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Weekly news
20-27 June 2022

Highlight on farmers, agribusiness and rural development in Laos

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NEWS DIGEST #26 June 27, 2022

Lao PDR news

Govt seeks to preserve 4.5 million hectares of farmland

VT Times, June 23, 2022.

The Ministry of Agriculture is drafting a decree aimed at banning the use of agricultural and irrigated land for commercial construction, in a bid to preserve 4.5 million hectares of land for agricultural production over the next 30 years.
Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Dr Phet Phomphiphak, told NA members this week that agriculture is under threat from development projects, and that more and more land is being used for construction purposes.
As a result, the ministry is drafting a decree to preserve land for crop cultivation, to safeguard the government's food security strategy and enable sustainable agricultural production.
The ministry hopes to set aside 2 million hectares for rice cultivation, with the available area currently standing at 700,000 hectares, as well as a further one million hectares for the cultivation of other crops, of which 700,000 hectares are currently grown.
In addition, the ministry wants 700,000 hectares of land to be made available for livestock farming, with just 100,000 hectares in use at present. Another goal is for fruit to be grown on 800,000 hectares of land, with fruit trees currently grown on 600,000 hectares.
Extra land for crops would help to meet targets set in the national development agenda and resolutions adopted in the five-year agricultural, forestry and rural development plan for 2021-2025.
In the next six months, Dr Phet said the ministry will focus on increased food production to reduce the importation of unnecessary products and help curb the rise in food prices.
In particular, the ministry will attempt to boost the production of export products, such as sweetcorn, rice, coffee, tea, livestock and rubber.
Meanwhile, agriculture authorities have been told to reevaluate contract farming practices, including the '2+3' model, in which farmers are responsible for providing land and labour, while investors provide seedlings, technical

services, and markets.
Assessment will also be made of the '1+4' contract farming system, in which people provide land, while investors are responsible for labour, seedlings, technical services, and markets.
Agriculture experts said Laos is a least developed country and as such has a great need for investment to drive economic growth and poverty reduction efforts.
Better city planning, more appropriate land allocation, and short- and long-term strategies are essential for the country to address land disputes and ensure the best use of land.
https://www.vientianetimes.org...

Laos plans to produce 3.7 million tonnes of rice for food security

KPL, June 22, 2022.

Laos has set a goal of producing 3.7 million tonnes of rice and supplying not less than 68.2 kg of meat, fish and eggs per capita this year.

Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Phet Phomphiphak told the ongoing National Assembly's 3rd meeting on Jun 20 that the government is focusing on ensuring the country has food security.

The ministry will promote domestic production to reduce imports, especially bio-fertilizers, currently merely 600,000 tonnes produced per year, much less than the real demand - two million tones -, and ensure the provision of chemical fertilizers, plant and animal varieties, and production equipment to local farmers.

The government will also focus on promoting the production for export purposes according to its agreements with trade partners, mainly China, Vietnam, Thailand and EU. The latter is open to all kinds of goods from Laos, according to the minister.

http://kpl.gov.la/En/Detail.as...

Laos to Restrict Development on Agricultural Land

Laotiantimes, June 22, 2022.

Laos plans to restrict development on agricultural land to avoid potential food shortages in the future.

Mr. Phet Phomphiphak, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, said during the ongoing National Assembly Session that the ministry will ensure the country can retain 70% forest coverage, including riverside lands, *Paxason Newspaper* reports.

Laos currently has 4.5 million hectares of agricultural land, with 2 million hectares dedicated to rice farming and the rest to crop and animal farming.

The ministry is implementing land allocation and demarcation projects for protected areas in response to small, medium, and large investments in order to prioritize the production of marketable crops.

The Ministry will also improve soil quality by applying organic, bio-organic, green manure and chemical fertilizers across ten target provinces as part of a food

security initiative.

Despite vast agricultural lands, farmers in Laos are suffering from fuel shortages and rising fertilizer prices.

The Lao Farmers Network has made a plea to authorities on social media, saying farmers are unable to plow their fields or water crops without access to diesel fuels.

https://laotiantimes.com/2022/...

Laos, India launch construction of dam, irrigation system in Xayaboury

Laotiantimes, June 27, 2022.

