

Thai communities lead the way in value-added rice cultivation

Thailand's Rice Department is intensifying efforts to transform premium rice into high-value products by supporting rice production centres nationwide to develop processing capabilities, improving rice breeds, and upgrading product brands.



This initiative aims to meet rising global demand for rice, as many countries continue to prioritise food security.

According to the Trade Policy and Strategy Office, Thailand's rice exports in June reached 1.02 million tonnes, a 78.7% increase year on year (YoY). The first half of 2023 saw exports of 5.08 million tonnes, up 25% YoY, generating US\$3.30 billion (118.67 billion baht).

Despite being among the world's top five rice exporters and the top 10 producers, Thailand faces challenges including limited farming land, declining workforce, and lower productivity per area.

The US Department of Agriculture reports that Thailand's 2023 rice production contributed approximately 4% to global output, trailing China, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Vietnam.

To address these challenges, experts suggest rice-exporting countries must implement sustainable cultivation practices and invest in agricultural research and development to increase productivity and climate resilience.

Showcasing success stories

The Rice Department recently hosted a special press trip on August 7-8 to visit two successful social enterprises in Phayao and Chiang Rai, northern provinces known for excellent paddy fields.

Owat Yinglap, director of the Rice Product Development Division, emphasised the importance of creating model rice fields and social enterprises to inspire and encourage knowledge-sharing nationwide.



"This approach strengthens farmer groups and teaches them to add value throughout the rice production system, from processing to waste reduction and production innovation," he said.

In Phayao, the Soisri village community grows five organic rice varieties – jasmine, brown, red jasmine, black glutinous, and riceberry. Their "Soisri" brand is known for superior taste and quality, with products ranging from bagged rice to chocolate-coated crispy puffed rice.

Chunyanut Phrawisat, leader of the Soisri enterprise, revealed that 1,000 villagers from 200 households cultivate rice organically on 1,000 to 2,000 rai (160 to 320 hectares). Last year's yield reached 50 tonnes, selling at 15,000 baht per tonne.



The community has won national awards and secured distribution in modern trade outlets like Tops Daily and The Mall Department Store.

Model community in Chiang Rai

In Chiang Rai's Chiang Saen district, the Sri Don Mun village demonstrates successful rice production and processing. Covering 238 rai (38 hectares), the community has earned Good Agricultural Practice certification, supplying high-quality seeds to five rice-growing areas.

Tanuwat Janfong, head of the Sri Don Mun Community Rice Centre, explained that 38 villagers from 45 households manage 1,037 rai (166 hectares), producing 250 tonnes last year at 11,000 baht per tonne.



The centre is developing innovative products like craft beer from sticky rice and exploring rice-based spirits and teas. They also produce vacuum-packed rice and various items from rice straw.

"We're also utilising technology to add value to rice by-products, producing vacuum-packed rice under the "Sri Don Mun" brand, as well as various items from rice straw," he said.

Future outlook

Piyapan Srikoom, director of Chiang Rai Rice Research Center, emphasised the need for more partnerships and collaboration from both the public and private sectors to further improve the country's rice production and rice processing.

When asked what the most difficult challenge was, he agreed with Chunyanut and Tanuwat's observations about a lack of new younger farmer generation to inherit their local rice industry.

Other challenges include the need for knowledge-sharing in marketing and branding so that local farmers can apply their knowledge to develop rice-processing products and sell them directly through various online platforms.

Owat concluded that the department's initiative showcases Thailand's commitment to modernising its rice industry, supporting local communities, and developing innovative, high-value rice products.

By fostering these model communities, the department aims to create a more resilient and sustainable rice sector throughout the country, meeting the evolving demands of global consumers for high-quality, organic rice products.
