

March 2018
(20 Feb - 20 Mar 2018)



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sustainable agriculture policy information

policy updates

Bangladesh Government aims at ensuring food security through extensive research, education and awards (2 Mar)

The Bangladeshi Prime Minister emphasized that extensive research on agriculture is one of the main components to strengthen food security. The inventions of Bangladeshi researcher on flood-, drought and salinity- tolerant rice are the example. She also encouraged the inclusion of agriculture and its practical aspects in school curricula to promote proper cultivation systems among students since their earliest age. Despite Bangladesh's increasing dependence on industry, the country still regards agriculture as the lifeline of its economy. Therefore, in each Bengali New Year, Bangladesh government offers *Bangabandhu Jatiya Krishi Purashkar* award, as the highest state recognition for contributions to agricultural development. Annually, the awardees from different organizations and individuals receive 5 gold, 9 silver and 18 bronze medals in 10 categories. Besides the medals, the Prime Minister also provides monetary prizes and certificates for the awardees.

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Sri Lanka: National Economic Council focuses on introducing a new policy on fertilizer subsidy (22 Feb)

The National Economic Council (NEC), appointed by the President, decided on new regulation for fertilizer subsidy. It aims to amend the current method of providing financial support and to avoid the shortage of fertilizer in the country. The government decided to credit the entire amount of fertilizer subsidy to the account of the farmers cultivating rice, maize, soya, chilies, big onions and potatoes before the next cultivating season starts. Additionally, they offer to pay LKR 1,000 premium for the LKR 40,000 per acre crop insurance for those crops. The meeting also considered policy revision related to the Glyphosate use and suggested to allow its use for tea and rubber cultivation land under certain conditions.

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Cambodia: Plantations of subsidiary crops continue to increase as an important step in reducing vegetable imports (27 Feb)

To reduce vegetable import and boost local production, the Government of Cambodia increase the land area to grow subsidiary crops which include certain vegetables and fruits. For this purpose, spatial information technology is used to map agricultural zones and select crops to plant. By mid-March, it is expected that the project will yield result to fulfill local vegetable consumption.

[more](#)

Indonesia: Vice President calls for boosting food productivity to build food resilience (9 Mar)

Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kalla raised an issue of food productivity during the Jakarta Food Security Summit held early March 2018. He stressed on the need to use technology in dealing with several issues hampering food security in the country. Decreasing farm land, rising population, urbanization, changing consumption pattern are issues that require attention to boost productivity.

[more](#)

Myanmar Government to help in rice quality upgrade for export (5 Mar)

Myanmar government estimates that the country exports 3.2 million tons of rice by the end of 2017-18 fiscal years. This volume records the highest level of Myanmar's rice export in 70 years. The country mainly exports average-grade-rice to China and needs to upgrade its rice quality to generate higher value and reach a wider market. To help Myanmar compete with high-grade-rice exporting countries such as Thailand, India and Viet Nam; local farmers require access to long-term and low-interest loans for rice productivity enhancement. Therefore, the government recently raised the loan volume for farmers from MMK 100,000 to MMK 150,000 per acre of farmland. The government also received a support from the Japanese government to extend loans to the agriculture sector and expand exports.

[more](#)

Viet Nam: Ho Chi Minh to subsidize loan interest for hi-tech farms (23 Feb)

Based on the Resolution No 10/2017 of Ho Chi Minh City People's Council, the city will subsidize interest on bank loans by up to 100 per cent to assist individuals and organizations supporting agricultural transformation. This support aims to promote modern, efficient and sustainable farming in 2017-20 through agricultural investment. The loan amount eligible for the subsidy support will be based on the investment scale and the regulations of the lending organizations. The period of support will be determined by the approved production cycle but will not exceed five years. The subsidy will be equivalent to the average 12-month VND deposit interest rate at four State-owned banks (Agribank, BIDV, Vietcombank, Vietinbank) plus 2 per cent. It will cover basic construction, machinery and equipment for agricultural production and processing, machine capacity upgrade, seed and hi-tech agricultural production, bird harvest, purchasing of fishing vessels and replacement of unproductive dairy cows.