Representatives of the Indian and Lao governments have launched a project to build the Nam Xang storage dam and irrigation system in Kaenthao district, Xayaboury province.
The project is funded by a loan of US$14.7 million from the EXIM Bank of India, and will run for 24 months.
An irrigation system will be built to supply water to more than 1,000 hectares of farmland in the rainy season and to 850 hectares in the dry season.
Almost 300 families in six villages of Kaenthao district will benefit from the scheme.
The project opening ceremony last week was led by India's Deputy Minister of External Affairs, Dr Rajkumar Ranjan Singh, and Laos' Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Dr Phet Phomphiphak.
Dr Phet said the project would support the government's agricultural development strategy to 2025 and the vision to 2030, especially the food security programme and the modernisation of agricultural products through a chain system of production.
Dr Phet thanked the Government of India for supporting the development of agriculture, forestry and rural development in Laos.
Dr Singh said "This project will be extremely beneficial for farmers and the economic development of Xayaboury province, especially in areas surrounding the dam."
"In particular, the project will have beneficial knock-on effects for local people, apart from directly benefiting farmers and growers who will be able to get water to irrigate their farms and plantations."
India has been extending development assistance in the form of concessional Lines of Credit for many decades, Dr Singh said. In 2015, the administration of Lines of Credit was streamlined and they are now provided under the Indian Development and Economic Assistance Scheme (IDEAS) through the EXIM Bank of India.
"India extends development cooperation to Laos as a partner developing country on the basis of the principles of equality, solidarity and mutual benefit. All development assistance extended by India is demand-driven and is extended without conditions, without constraining the policy space of the partner country," he added.
On the same day, Dr Singh attended a handover ceremony for a dormitory at the Laos-India Entrepreneurship Development Centre, which was built at a cost of US$50,000.

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Ministries assess progress of disaster risk management project

VT Times, June 23, 2022.

Officials from four ministries met on Wednesday to discuss progress made in the first six months of this year to fulfil the goals of the South East Asia Disaster Risk Management Project in Laos.

The ministries of Planning and Investment, Public Works and Transport, Natural Resources and Environment, and Finance were represented at the meeting in Vientiane.

The project is funded by the World Bank Group with US$56 million, which includes a US$55 million loan and a US$1 million grant to cover the eight years of operation from 2017-2024.

The project comprises flood risk management through the construction of embankments in Xay district, Oudomxay province, and Borikhamxay and Luang Prabang provinces, implemented by the Ministry of Public Works and Transport. This work is now 26.89 percent complete.

In addition, early warning/meteorological systems and disaster preparedness is being stepped up in Oudomxay, Luang Prabang and Phongsaly provinces, implemented by the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology under the Ministry of Natural Resources and other entities, and is now 21 percent complete.

The third project component is emergency response and post-disaster recovery. This work is being carried out by the Ministry of Finance and is now 94.31 percent complete.

The fourth component is an initiative titled Integrating Natural Disaster Risk Reduction into Public Investment and Project Management, implemented by the Ministry of Planning and Investment, and the fifth component concerns emergency response mechanisms.

Wednesday's meeting delivered progress reports from the four ministries on work carried out so far this year, and outlined plans for the last six months of this year.

Deputy Minister of Planning and Investment, Mrs Phonevanh Outhavong, said "We have only two years and six months to meet all the project targets. In the remaining period, all ministries must do their best to complete their activities satisfactorily and achieve the goals and objectives of the project."

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President urges animal feed companies to boost output

VT Times, June 24, 2022.

President Thongloun Sisoulith, who is also Party Secretary General, and his delegation on Wednesday visited the Friendship Agriculture Co., Ltd. and Green Fest Lao Co., Ltd. in Xaythany district, Vientiane, where he was welcomed by the Mayor of Vientiane, Mr Atsaphangthong Siphandone.

The president made helpful suggestions to the management of the two companies, advising them about improved production techniques and the need to use good quality raw materials, as well as paying less for imported items.

He also stressed the need for the companies to export more of their products, saying this would broaden their market and bolster productivity.

Products made for export must be able to compete in terms of quality, he said, while marketing, services and pricing must be carried out appropriately. The overarching aim of increased productivity is to reduce the need for imports, the president said.
He advised the companies' management to increase output in order to meet the high demand for animal feed in Laos, and to produce more for export in order to earn more foreign currency.
This would be a significant contribution to solving the government's financial difficulties, as well as strengthening the economy going forward.
President Thongloun heard a report on the operations of the two companies and learnt that Green Fit Lao Co., Ltd. has the capacity to produce 3 million tons of animal feed a year, or 20 tons per hour.
The company makes feed for chickens, ducks, fish, cattle, quail and frogs.
In the first phase of production in 2020, the company produced 40,000 tons; in 2021 the amount fell to 28,000 tons, but this year output is expected to climb back to 40,000 tons.
Ninety percent of the raw materials come from crops such as sweetcorn, barley and cassava.
The two companies are facing difficulties such as price competition, access to finance, shortages of currency and fuel, problems in the transport of raw materials and other issues.

