Laos to increase rice export

Rice farmers eye larger export crop

The government hopes that by 2015 farmers will grow 400,000-500,000 tonnes of rice a year for export, of which 50,000 tonnes will be top grade rice.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry will focus on traditional top grade rice varieties such as black rice, kaynoi, takhiet, CR 203 and thaddokkham.

To reach this target, the ministry should increase rice yields in irrigated areas in both dry and wet seasons, Agriculture Department Deputy Director General, Mr. Kham Sanatem, told Vientiane Times recently.

The ministry will also encourage the allocation of more rice fields in suitable areas, especially in upland locations, said Mr. Kham.

In 2008, the ministry instructed the agriculture and forestry sector in each province to promote the system of rice intensification (SRI), which involves planting single rice seedlings in irrigated areas.

The method has benefited many farming families in the northern provinces especially Luang Prabang and Xayaboury, according to a report from the Livelihood Improvement Project for the Rural Poor in Laos with Increase of Rice Production.

Some farmers who planted rice by this system could produce about nine tonnes of rice a hectare, while the traditional method only produces 3-4 tonnes.

SRI cropped areas have increased from 1,437 hectares in the 2008-2009 dry season to 2,550 hectares in the wet season, and from 3,625 hectares in the 2009-2010 dry season to 5,000 hectares in the wet season.

It is believed this method will be further encouraged in other provinces, especially in irrigated areas, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Sitaheng Rasphone reported at a meeting recently.

The project is run by the Department of Irrigation and supported by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency.

Another important project is Enhancing Milled Rice Production (EMRIP), financed by the European Union, Helvetas and SNV, worth 2.3 million euros.

The project is running from January 2010 to October 2011 in cooperation with the ministries of Agriculture and Forestry and Industry and Commerce.

Project activities are taking place in Vientiane and in Borikhamxay, Khammuan, Savannakhet, Saravan and Champassak provinces.

The objective of EMRIP is to bring rice millers together with smallholder rice farmers to revitalise
this critical sector through improvements to quality rice production techniques and improved milling practices. The project recognises that the private and public sectors both have important roles to play. The project works with progressive and socially committed millers with existing links to smallholder rice farmers. Each participating miller will provide inputs, credit, training and extension to about 1,000 smallholder rice farmers and will pay a premium price for good quality paddy rice. In return for their co-investment with small farmers, millers will receive project support to improve milling facilities and equipment. The millers will also receive capacity building support from EMRIP to improve their business management skills. Improved milling efficiency and higher prices paid for good quality rice will provide millers with the surplus needed to continue supporting farmers and pay premium prices after the project ends. Government also has an important role to play in facilitating and supporting development of the rice sector. Lao farmers produced 3.26 million tonnes of rice in 2010, most of which was consumed within the country or exported along borders with neighbouring countries.

Source: Vientiane Times
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