[more](#)

Vietnam MARD and NGO help connecting small farmers to vendors (8 Mar)

The Department of Cooperatives and Rural Development (DCRD) under the Vietnam Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) signed a cooperation agreement with a non-governmental organization, Good Neighbors International (GNI). The agreement for a development assistance programme aims to strengthen the link between agricultural production, distribution and marketing towards sustainable agri-food value chains. The programme includes the establishment of new agricultural cooperatives in areas supported by the GNI, involving the poor in mountainous and ethnic minority areas. GNI collaborates with supermarkets and convenience stores to support farmers in finding a distributor. GNI and DCRD will also organize research and surveys on actual agricultural product demand to create suitable market linkages between the cooperatives. As of 2017, Vietnam had around 12,000 cooperatives but only 38 per cent of them have notified the positive outcome. GNI will maintain VND 12.4 billion funds for cooperatives and continue linking farmers with agricultural product vendors.

[more](#)

Tonga receives 200,000-plus seeds from newly established seed bank for rehabilitation after tropical cyclone (13 Mar)

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (MAFF) of Tonga received more than 200,000 tomato and capsicum seeds from the Hango Agricultural College, through the support of the European Union and SPC's Agriculture Policy Program for helping farmers rehabilitate their crops after Tropical Cyclone Gita. The seeds were harvested from the seed bank, established by the college, in the months prior to the cyclone. The initial objective of the seed bank was to complement government seed services. Precisely, the college adopted systematic programming that successfully made the seeds available at the time of urgent need.

[more](#)

trends and statistics

Azerbaijan: Increased international demand for Azerbaijani potato (27 Feb)

As Azerbaijan's potato imports exceeded exports by \$14 million in 2016, the government aims to rule out imports by intensifying potato production for both domestic and international demand. The rising demand in both markets encouraged local farmers to boost potato cultivation and greenhouse usage, leading to increased production in 2017. The government has noted that the increasing number of greenhouses created in recent years will result in faster harvesting and promote export potential. Currently, potato farming is profitable for local farmers targeting the markets of Russia and large cities of Azerbaijan. An Azerbaijani economist assumes that Azerbaijani potatoes can expand new market opportunity in the Persian Gulf and European Union countries due to their high demand for potatoes.

[more](#)

Nepal: Credit flow to agriculture sector jumps 30 per cent (21 Feb)

As the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) required bank and financial institutions (BFIs) to distribute financial resources toward the productive sector, credit growth of BFIs toward agriculture sector almost doubled in the first half of FY2017/18. It rose by NPR 27.2 billion (30.2 per cent) over six months in the current fiscal year, compared to a growth of 13.6 per cent in the similar period of the previous fiscal year. As of January 2018, the credit of BFIs in agriculture sector stands at NPR 117.24 billion. The government, through NRB, has not only been offering loans for the sector but also providing interest subsidy up to 5 percent to farmers on the agro, farming and livestock loans. Though BFIs are still short of regulatory requirements (6.8 out of 10 per cent requirement of total credit on agriculture sector), their loans to farmers have been increasing as reflected in the rising credit flows.

[more](#)

Philippines: Food security assured despite shrinking number of farmworkers (14 Mar)

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) data, the agriculture sector's share in total employment has decreased by 20.6 per cent from 1993 to 2017. Contrarily, the service and industry sectors' share in total employment increased steadily. The researcher assumes that farmers demanding better pay could be the main driver of the abandonment of the farm sector. Despite that, the Agriculture Secretary is optimistic that those figures indicate modernized agriculture in the country and should not have a serious impact on production. His statement is supported by PSA data showing upward average daily pay of farmworkers from 2010 to 2015 and increased paddy production by 9.35 per cent in 2017.