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Germany supports monitoring of Mekong water quality, fish migration

VT Times, June 23, 2022.

With the rapid development of infrastructure on the Mekong River, the Mekong River Commission (MRC) and its partners have introduced new technology to calculate the possible impact of a large project on water quality and fish migration.

The MRC on June 7 showcased two new sets of equipment at the Don Sahong Dam, less than two kilometres upstream of the Lao-Cambodian border.
The unveiling was attended by senior officials from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, the Embassies of Germany and Australia to the Lao PDR, and the German implementation agency GIZ.
Hydrolab technology will monitor the water level and quality immediately below the dam and report - if anything adversely affects that quality – in real-time.
This monitoring is vital for the millions of fishing and farming families who rely on the Mekong, even for drinking water.
The second technology is an "acoustic telemetry" system, including tags attached to some transboundary migratory fish species. The technology helps understand whether fish can migrate up and downstream despite obstacles due to the construction and operation of the dam.
To date, there has been no way to prove if the Don Sahong hydropower plant has any secondary effects.
This new system will provide evidence by tracking fish movements through a few natural-like fish passages or fishways, including the Hou Sadam and Hou Xangpheuk channels, which the developer modified with the construction of the dam.
The newly introduced equipment is supported by the German government and

implemented by the MRC-GIZ Transboundary Water Cooperation in the Lower Mekong Basin, under the Joint Environmental Monitoring (JEM) Pilot Project.
Speaking at the event, the German Ambassador to Laos, Mrs Annette Knobloch, said "Germany has a long-standing cooperation with the Mekong River Commission and has provided more than 67 million Euro in technical and financial support for transboundary water cooperation to achieve the MRC's vision of an economically prosperous, socially just and environmentally sound Mekong River Basin."
Mrs Knobloch added that Germany acknowledged the significance of testing different methodologies to monitor the environmental impacts of mainstream dams. The knowledge gained from the testing contributes to the consolidation of the JEM Programme.
CEO of the MRC Secretariat, Dr Anoulak Kittikhoun, also noted the value for future projects.
"The findings and recommendations of JEM pilots can also be made for similar dams, so they can build one that doesn't just generate electricity, but also functions harmoniously with people's livelihoods, through fisheries resources and other river ecosystems."
The JEM pilots are financially supported by the MRC member countries and development partners, including Germany and Australia.

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CLMVT news

Vietnam estimates high fruit production in 2022

fareasternagriculture, June 21, 2022.

According to Le Thanh Tung, deputy director of the department of crop production (Vietnamese Ministry of agriculture and rural development), the output of Southern key fruit trees in 2022 is estimated at over 7.3 million tonnes

Specifically, the output for the first 6 months of the year is estimated at 3.3 million tonnes, while that of the last 6 months is estimated at 4.1 million tonnes. According to the Ministry, some provinces have high output including dragon fruit in Binh Thuan, Long An, Tien Giang; pomelos in Ben Tre, Vinh Long, Tien Giang; mango in An Giang, Dong Thap, Tien Giang, Khanh Hoa, Dong Nai; jackfruit in Tien Giang, Hau Giang, Dong Nai; and passion fruit in Gia Lai, Dak Lak.

Tung added that Vietnam's fruit product exports currently consist mainly of fresh fruits at 75.9%; the remaining are processed fruits. The top 10 Vietnamese fresh fruit exports in 2021 include dragon fruit (accounting for the highest percentage at 33.9%), mango (6.5%), banana, jackfruit, coconut, durian, lemon, watermelon, lychee, passion fruit. The top 10 consumption markets for Vietnamese fruits comprised China, the US, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Netherlands, Russia, and Australia.

According to the country's **Center for Informatics and Statistics**, the export value of fruits in May 2022 is expected to be US$300mn, making the total value for the first five months of 2022 US$1.47bn, down 13,6% when compared to the same period of 2021.

