



Weekly news

July 01-15, 2024

Highlight on farmers, agribusiness and rural development in Laos



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Fair shines spotlight on Lao tea industry

VT Times, July 2, 2024

The 2024 International Tea Day Fair in Vientiane, which took place from Friday to Sunday, gave a boost to the reputation of Lao tea as a high-quality product and established a strong image of tea in Laos, as well as encouraging friendly competition and recognition among the local tea community.

The fair was organised by the Mekong Tea Project and implemented by the Department of Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. It gathered together tea farmers, producers, industry professionals, consumers, and other stakeholders from around the country.

The event reflected the importance of tea in the daily lives of Lao people and the potential of the product to ease poverty levels and create economic opportunities.

Lao teas can be a source of environmental sustainability, economic development, and a path to building resilient communities.

By celebrating the Lao tea industry and its links to environmental preservation, its potential gains wider recognition, including the positive impact it can have on people and the planet. Speaking at the opening ceremony of the fair, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Professor Dr Linkham Douangsavanh said “Despite favourable growing conditions and market proximity in China, to reach its full potential, the tea sector faces many challenges. In particular, farmers have limited knowledge and skills concerning tea processing, and are not encouraged to produce tea for export. Through this event, we aim to bring together all tea value chain actors to promote Lao tea’s image and sales.”

The Ambassador of France to Laos, Ms Siv-Leng Chhuor, said “We hope that this fair will help promote the Lao tea culture and the quality of teas across the country. The specificities of Lao tea, often produced in forested ecosystems by small-scale farmers, are to be preserved and scaled-up. We are convinced that the development of the tea value chain has great potential to empower smallholder farmers, shed light on Lao culture, and

help preserve the environment.”

The Ambassador of the European Delegation to Laos, Ms Ina Marčiulionytė, added “Together as Team Europe, we commit to support a sustainable and inclusive development of the tea sector in Laos. We hope it will help empower young people and women, protect forests, and get increased recognition for Lao tea, domestically and internationally.”

Those attending the fair included representatives of Agence Française de Développement (AFD), which is funding the Mekong Tea Project, the European Union Delegation to Laos, and members of other international and national organisations.

Tea producers and exporters from all over Laos came together to celebrate International Tea Day. Producers and companies from Bokeo, Xayaboury, Phongsaly, Huaphan and Champassak provinces displayed their products, representing the diversity and special characteristics of their tea terroirs.

Among these was the Meung Tea Producers Cooperative, based in Meung district, Bokeo province. With support from the Mekong Tea Project, the Cooperative recently obtained Organic EU certification, which will allow its members to produce certified tea for the European market.

A large number of people visited the three-day fair and enjoyed discovering the wide variety of tea blends from various provinces in Laos.

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German support set to transform school meals in Laos

VT Times, July 4, 2024

The German government has supported the school meal programme, which amounts to about US\$9.5 million over five years.

Target areas are 200 schools in the three southern provinces of Saravan, Xekong and Attapeu, benefitting 22,000 children.

The project is implemented under the leadership of the Inclusive Education Development Centre of the Ministry of Education and Sports.

During the five years of implementation, the project will further strengthen government capacities on all levels, and will formulate a sustainable financing strategy for school meals.

A new agreement signed by the Ministry of Education and Sports on Tuesday formalises support from the Federal Republic of Germany to Laos’ largest social safety net in the form of school meals.

Support to local agriculture for a steady supply of food to schools, driven by a partnership with the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), aims to create a positive cycle of rural poverty reduction centred around local schools.

Since the early 2000s, the Lao government has worked to improve primary school enrolment and retention rates with the help of food, a great incentive for education for many rural families.

School meals programmes are currently operating in about 25 percent of primary schools around the country, benefitting close to 250,000 children, but external support is needed to sustain the programmes in many areas.

