

February 2018
(20 Jan - 20 Feb 2018)



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sustainable agriculture policy information

policy updates

Agricultural Ministers call for action on sustainable livestock production for SDG implementation (23 Jan)

The tenth Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA) was held from 18-20 January 2018, in Berlin, Germany with the theme, 'Shaping the Future of Livestock - Sustainably, Responsibly, Efficiently'. Agriculture ministers attending the Forum adopted a Call for Action towards strengthening the role of livestock in, among others, ensuring food security, improving livelihoods, and addressing climate change. The ministers recognized that sustainable livestock sector will play a key role in enhancing the right to adequate food and implementing the 2030 Agenda. Azerbaijan, China, India, Japan, Mongolia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan are ESCAP member states that joined in this collective statement. On the sidelines, the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) organized an Expert Forum on opportunities to increase the efficiency of livestock production while reducing GHG emissions.

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India: Agriculture income support: Telangana breaks new ground in farm subsidy (15 Feb)

The Telangana state government will give farmers a subsidy of Rs 8,000 per acre for Kharif and Rabi season, regardless which crop they grow and how much quantity gets sold at any market price. The subsidy will be applied to approximately 1.62 crore acres cultivable land of the state and given to all the 72 lakh farmers. According to the survey, small farmers who own less than 10 acres of land largely benefit from the scheme. The state government will issue passbooks which serve as a proof of land ownership thus making farmers entitled to the subsidy scheme. Unfortunately, tenant farmers who do not own land cannot benefit from this scheme as they keep moving and have no proof of cultivating certain land.

[more](#)

Pakistan: Sixteen proposals of hybrid rice presented to Seed Certification Department (14 Feb)

Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (PARC) presented the working papers containing 16 recommending proposals to improve the potential of rice hybrids to the Federal Seed Certification and Registration Department. The proposals were introduced in a meeting of Variety Evaluation Committee on Rice which was attended by technical members of the committee from National Agriculture Research System. The meeting also highlighted the standardization of operating procedures and evaluation of rice hybrids for the benefits of farmers and rice sector in Pakistan.

[more](#)

Pakistan established innovation hub for rural youth development (1 Feb)

The first rural innovation hub has been established in the district of Layyah, Pakistan. This new hub is expected to provide rural youth with economic and entrepreneurial openings. Rural youth has long been neglected and local government is now empowering them with various schemes to help them reach their full potential in economy. Empowered rural youth is expected to introduce innovation to the agriculture sector and help farmers in dealing with the impact of climate change..

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Brunei: National standard guideline to support local organic farms (13 Feb)

The Department of Agriculture and Agrifood of Brunei Darussalam moves forward with the preparation of the 'PBD 27: 2016 Brunei Standard for Organic Agriculture (vegetable and fruits)'. A briefing was held on 12 February 2018 to introduce the standard to other governmental institutions. The standard will provide a guideline to boost the development and management of local organic farms, ensuring production of quality organic products and facilitation of export market. Issues such as crop production management, storing records and list of permitted substances in organic agricultural products were emphasized during the briefings.

[more](#)

Cambodia: New laboratory for food safety launched in Svay Rieng (7 Feb)

On 6 February 2018, the third laboratory opened in Svay Rieng province to monitor food products' safety, following other similar labs that came online in Banteay Meanchey and Preah Sihanouk provinces in 2016 and 2017, respectively. The Ministry of Commerce aims to increase the efficiency of safe food distribution by helping companies and traders save time in ensuring the food suitability for consumption, without having to send the samples first to Phnom Penh. Beside the existing laboratories, three more laboratories in Phnom Penh, Preah Vihear and Banteay Meanchey are awaiting completion for the same purpose.

[more](#)

Filipino farmers to plant rice in PNG (12 Feb)

The Philippines Department of agriculture (DA) held a discussion with PNG Minister of Agriculture, Benny Allan regarding a government to government collaboration to establish a rice model farm with modern technology in PNG to make the country rice self-sufficient in the coming year. In addition to capital, technology and equipment, the DA will send 22 Filipino farmers to set up a trial field to cultivate five rice varieties developed by the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) in a 100,000 hectare of land in PNG. Excess production will be exported to Philippines and PNG neighboring island countries such as Samoa, Vanuatu, among others.