China ranked first in Vietnam's fruit and vegetable import market in the first four months of 2022 with 53.3% market share. Fruit and vegetable exports to this market in the first four months of 2022 reached US$625.8mn, down 27.7% over the same period in 2021. In the first four months of 2022, the market saw a sharp increase in fruit and vegetable export value. especially the United States (+51.4%). In contrast, the market with a decrease in fruit and vegetable export value was Russia (-42.4%).

https://www.fareasternagricult...

New rice varieties launched for international market

Khmer Times, June 24, 2022.

The long and slim kernels SKO rice stands for Sen Kro Oub and DSMK stands for Damneob Sbai Monkul. These varieties have been developed and researched by the Cambodia Rice Federation in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and partner organisations

The Cambodian Rice Federation launched two new varieties of rice – SKO fragrant rice and DSMK glutinous rice, which will compete with similar fragrant rice varieties from other countries on the international market.

The long and slim kernels SKO rice stands for Sen Kro Oub and DSMK stands for Damneob Sbai Monkul. These varieties are also expected to improve the income of Cambodian farmers.

They have been developed and researched by the Cambodia Rice Federation in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, agricultural cooperatives and partner organisations.

The Sen Kro Oub rice varieties play an important role in exports and they are non-seasonal, which allows farmers to grow up to three times a year, according to CRF.

Speaking at the launch ceremony, Minister of Commerce Pan Sorasak said the two varieties are good for Cambodia to show the development of the rice sector in the country and prepare for competition in the international market.

“These SKO rice varieties are a new choice for farmers and exporters to compete with other countries’ fragrant rice in the international market,” Sorasak said.

Establishment of collective marks is very important for building customer trust and building clarity for farmers, as some farmers now face difficulties in selling their rice during harvest seasons as farmers do not have a clear source of information on market demand and exporters do not have specific information from farmers, said CRF’s Board Chairman Hun Lak said.

https://www.khmertimeskh.com/5...

Agriculture experts make strong case for lifting ban on some chemicals

nationthailand, June 23, 2022.

The Chemical Industries Club of the Federation of Thai Industries (FTI), academics, and farmers have urged the government to lift the ban on some chemical herbicides and pesticides to meet commercial demand and enable Thailand to achieve its objective of becoming the "kitchen of the world".

Petcharat Eksangkul, member of the Chemical Industry Committee and vice president of the FTI, said that rather than focusing only on organic agriculture, it is time for the country to also focus on chemical agriculture which involves good practices at every step in the production of agriculture products, or GAP (Good Agricultural Practice).

Petcharat was speaking on the topic of "Organic Chemicals: Thailand's Opportunities Under the Global Food Crisis" during the third seminar on "Chemical: Hero or Villain?".
These GAP methods help solve shortfalls in productivity due to plant diseases, pests and inclement weather.

"We need to accept that chemicals do cause both harm and benefits depending on the way we use them. Knowing how to use chemicals responsibly, along with proper management and scientific proof, will be the key to driving the use of chemical herbicides and pesticides for the benefit of the country," said Petcharat.

The president of the Weed Science Society of Thailand, Chanya Maneechote, said most Thai people are told that chemicals are toxic. Hence anything involving chemicals is viewed as dangerous. Using chemical herbicides and pesticides is resisted as a result.

"These kinds of chemicals are only harmful if you directly consume them. However, if you strictly follow instructions with proper protection kits, there is no danger. Herbicides like paraquat are banned in Thailand, but widely used in America and Japan. If it is dangerous, why do these developed countries allow their farmers to use it?" said Chanya.

She also cited the case study of Sri Lanka, which banned all chemical fertilizers and pesticides at the beginning of 2021 in order to become a 100 per cent organic country. But it was forced to lift the ban in November 2021 as it could not take the burden from decreased productivity of major agricultural products such as rice and tea leaves.

Previously, Sri Lanka had banned the use of glyphosate (a chemical herbicide) in 2015 believing that glyphosate might cause idiopathic chronic kidney disease and possibly carcinogenic. At that time, Sri Lankan scientists and researchers had warned that there was no scientific concrete evidence to issue the ban but the government did not listen. Three years later, many economic crops, especially Sri Lanka's main export crops, were severely damaged by the glyphosate ban and the government finally lifted the ban on glyphosate.

> "Thailand must consider all aspects before banning any chemicals used in agriculture. Risk assessment and management of cost and economic worthiness of the use of agrochemicals are required in order to be able to make effective policy decisions. Many of the world's leading agricultural countries such as Brazil, Japan, Mexico, China and the United States all provide this kind of assessment," said Chanya.

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