Deputy Minister of Education and Sports Dr Souriodong Sundara said there are many points in favour of school meals, to which the government attaches great importance. The ministry’s Education and Sports Sector Development Plan for 2021-2025 acknowledges the key role that school meals play in reducing inequalities in education by boosting enrolment, attendance, and learning outcomes.

The newly provided support aims to build a supply system linking local farmers to school meals to ensure a steady supply of fresh ingredients for school meals that benefit children from a nutritional and educational standpoint, and also farmers by creating economic opportunities.

This is expected to form a mutually reinforcing cycle that, together with budgetary support from the

government and rice contributions from families, will create stable, durable and locally managed school meals programmes.

The project also has a strong gender component that aims to empower women. In addition, it promotes climate-smart practices among smallholder farmers and equips schools with energy-efficient cooking solutions.

German Ambassador to Laos Annette Knobloch said the Accelerating School Meals in Laos project, which was designed by the World Food Programme to support girls and young women in particular, fits perfectly into these guidelines.

WFP Country Director and Representative, Jacqueline de Groot, said Germany's generous support is framed by WFP's global efforts to transform food systems and strengthen human capital in countries such as Laos.

The programme also aims to improve health and nutrition awareness for students in rural schools, so that the next generation can make choices that equip them for a happy and productive future, she added.

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Vietnam approves 6km conveyor belt to transport coal from Laos

VT Times, July 4, 2024.

Authorities in Quang Tri province, Vietnam, have approved the construction of an over-six-kilometre-long conveyor belt to transport coal from Laos, the Tuoi Tre News website reported on July 1.

The conveyor belt will cover 23.8 hectares of land and is estimated to cost about US\$58.3 million or VND1.5 trillion.

The belt was deemed necessary because roads that are currently used to transport coal have become degraded and are no longer suitable for this purpose.

The conveyor belt will carry 30 million metric tons of coal a year. The supply of coal from Laos to Vietnam will bolster the country's energy security until 2030. Use of the conveyor belt for the transport of coal will ease the pressure on customs officials at the La Lay border crossing and on National Highway 15D.

The conveyor belt will start at the Laos-Vietnam border and end at a warehouse in A Ngo commune, Dakrong district, Quang Tri province.

Over the past two years, coal imports from Laos into Vietnam have grown, with the coal being cleared through customs at the border crossing between Dakrong district and Saravan province in Laos.

Nearly 4,000 metric tons of coal passes through the La Lay border crossing daily. The amount can surge to 12,000 metric tons of coal, equivalent to 400-450 trucks transporting coal, if there are no traffic hold-ups.

In 2023, Quang Tri province imported 2.2 million metric tons of coal from Laos.

A recent surge in the number of trucks carrying coal from Laos to Vietnam has overwhelmed the border crossing, leading to the degradation of National Highways 15D and 9, as well as the Ho Chi Minh Road.

In addition to the 6km conveyor belt, the investor in the project proposes to build two more belts, with one connecting the former with My Thuy Seaport and the other linking the Vietnam-Laos border and a coal mine in Xekong province.

The three conveyor belts are expected to create a conveyor system with a total length of 160 kilometres.

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Luang Prabang farmers grow coffee for export to Japan

VT Times, July 12, 2024

Farmers in Luang Prabang province are growing coffee to export to Japan, under the Cocreation of Food Security for Farmers with Economic Empowerment with Japan (COFFEE-JAPAN) project.

Since the project began in February, people in Luang Prabang have begun to change the way they live, with significant support from the project, according to the World Food Programme.

Farmers started growing coffee on local arable land and began learning about good nutrition, showing incredible determination to succeed and make improvements to their lives.

The project helps to bolster coffee production and marketing efforts, while promoting access to and understanding of essential nutrition.

The progress of project implementation has seen farmers change their mindset and adopt an easier and healthier lifestyle.

They have learnt about the importance of good nutrition, are getting a new income stream from coffee cultivation, and are learning about the need to preserve forested land.

