



# THE ASEAN AND IRRI PARTNERSHIP

*Rice is crucial to the economic health and food security of all ASEAN countries.*

*A huge portion of the global rice supply is produced, eaten, and traded in the rice-rich ASEAN region.*

*Consider these:*

- *Thailand and Vietnam are two of the world's largest exporters of rice.*
- *Indonesia and the Philippines are two of the world's largest importers of rice.*
- *Myanmar is preparing to re-assume its place as a major exporter of rice.*
- *Singapore relies on trade for the high-quality rice its population needs.*

## History of collaboration

In the wake of the 2007-2009 food price crisis, ASEAN leaders adopted the ASEAN Integrated Food Security (AIFS) Framework and the Strategic Plan of Action on ASEAN Food Security (SPA-FS) at the 14th ASEAN Summit in 2009, for which the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) was tasked to propose a Rice Action Plan. That plan has been integrated into the Global Rice Science Partnership (GRiSP), a single, global strategy for rice research led by IRRI.

During the Thirty-Third Meeting of the ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry (33rd AMAF) in Jakarta in October 2011, the ministers stated that they "supported GRiSP, led by IRRI, as it represents an important expansion and development of 2008's ASEAN Rice Action Plan."

In the 2013 AMAF meeting in Malaysia, the ministers made note of the contribution of GRiSP toward ensuring that rice is affordable to the poor, profitable to farmers, is of good quality, and nutritious. It was decided then that the Senior Officials Meeting of AMAF will work with IRRI to secure the resources needed to implement GRiSP across the ASEAN.

In the September 2014 AMAF meeting in Myanmar, the ASEAN Secretariat and senior ministers were tasked to cooperate closely with IRRI. All ASEAN member countries were also encouraged to continue bilateral programs with IRRI.

Following strong AMAF endorsement, options for

ASEAN and IRRI collaboration can be organized under the following areas: **strategic technical assistance, building the next generation of rice scientists** and **enhanced regional cooperation**.

## Strategic technical assistance

IRRI provides technical and policy support to the member-nations of the ASEAN in the development of their respective rice sectors. Agriculture ministries of several countries have worked with IRRI in drafting rice sector strategies, guided by the peculiarities of each country's experience, global trends, and more than 50 years of IRRI's study and development of higher-yielding and sturdy rice varieties, technologies, crop management practices, and policy advice.

IRRI has been a key global hub for developing and disseminating high-yielding and resilient rice varieties, advanced cultivation technologies, and educational programs and tools to its national agricultural research extension system partners across ASEAN and the world.



The development and implementation of the rice sector strategies are coordinated by the Council for Partnership on Rice Research in Asia or CORRA (<http://corra.irri.org/>).

## A new generation of ASEAN rice scientists

IRRI has proposed that ASEAN member states invest in a broad suite of education and extension

initiatives related to rice, including Ph.D. scholarships, a certification course under the Rice Breeding Academy, and a competency-based program to build professional extension capacity, combined with tools and mobile applications to facilitate agricultural extension.

The ASEAN Technical Working Group on Agricultural Research for Development (ATWGARD), in May 2015 in Ho Chi Minh City, agreed to merge IRRI's proposal into the ASEAN Agricultural Innovations and Research and Development Fund (AIRDF). The AIRDF had been proposed at an earlier meeting by Malaysia, and approved by the ATWGARD.

Malaysia and IRRI are now working together to draft the operating details and guidelines for the AIRDF, covering: (a) contributions to AIRDF by ASEAN members, other countries (i.e., Plus 3, ASEAN Dialogue Partners), and donors; (b) allocation of available funds across rice and other agricultural commodities; and (c) allocation of funds to degree and non-degree scholarships, and professional training; and (d) governance, administrative, finance and accounting arrangements, including the respective roles of the ASEAN Secretariat, ATWGARD, and IRRI.

AMAF likewise endorsed increased participation of the region's budding researchers in IRRI's training and scholarship programs and capacity building initiatives.

IRRI has suggested the establishment of a regional capacity-building fund to support the training and upgrading of ASEAN rice scientists and policymakers. The fund will manage contributions from ASEAN member-states, the ASEAN+3, and development and dialogue partners.

### Enhanced regional cooperation

In an integrated ASEAN, shared security in food and nutrition requires stronger regional agreements that will facilitate reliable rice reserves, especially during emergency situations. Experts at IRRI say that durable regional agreements on rice production and supply will shield the region from global food crises that may emerge from upheavals in market conditions.

Multilateral cooperation is indeed crucial in curbing volatility in rice and food prices. The governments of ASEAN member countries must share information on cross-country stocks and prospects that enable rational, moderate, and longer-term assessments of supplies and prices.

Such dialogue will underlie international understanding and assurance that rice-exporting and -importing countries have shared interest in stable, if higher, rice prices. It is likely that food prices will be higher than experienced since the mid-1970s, and bodes well for farmers and for long-term, higher total global supplies.

These and other implications of an ASEAN economic bloc are strategic options that experts at IRRI—scientists, economists, and market specialists—could provide assistance to governments and policymakers on.

### International Rice Research Institute (IRRI)

The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) is the world's premier research organization dedicated to reducing poverty and hunger through rice science; improving the health and welfare of rice farmers and consumers; and protecting the rice-growing environment for future generations. IRRI is an independent, nonprofit research and educational institute founded in 1960 by the Ford and Rockefeller foundations, with support from the Philippine government. The institute, headquartered in Los Baños, Philippines, has offices in 15 rice-growing countries in Asia and Africa, and about 1,180 staff members of some 40 nationalities.

Working with in-country partners, IRRI develops advanced rice varieties that yield more grain and better withstand pests and disease as well as flooding, drought, and other destructive effects of climate change. More than half of the rice area in Asia is planted to IRRI-bred varieties or their progenies. The institute develops new and improved methods and technologies that enable farmers to manage their farms profitably and sustainably, and recommends rice varieties and agricultural practices suitable to particular farm conditions as well as consumer preferences. IRRI assists national agricultural research and extension systems in formulating and implementing country rice sector strategies.

### Contact

V. Bruce J. Tolentino  
Deputy Director General for Communication and Partnerships  
International Rice Research Institute  
b.tolentino@irri.org  
+63 (2) 580 5600 ext. 2705 or 2213  
+63 (917) 812 4383 (mobile)