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Philippines: Department of Agriculture launches farm mechanization loan program (19 Feb)

The Department of Agriculture, through the Agricultural Credit Policy Council (ACPC), has launched "the Farm Equipment and Machineries Loaning Program". The program amounted to PHP 400-million loans, to strengthen farm mechanization by offering affordable credit for farmers. It will be accessible for farmers' cooperatives with a 6-per cent annual interest payable in eight years. This program is part of farm mechanization reforms, where the loans are offered instead of grants, to reduce post-harvest loss that could deduct up to 16 per cent of the total harvest. Previously, the farmers' groups were required to

put up 10 per cent equity before they could acquire tractors, planters and harvesters. The current program also abolishes the government bidding process by letting the farmers decide their own brand preference of equipment and machinery.

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Thailand: Multi-billion-baht scheme launched for rural development (2 Feb)

The Thai Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration with other ministries will commence 'Thai Niyom' programme to develop rural area in the country. Around 7,663 teams will visit villages to assess overall situation and gather data. Thai Nyom aims not only to deal with rural poverty by restructuring agriculture sector in a more sustainable way, but also to raise the participation of villagers to the programme. The estimated overall budget allocated for this reform is around Bt47 billion which will be implemented in five different stages targeting more than 70,000 villages nationwide.

[more](#)

Vietnam promoting trade through agro, forestry, fishery exports (1 Feb)

In the meeting with the Agriculture Ministry steering board, Vietnamese Deputy Minister of Agriculture requested relevant agencies to address difficulties related to regulations and boost trade to set a target of 40 billion USD from agro-forestry-fishery exports. Agriculture sector in Vietnam is working on a restructuring programme by developing national signature products, local signature products and the one-village-one-product. Trade cooperation with some countries will be enhanced and government will also look at other potential agricultural commodities for export. Vietnam received around 36.37 billion USD from agro-forestry-fisheries export in 2017, an increase of more than 4 billion from the previous year.

[more](#)

Vietnam considers solutions to improve productivity level (6 Feb)

Vietnam General Statistics Office (GSO) showed that the country's productivity in line with purchasing power equality was very low with only \$9,894 in 2016 which is even lower than Lao PDR. The low productivity is caused by the high proportions of both unemployed and real workers. There is a need to improve the growth model and productivity to increase Vietnam's GDP growth rate which showed continued decrease since 1990. Furthermore, research found that productivity is proved to be a fundamental factor that reflects nations' competitiveness.

[more](#)

Rep of Korea: Government looks to farming startups to boost agriculture industry (20 Feb)

The Korean Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs launched a management plan for a new 'fund of funds' worth 50.5 billion won to support companies that are interested to invest in agriculture. The funds will be used to solve major problems in the sector with some allocated for agriculture startups with young entrepreneurs as one of the target as well as setting aside general funds for agricultural products. Gyeonggi provincial government is one of the regions which is interested in this program.

[more](#)

Kazakh ministry of agriculture will inclusively digitize agriculture sector (1 Feb)

The Ministry of Agriculture in Kazakhstan aims to digitize the agriculture sector to increase productivity and enhance competitiveness. The Ministry plans to convert 89 out of 101 services into fully automated format in the next few years. Precision farming and smart farms will also be enhanced to gain greater

productivity with fewer resources. Better electronic grain system will continue to improve with online monitoring and trading. These digital solutions aims to boost the national economy as well as to reach the country's target to become 30 most developed countries in the world.

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Iranian Government allocates \$130m to agro mechanization (24 Jan)

Since August 2013, the Iranian government has allocated a special budget for agro mechanization. The budget has been mostly spent on the renewal, repair or renovation of imported machinery and equipment. The government aims to reduce agro products waste in the country during pre-harvest, harvest, post-harvest and supply stages; which contribute to 2.7 per cent of global food waste.