The COFFEE-JAPAN project is funded by the Japanese government and carried out in collaboration with the Lao Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the United Nations World Food Programme, Saka no Tochu, a Japanese private company active in Laos, and Saffron Coffee, a Lao fair-trade coffee company.

The project is underway in eight villages in Luang Prabang's Phonxay and Viengkham districts, and will take place over a period of 30 months.

The coffee produced under the project will be sold to Japan.

Japan's support is helping to stabilise and improve rural incomes, while ensuring food security and improving nutrition.

The project has provided training and infrastructure for farmers, which will benefit their whole village, with the ultimate goal of a better life for everyone in the community.

Through the project's activities, it is envisaged that more coffee will be grown for export, specifically for small- and medium-scale coffee roasters in Japan.

COFFEE-JAPAN is an innovative public-private partnership with a sustainable people-centred approach, integrating export-grade coffee production, capacity building and nutrition awareness to empower communities and drive positive change.

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Laos rice production facing challenges with environmental changes

VT Times, July 12, 2024

Laos is facing challenges in improving rice production to meet the demands of the market and to ensure food security.

In such circumstances, the "Stakeholder Engagement on Enhancing Smallholder Rice Production and Strengthening Seed Systems for Food Security and Climate Resiliency in Laos" is a project that can meet the needs of the current situation, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Mr Kikeo Singnavong, said at a workshop in Vientiane yesterday.

This project is focused on five tasks, including improving the development of new rice varieties that have nutritional value and can adapt to changes in the environment, improving the production and distribution system for rice seeds so that farmers can access them, and improving the fertility of paddy soil to increase productivity.

The project also focuses on improving the post-harvest storage and marketing system, and empowering Laos's academics, students and farmers, he said.

Mr Kikeo said he believes this project will be an important step towards developing the rice sector in Laos so that it can become stronger and is able to produce adequate food amid environmental changes.

In recent years, agricultural and forestry production has gradually made significant contributions to improvement of livelihoods and poverty reduction among Lao people.

Rice as the main staple crop in Laos and it is key to food security and employment. More than 80 percent of the country's farmers grow rice, which takes up about 60 percent of the cultivated area in Laos.

However, several challenges continue to affect rice production, including climate-vulnerable rice ecosystems, limited access to technology and inputs, high post-harvest losses, limited market access due to a fragmented rice value chain, and limited access to high quality rice seeds and other priority commodities.

The workshop's main goal was to bring together key stakeholders, relevant government agencies and international organisations to discuss and plan for collaborative and sustainable strategies to enable resilient, competitive and profitable agricultural development in Laos.

The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) is working to lead collaborative initiatives between governments and international partners in the region, and to address complex and interrelated challenges such as climate change, urbanisation, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, poverty, food safety, nutrition, and social inequity.

The Lao government aims to reach the goal of producing 4.2 million tonnes of rice in 2030, (2.5 million tonnes of rice for food security, 100,000 tonnes of seeds, 1.6 million tonnes for domestic processing and export). The Lao people are set to consume an average of 160 kg of rice per capita per year, accounting for almost 62 percent of the total amount of rice.

In order to ensure that the actual rice production meets the target, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, especially the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI), must actively work with relevant partners to develop a specific project to bring technology related to rice production to the production base, the NAFRI Director, Dr Chanthakhone Boualaphanh, said.

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China-Laos Railway facilitates fruit transport

VT Times, July 15, 2024

KUNMING (Xinhua) -- The China-Laos Railway has transported more than 100,000 tonnes of fruits this year as of Thursday, an increase of around 120 percent year on year, local railway authorities said.

On Thursday, a batch of 108 tonnes of durians from Thailand transported via the China-Laos Railway was unloaded at Kunming Hongyun international logistics port, surpassing the 100,000-tonne mark. It took only 29 hours for this batch of goods to reach the unloading area in Kunming, capital of southwest China's Yunnan Province, from the Vientiane south railway station, said China Railway Kunming Bureau Group Co., Ltd.