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Chinese companies aggressively buy agriculture land abroad (26 Feb)

Due to changes in consumption patterns among growing middle class in China, meat demand has considerably increased. It escalates the country's need for soybean and corn for livestock feed. An imbalance between Chinese growing appetite and limited arable land areas led the country to boost their agricultural investments abroad. It amounted to USD 94 billion since 2010, with almost half of them were invested in the past two years. As of 2012, private and state-owned Chinese enterprises have invested in

cereals, soybeans, orchards and livestock breeding; covering 9 million hectares of land in developing countries. However, in the recent years, Chinese attention appeared to be shifted to Australia, the United States and Europe.

[more](#)

China is becoming the top producer, top consumer, top stockholder, top importer and a "rising exporter" of rice (15 Mar)

According to the Grain World Market and Trade Report, China grows stronger in global rice trade as both importer and exporter. Most of their rice exports went to Republic of Korea, Mongolia and Hong Kong, SAR China. The country even started to resume its exports to Africa after a pause since 2012. In 2017, around two-thirds of the exports went to Africa. The competitor, Thailand, has decreased its exports of low-priced rice to Africa. It, therefore, opens a wider road for Chinese exports to the African market.

[more](#)

Rep of Korea: Soybean production to rise while consumption holds steady (13 Mar)

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates that the Republic of Korea will increase its soybean production by 20 per cent to 100,000 tons in 2018-2019, following government plans to reduce rice cultivation. A survey by the Korean Rural Economic Institute (KREI) indicates that the soybean area is forecast to increase 45,775 ha, less than 1 per cent increase. However, this figure does not reflect the effect of rice area reduction programs that encourage soybean cultivation on rice fields. Despite the production increase, the consumption forecast of domestic soybean, soybean meal, soybean oil and soybean imports remain similar as the previous year.

[more](#)

case stories

Pakistan: Thar saline water being used for fish and agricultural production (1 Mar)

In the Thar Desert, 180-meter depth underground saline extracted water of Thar Coal Block II has been made usable for fish and agricultural production. The Sindh Agro Coal Mining Company has successfully cultivated bio-saline crops using the water. Meanwhile, the fish production started last year on a small ground with about 90 per cent survival rate of fishes. In the second phase of experiments, the company created fish ponds, filled with underground saline water of Thar Coal mining blocks, to produce and breed seven types of fishes. The company spokesman regarded that the succession of fish production experiments can bring revolutionary changes to the Thar Desert and can provide employment opportunity for local people and traders.

[more](#)

India: ICAR, agri universities prepare strategy for doubling farmers' income (8 Mar)

State agriculture universities in India and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) have been developing a strategy document to make agriculture sustainable and beneficial for farmers. The strategy document aims to double farmers' income by the year 2022. For the past years, government policy initiative has focused on food grain production which shows an increasing trend. In India, 85 per cent of farmers are marginal and are in urgent need of farm innovation. ICAR has also developed around 45 Integrated Farming System (IFS) models to help them in confronting with climate change.

[more](#)

6,000 farmers from South India roped in to create seed bank (27 Feb)

Since 2012, Vijaya Ram of Tarakaturu village, South India had been collecting 200 paddy seed varieties from all over the country to develop the seed bank. The seeds are distributed to around 6,000 farmers and cultivated in a natural farm by using cow dung and urine instead of fertilizers and pesticides. Some seed varieties have shown good result in terms of grain quality and survival rate in both *rabi* and *kharif* seasons. The Navara variety in particular contains more than 40 per cent fibre value. The seed bank aims to have scientific data of all the varieties and maintain the seed quality and its nutritional values.