[more](#)

trends and statistics

Bangladesh wheat cultivation reached its lowest in 3 decades (9 Feb)

Bangladesh rising demand of wheat has to rely on import as the acreage of wheat plantation decreased about 79 per cent year-on-year and recently stood at 3.49 lakh hectares. The country's wheat import was amounted to 56.90 lakh tons in fiscal 2016-17 and is forecasted to increase to 65 lakh tons in this fiscal year. The price hike of rice in Bangladesh, doubled from Tk 600-700 two months ago, tempted many wheat farmers to shift to rice farming for higher profits. Additionally, many farmers preferred boro rice cultivation as rainfall affected wheat plantation in last November. The blast infection attacked for the first time in 2015 also discouraged farmers in southwestern districts to cultivate wheat, causing more shrinking acreage of wheat plantations.

[more](#)

Pakistan's agriculture productivity among the lowest in the world (24 Jan)

A recent report released by Pakistan Business Council states that Pakistan has reached the lowest level of crop yield per hectare in the world. Pakistan largely depends on agriculture having 19.5 per cent share in GDP with productivity ranges very low from 29 to 52 per cent. The low productivity has hampered the country to take part as a major player in the global processed food industry. Media reported that China has a potential to enter Pakistan's agriculture sector by offering capital and loans to Chinese companies to set up business in Pakistan as well as establishing fertilizer plants, logistics network, warehousing and distribution system in the country.

[more](#)

Indonesia set to become the world's biggest wheat importer (15 Feb)

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimated Indonesia to be the largest wheat importer in the 2017-2018 marketing year amounted to 12.5 million tons of wheat, overtaking Egypt's spot. According to the World Bank data, Indonesia has imported 10.2 million tons of wheat in the previous year, originated from Australia, Canada, Ukraine and the United States. Due to Indonesia's growing population and changing food consumption pattern among middle-class segment, wheat demand for food and animal feed has grown rapidly leading Indonesia to be heavily dependent on wheat imports.

[more](#)

Vietnam coffee imports on the rise (26 Jan)

Despite being the second largest coffee exporter in the world, Vietnam still needs to import coffee due to rising domestic demand. During 2016-2017, the country has imported 60,000 tons of coffee with a potential increase in 2017-2018 periods. The imports are various types of coffee originated from Brazil, the US, China, Indonesia, Lao PDR and Cambodia. The trending of cafe chains encourages coffee import

of the country.

[more](#)

case stories

Bangladesh: How specialized banks are lending a helping hand (20 Feb)

The Bangladesh Government has created two specialized bank: Bangladesh Krishi Bank (BKB) and Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank (RAKUB) to finance agriculture, cottage industry and SMEs in rural areas. Around 65 per cent of Bangladesh total population live in rural areas and are heavily involved in agricultural farming and cottage industry. Since women make up half the total population, the government also featured women entrepreneurship to attain the country's development goals. Bangladesh Bank including private, foreign and state-owned commercial banks has been focusing on organizing efficient credit delivery mechanism to agriculture and other rural-based activities. They also suggested all banks including BKB and RAKUB to provide loans to women entrepreneurs at 10 per cent interest rate. This consequently, has increased the total outstanding loan in the agriculture sector by 4.7 per cent (BDT 15.4 billion) in FY2016. Although BKB and RAKUB are underway to contribute to food sufficiency, rural employment generation and poverty alleviation however still face challenges in manpower shortage, needs of fund injection and autonomy.

[more](#)

Bhutan Agriculture and Food Regulatory Authority seizes more than 78MT of banned vegetables since May 2016 (5 Feb)

The Bhutan Agriculture and Food Regulatory Authority (BAFRA) seizes more than 78 metric tons (BNU 7.9 million worth) of banned vegetables. In 2016, an identical ban was enacted temporarily for cauliflowers, beans and green chili due to their high contents of pesticide. Before confirming the seizure, the authority regularly runs several tests once detecting vegetables with high pesticide-content. According to the revised food rules and regulations, the recently seized vegetables are charged at 10 times the local rate. As a penalty for illegal imports of banned vegetables; around BNU 4 million, BNU 2.7 million and BNU 1.1 million fines were imposed in Phuentsholing, Thimphu and Gelephu; respectively.