Thanks to streamlined customs clearance measures, tropical fruits from South Asia and Southeast Asia are continuously transported to China via this railway. Currently, the railway's cross-border customs clearance time has been reduced to no more than five hours, facilitating the transportation of fruits and vegetables, flowers and other goods that require swift transit, said the company.

The China-Laos Railway, a landmark project of high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, began operations in December 2021. The 1,035-km railway connects Kunming in China with Vientiane in Laos.

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Agriculture ministry boosts river fish stocks

VT Times, July 15, 2024

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry organised a ceremony on Saturday during which 400,000 fingerlings were released into the Vientiane Canal, to mark National Aquatic and Wildlife Day on July 13.

This supports the ministry's goal to add at least 64 million fish fingerlings and other aquatic species to the country's rivers this year, as part of sustainable fisheries management, species conservation, and the boosting of food resources.

The event took place in Hongsoupharb village, Xaysettha district, Vientiane, and was attended by Vice President Dr Bounthong Chitmany and the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Associate Prof. Dr Linkham Duangsavanh.

Speaking at the ceremony, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Mr Kikeo Singnavong said the event would help business operators and the general public to realise the importance of fish and other aquatic creatures as a viable sector of the economy, through the generation of income for families and the nation in sustainable ways.

Laos currently has more than state-run 50 centres and stations around the country that produce fish fingerlings.

There are also about 140 privately-owned fish farms producing fingerlings, while at least 400 fish farms provide about 290 million fish each year, accounting for 73 percent of the target figure for domestic supply.

In addition, there are more than 1,100 fish conservation zones in Laos, including 890 that are managed by local authorities.

The government plans to increase the supply of meat, eggs and fish to at least 577,000 tonnes by 2025, which will ensure that at least 73kg of protein rich food is available for each person annually.

Last year, the ministry oversaw the production of more than 220,000 tonnes of fish and other aquatic species, equivalent to 29 kilograms per person and sufficient to meet the needs of Lao consumers.

The government designated July 13 as National Aquatic and Wildlife Day in 1997 to encourage the active management and protection of fish and other aquatic species together with regional and international organisations.

This has seen the creation of fish conservation zones, better management of endangered fish species, and enhanced efforts to conserve other forms of aquatic life.

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Thailand promotes agricultural exports to Shanghai market

Nation, July 9, 2024

The discussion also included fostering cooperation in agricultural technology investment and having more Thai agricultural products going on show at major international exhibitions organised by the CCPIT Shanghai, which hosts over 700 events each year.

Thamanat stated that having more opportunities to attend international exhibitions in Shanghai would be an excellent way to promote new agricultural products in the Chinese market, such as coffee, premium rice, frozen mangosteen, and peeled pineapple.

Aside from improving agriculture product quality, Thamanat revealed plans to expand Thai agriculture products into online channels, particularly Chinese e-commerce platforms.

The move, he said, will help increase the number of options for Thai agriculture products to reach Chinese consumers while also developing Thai farmers' entrepreneurial skills.

Zhou Minhao also expressed his desire to increase Thai agricultural product imports, noting that Thailand's premium agricultural products are in high demand among Shanghai consumers.

China is already Thailand's largest agricultural export market.

In 2023, the Yangtze River Delta region imported 4,101,220 tonnes of Thai agricultural products worth more than US\$4.012 billion, providing a strong and consistent income for many Thai farmers.

Shanghai is also an important export market for Thai rubber, fishery products, and fruits, particularly durian, with Shanghai importing the most from Thailand, along with the other Yangtze River Delta provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Anhui.

The two parties also discussed how to facilitate business matching and encourage more Thai agricultural products to be exhibited at major trade fairs at the national and international levels. They also agreed to establish a trade and investment cooperation network in the agricultural sector.

To celebrate Thailand and China's 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2025, Thammanat proposed that Thai and Chinese officials use the two countries' silk products as a symbol of this special ceremony. The Chinese side agreed and is willing to continue organising this important event alongside Thailand.

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