

MEDIA RELEASE

AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY
VIENTIANE



04 July 2014

New Australian program to support Lao and Cambodian rice farmers

A new Australian agricultural research program has been launched to help farmers in lowland rice growing areas to use machinery and diversify their farming to reduce costs and increase production.

The four-year AU\$1.5 million (or 11 billion Kip) initiative of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) is being implemented by the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI) and the Cambodian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI).

“In the past decade, constraints to intensifying and diversifying production have become apparent including labour scarcity, increasing wage rates, poor post-harvest handling and lack of value-adding activities,” said NAFRI Director General Dr Bounthong Bouahom at the project inception meeting in Vientiane on 3 July.

Dr. Bounthong and the Australian project leader Professor Shu Fukai, of the University of Queensland gathered with the researchers from NAFRI, other international research for development institutes, and CARDI.

“Rain fed lowland rice, grown once a year in the wet season is the backbone of agricultural production in Laos, but is largely subsistence-oriented with low productivity, delivering low quality rice to local consumers,” Dr Bounthong said.

“Household income would be increased and rural poverty reduced if quality rice and non-rice crops could be successfully grown” he said.

The cooperative project will target eight sites in each country which contrast in the availability of irrigation, agriculture services and businesses. Altogether, about 400 farmers and 40 small businesses will participate with researchers in testing and evaluating alternative farming systems including livestock and the integration of forages and crops.

“Introducing machinery suitable for lowland rice growing areas will help farmers reduce costs, produce higher grade rice and grow more crops each year,” Australian Ambassador to Lao PDR John Williams told the meeting of researchers.

The aim of these joint efforts will be to provide economic benefits through adoption of labour-saving technologies, diversification into high-value crops, and higher prices for quality produce.

“Australia remains a partner committed to helping the Lao PDR to achieve economic development goals in agriculture, which engages many people, and in other priority areas,” Mr Williams said.



Australian Ambassador to Lao PDR (seated centre) and NAFRI Director General Dr Bounthong Bouahom (seated at right) with participants at the program launch.

Media Enquiries:

Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR)

C/o: Australian Embassy

Vientiane, Lao PDR

Tel.: 021 353800