[more](#)

UNDP program to benefit 14,000 Nepali farmers (8 Feb)

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of Nepal plan to launch the Cooperative Market Development Programme (CMDP) aiming to ensure the fair market opportunities for local farmers. The program focuses on the improvement of quality and quantity agriculture produce and provides the farmers with technical training. CMDP will be implemented in six adjacent districts to Kathmandu due to their poor conditions for agriculture and market. Around 14,000 farmers and their families will benefit from this initiative which also supports the implementation of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 and 2 on fighting poverty and achieving food security.

[more](#)

Cambodia: International fund boosts agriculture development (25 Jan)

IFAD supported projects has contributed to poverty alleviation and agricultural development in rural Cambodia as shown by an independent evaluation published recently. The development projects worth a total of \$166 million has started since 1996 and has reached more than 1.2 million rural poor households. The Cambodian Ministry of Agriculture hopes that IFAD will continue its support and expand throughout the country.

[more](#)

Smartphones are revolutionizing Myanmar's farms (1 Feb)

Millions of farmers in Myanmar reap the benefit from agri-apps that provide helpful information such as weather reports, crop prices at the nearest market and procedure to tackle plant diseases through the smartphone. Green Way and Golden Paddy are the two widely used apps in the country. To support this measure, the Myanmar Book Aid and Preservation Foundation has provided training for about 1,000 government extension workers in agriculture, livestock, fisheries and rural development sectors. The non-familiarity of older people towards modern technology remains a challenge. Therefore the training of basic computer skills is also given to children of farmers.

[more](#)

Climate change to adversely impact grain production in China by 2030 (1 Feb)

A study reveals that China's food losses could reach up to 8 per cent by 2030 due to the worst case of seasonal drought, particularly for the three major grains: rice, wheat and corn. The research used the Chinese Agricultural Policy Analysis model and evaluated the impact of climate change on grain production and the total land area sown in the country. There are five scenarios applied in the study where the integrated scenario is seen most significant for policymakers. The integrated scenario measures the combination of water saving techniques and adoption of new crop varieties as adaptation strategies to seasonal aridity which is predicted more likely to happen.

[more](#)

Fiji: Ministry's assistance to Vulagi pineapple farmers (26 Jan)

Vulagi Estate is known for its pineapple production for decades. In 2015, with support from the Ministry of Agriculture, a Vulagi Pineapple Farmers Association was formed to increase production and assisting its member farmers. The Ministry also provided \$165,552 assistance to the association including planting materials, road operation, agricultural subsidy, as well as training workshop. The association holds a monthly meeting to share recent farming techniques with its members and assist farmers from nearby village with better farm managements.

[more](#)

What does sustainable palm oil mean to smallholders? (30 Jan)

The production share of smallholders in palm oil industry accounted for 40 per cent, however, the implementation of sustainable palm oil remains low, only 14.5 per cent globally. The experience of Thai palm oil farmers committing with the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil indicated that the certification knowhow enables them to double productivity. Meanwhile, Malaysian smallholders showed the less-spraying practice of oil palm farming on peat soil can boost productivity. Even though sustainable palm oil still needs to include certified mill as one of the standards, both examples suggest that sustainable farming on oil palm can generate stable income for smallholders.

[more](#)

How the growth of cities changes farming (17 Feb)

The rising demand for protein has transformed many small and medium-sized farms in Bangladesh and Nigeria to be more professional. In Bangladesh, better infrastructure, aquaculture research institutes and city growth pushed the domestic farmed-fish industry to double in size since 2008. In 2016, fish farmers produced 2.2 million tons of fish with 94 per cent of Bangladesh's farmed-fish consumed domestically. Meanwhile, in Nigeria, medium and large poultry farms increased from around 400 in 1990s-2000s to currently around 1,000 farms. While in Bangladesh, fish farmers are often former rice farmers. In Nigeria, poultry farmers are more likely to be prosperous and well-connected urbanites, with some having major support from foreign investors. The fish and chicken booms in both countries are encountered with producers complaining about oversupply. Despite progressive professionalisms, both are still distant from exporting to rich countries as standardization and certification system have not yet well-applied.

