

Int'l wholesalers praise Thailand's potential as regional agricultural hub

Members of the World Union of Wholesale Markets (WUWM), the global association of agricultural and food wholesalers representing over 40 countries, recently gathered in Bangkok to hold their first-ever meeting in Southeast Asia.



Hosted by the Thai Agricultural Wholesale Market Association (TAWMA) and ASEAN's largest agricultural wholesale market, Talaad Thai, the conference was attended by more than 300 delegates who met to discuss the integration of technology into wholesale market operations.

The Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), Qu Dongyu said in his keynote address to the group that “there is an urgent need to transform our agri-food systems to be more efficient, more resilient and more substantial,” and that “wholesale markets are a key leverage point for this transformation.”

According to FAO estimates, world food production must increase by around 70% to feed a world population projected to exceed nine billion by 2050.

Pradit Phataraprasit, President of the Thai Agricultural Wholesale Market Association and the owner of Talaad Thai wholesale market, said, “While the agricultural sector accounts for under 10% of Thailand's Gross Domestic Product, Thailand is still one of the world's largest producers and exporters of rice, sugar, pineapple, shrimps, palm oil, cassava products and canned tuna,” and that Thailand's total exports of agricultural and processed agricultural produce were valued at around US\$50 billion, or over Bht 1.8 trillion.

“There is a huge and unrealised upside for Thailand in this sector if we can increase efficiency through the expanded use of technology in farming and agriculture because we have already been able to succeed globally despite relatively low productivity and under-mechanisation,” he said.

Phataraprasit noted that Thailand's substantial investments in transport infrastructure during the past years, its central location in the region, as well as its 15 FTAs with 19 countries in and outside of the region, strongly reinforce Thailand's competitiveness and position it to benefit greatly from the growth of global demand for food and agricultural produce.

Paopoom Rojanasakul, Deputy Minister of Finance, another keynote speaker, said, “It is a top priority for the government to boost the economy and engage with international partners,” and that to facilitate the development of the wholesale sector as well as other businesses, the Ministry of Finance is aiming to enhance the tax system and make it more streamlined. He said that logistical efficiency is essential for Thailand to be an agriculture and food hub, and the government would continue its emphasis on investing in transport infrastructure. He noted that, already, “the trend of foreign investment in this sector from the USA, EU, and ASEAN is growing.”

As a part of the conference programme, the delegates visited the Talaad Thai wholesale market, which is located on a 543-rai site in Pathum Thani, where they observed operations as well as sampled seasonal Thai fruits.

Stephane Layani, Chairman of the World Union of Wholesale Markets (WUWM), expressed his excitement at seeing the rapid integration of technology into wholesale markets around the world and said that he hoped for Thailand and other regional countries to be a part of that trend.

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