started to identify and develop research-based innovations for agricultural insurance to cope with the challenges. The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), and other research institutions have organized a regional dialogue in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 17 December 2017. The event provided case studies and information that clearly demonstrated the importance of research in enhancing insurance products and programmes as instruments to achieve compensation, adaptation, and emission targets.

[more](#)

Indonesia: Information empowers citizens to demand public services (2 Jan)

In Indonesia, the Social Protection Card (KPS) is given to the 25 per cent of households with the lowest socioeconomic status, and used for accessing subsidized rice (*Raskin*), cash transfer for poor students (BSM) and temporary direct cash transfers (BLSM). A research showed that information about the beneficiaries' eligibility and their quantity rights to subsidized rice printed in the identification card are effective in facilitating the distribution of the service, escalating the subsidy received by eligible households by 26 per cent.

[more](#)

Laos: Determined woman builds her life around organic farming (28 Dec)

The article illustrates a success story by a woman farmer in Vientiane, who started organic farming with her family, believing that organic farming would provide benefits to both consumers and sellers. With loans from bank, the family was able to build greenhouses to grow vegetables and fruits, and dealing with pests and diseases with self-made insecticides. As selling the produce to the market is another struggle, the unsold produce was bartered with other vendors. With farming, the family managed to send children to university and live with satisfaction.

[more](#)

Nepal: Urban rooftop farms as new city culture (3 Jan)

Even though Nepal is an agricultural country, their agricultural products are still lack and not sufficient even for local consumptions. Nepal begins to see rooftop farming as a viable option, when the country experiences decreasing cultivable land, increasing price and poor quality of agricultural produce. This farming is

constituted of various techniques (Aeroponic, Hydroponic, traditional, etc.) and profitable in some points as it grows unseasonal vegetables and fruits and contribute to efficient waste management. With people migrating to bigger cities like Kathmandu, rooftop farming can be an option to become self-sufficient in cities that offer negligible cultivable lands as well as expensive vegetables.

[more](#)

Helping build sustainably productive farming systems through the work of the Asian Cassava Breeders, and Forage Legumes, Networks (21 Dec)

In response to the increasing pressure for farming systems in Asia to produce more without harming the environment, researchers from eight Asian countries - Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Viet Nam - gathered in Haikou City, China, last December to form the Asian Forage Legumes Network. The network studied the current level of knowledge on biological nitrogen fixation (BNF) by forage legumes. Another network is the Asian Cassava Breeders Network (ACB-Net) that brings together cassava breeders and other stakeholders for a collaboration on cassava genetic and crop improvements. Both network support regional cooperation in agricultural science and technology for sustainably productive farming systems.

[more](#)

technological innovations

Bangladesh: Country's first biotech rice released (28 Dec)

The Bangladeshi scientists have applied a biotech plant culturing technique in producing strong and stout rice variety to improve productivity. The BRRIdhan-86 is developed using Anther culture by making immature pollens divide and grow into tissues. It is expected to gain half a tonne of extra yield potential per hectare over the country's widely produced BRRIdhan-28. Additionally, the scientists also expand BRRIdhan-84 containing improved key micronutrient to tackle stunting that happens to more than one-third of under-five children in Bangladesh. Aside from BRRIdhan-86 and BRRIdhan-84, there are new other rice varieties approved in the country.

[more](#)

Pakistan needs to adopt modern farming tech to save water and money, ICARDA

The country manager of ICARDA, Abdul Majid, stated the importance of adopting latest technologies of farming and water for Pakistan. Even though Pakistan has large portion of fertile lands, but most dry areas are idle due to lack of technologies. In recent meeting with ASPs (Agriculture Service Providers), ICARDA also introduced Banana Tree Shredder machine that can save water more than 30 per cent. Through modern technologies, it will not only solve the water problem, but also result in better production.

[more](#)

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