[more](#)

Five ways to reduce farm distress in India (29 Jan)

Despite the Indian government's pro-agriculture budgets, the country still suffers from agrarian distress. The 86-per cent majority of marginal farmers encounter climate risks, price volatility and indebtedness; making them more vulnerable. Based on lessons learnt from policy implementation, there are five essential components to optimize and integrate the already-pro-agriculture government approach in India. It includes generating higher income by maximizing the use of technology; incentivizing rural youth for regenerating agriculture; guaranteeing both production and price risks; supporting public-private partnership (PPP) for agri-infrastructure development; and ameliorating rural life quality.

[more](#)

technological innovations

Bangladesh Institute for Nuclear Agriculture develops 90 varieties of 13 crops (25 Jan)

Bangladesh agriculture moved forward with the advanced use of nuclear technology for agriculture. The Bangladesh Institute for Nuclear Agriculture (BINA) has expanded 90 new varieties of 13 diverse crops using nuclear technology and introduced microbe- fertilizers as an alternative to nitrogen fertilizers. Some adaptive breeds of rice varieties such as varieties surviving extreme weather conditions and harvestable within a short time are expected to boost agricultural yields by a substantial margin.

[more](#)

Cambodia: Mapping technology to boost agricultural yields (7 Feb)

Cambodian Minister of Agriculture has signed the MoU with a Korean firm, Korea Land and Geospatial InformatiX Corporation (LX Corporation), to boost the agricultural productivity through mapping crops. LX Corporation is a company that deals with spatial information procurement and management. The company will work with the Ministry to identify best areas for the right crops. This way it helps to increase production and competitiveness in international market. The challenge of this project is to convince the farmers to change their crops.

[more](#)

'Nuclear Package' helps farmers increase rice yields and income in Northern Malaysia (25 Jan)

Malaysia's government nuclear agency, Nuklear Malaysia, has implemented an integrated approach to support rice farmers overcoming soil problems and extreme weather events. The use of new rice variety, bio-fertilizer and plant growth promoter helped the farmers increase their yields. The nuclear techniques can produce adaptive varieties surviving drought and submersion which also contribute to farmers rising income.

[more](#)

Agricultural apps ploughing the way for farmers in Myanmar (20 Feb)

Nowadays, mobile app technology becomes potential means to modernize agriculture sector as it can help farmers producing more yields. In Myanmar, the use rate of smartphones reached 80 per cent which also include farmers. Two former agricultural students have seen this potential and created an app called "Green Way" with various features including connecting farmers with agri-expert. Another app is "Golden Paddy", a platform with three channels, a mobile app, a web app, and a Facebook page. Several

high impact projects are also underway, among other is "Smart Agriculture" which aims to partner with other countries, such as Thailand, Viet Nam and Indonesia.

[more](#)

Japan: How drones are changing the rice industry (9 Feb)

Nearly 80 per cent of Japan's land cover is used for agriculture and with the productive age population (15-64 years) in decline since 1993, drone technology is proving to be one solution to manage the land with dwindling labour force. The technology is now used to survey crops allowing farmers to monitor and apply pesticide treatment to their crop with very little work force needed. Japan is looking into more export market for Japanese rice with the increase popularity of Sushi in China, the United States and Europe. With drone technology, the private company OPTiM, The Saga University and local government of Fujieda City and Obihiro City in Hokkaido Prefecture are finding ways to encourage more young people be more involved in agriculture activities and stay in farming. Particularly for Japanese rice, this technology can help make the sector more competitive. They hope this effort will improve crop yield and increase the selling price and value of the crops.

[more](#)

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