[more](#)

Laos farmers taught safe chemical use despite organic legacy (2 Mar)

Beside watermelon's sale value, its need for minimal handling infrastructure made the fruit one of the important cash crops for the southern Lao PDR's farmers. Over recent years, disease such as curly leaf virus has destroyed 90 per cent of watermelon crops in a village in Savannakhet. Despite the strong anti-pesticide policy in the country, farmers still deemed organic agriculture being unable to solve their problems with pests. Consequently, the Department of Agriculture has given approval to the Australian researcher and initiative (Crawford Fund) to mitigate the incorrect use of pesticides, amid the national debate. They aim to improve farmers' knowledge on the safe use of pesticides and management of weeds, pests and diseases through a combination of chemical and non-chemical control options.

[more](#)

Innovative farm machineries is changing agriculture in Bangladesh (19 Mar)

Modernization of agriculture sector in Bangladesh is underway to make a significant progress. It enabled the country to produce 338.15 lakh metric tons of grain cereal (rice, wheat and maize) during the 2016-2017 fiscal years, despite labour shortage and natural calamities. Farmers mainly used machineries for preparing the land, irrigation and thrashing the crops. However, the pace of climate change is now faster than the new technologies being introduced into the fields. Therefore, the government supports the mechanization by raising subsidy for purchasing farm machineries from 30 to 50 per cent.

[more](#)

How empowering women leads to innovative agricultural practices and better household welfare (7 Mar)

A study analysed whether women's empowerment leads to better agricultural farming and technology adoption (e.g. high yield rice varieties) in Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Philippines and Viet Nam. It applied a gender-inclusive sampling technique to draw 12,000 sample households from 70 districts and 1,165 villages within the five countries, focusing on women's decision-making capability in production, income, resources, time and leadership. It shows that, for the countries combined, women had only 30 per cent decision-making role in the household. However, the pattern of agricultural decision making varied across the five countries. The Philippines shows the highest amount of women's involvement. Meanwhile, in Myanmar, men dominate agricultural community decisions. The findings indicate that women were more concerned about household welfare. Empowered women's ability to access more information enabled them to contribute to the decision about what to do in the field to improve yields and economic outcomes for the households. Author expected the study findings can influence development policy and programme design for women empowerment.

[more](#)

voices and views

UN highlights need for action to empower women and girls in Asia-Pacific on International Women's Day (8 Mar)

The UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), UN Women and the UN RCM Thematic Working Group on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women jointly held a discussion on women's rights, empowerment and equality. The event marked the commemoration of International Women's Day 2018, under global theme: "Time is Now: rural and urban activists transforming women's lives". The discussion highlighted crucial challenges that women and girls in Asia-Pacific encountered, such as achieving quality education, disaster resilience and preparedness, and adequate access to health care, living standards, food security and economic empowerment. It emphasized the problem of rural women dealing with higher inequalities, threats of violence and restriction of mobility. One of the discussion panelists suggested innovative financing models and updated data production as a way to support gender-responsive policy-making and enhance gender equality.

[more](#)

IAEA supports Pakistan economy through value addition in agri-products (14 Mar)

The Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) proposed value addition of massive agricultural products as a way to strengthen Pakistan economy. He offered full support to enable Pakistan food products to go through proper certification, for instance, by using nuclear technology in agriculture. The Nuclear Institute for Agriculture and Biology (NIAB) of IAEA has so far evolved 45 different crop varieties including diseases- and weather-resistant crops. Inaugurating the Veterinary Drug Residues (VDR) laboratories at NIAB, he expected that the labs can improve food safety and competitiveness of Pakistan food exports.

[more](#)

technological innovations

New rice variant to ensure Brunei's food security (6 Mar)

The Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism (MPRT) of Brunei Darussalam is currently examining the new hybrid variant of rice. The variant is expected to be able to produce 12 metric tons per hectare per season; to increase the country's rice self-sufficiency by 30 per cent, despite high acidity of Brunei's soil. The ministry targets to ensure at least 20 per cent of rice self-sufficiency by 2020. While in 2016, the national rice self-sufficiency still stood at 4.58 per cent. The ministry underlined their commitment to conducting research on soil fertility issues, irrigation systems and other issues related to paddy farming to boost rice yields in the country.

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