



**NATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY ORGANIZATION  
LIAISON OFFICE APO, JAPAN**

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**BRIEF REPORT ON PRODUCTIVITY TALK ON  
COVID -19 IMPACT ON FARMERS IN ASIA**

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**Presentation/ Discussions by Dr. Siang Hee Tan**

**Consumer Demand Aspect and Purchase Behavior**

COVID – 19 crises is rapidly altering how people can earn a living and access food. The whole value chain and supply chain has been disrupted due to shut down of the restaurant industry. If you look at the ground the price of rice as the governments are not allowing the export of rice. Traders expect rice export prices to remain high as Vietnam limited rice exports to around 400,000 metric tons for April 2020. The Vietnam government will review the rice export restriction again on April 25<sup>th</sup> to determine the allowed volume for may 2020. On the other hand Thai rice exporters are reportedly facing labor shortage in their export facilities, particularly migrant workers from neighboring countries that are enforcing the lockdown during the COVID 19 outbreak.

**Food Supply Chain**

As if the lock down remain on and off by different governments, this will increase turmoil and therefore, we need to insure that the supply chain of different items remain intact. If due to lock down the farmers cannot allowed to work, the prices will drastically increase. Vegetable supplies sent to Singapore every day via the causeway have decreased by 30 % due to movement control order, which as a result has broken supply chain. COVID-19 lock down is having a devastating effect on livelihoods. The supply chain woes force Cameron to dump greens, Lazade (E-Commerce) steps in and connect them to farmers. If farmers are producing less food, items the prices will drastically increase for the consumer. Due to this rush of lock down, the borders and limit interaction during this challenging time is so critical that the measures to address one crisis do not unintentionally create a new crises.

**Distribution of Food**

The concentration and distribution of food insecurity by severity differs greatly across the regions of the world. Worldwide around 704 million people are facing severe food insecurity and therefore could ultimately a new crises would arise as food is actually not a luxury but it is a necessity. Therefore, farmers will continue providing quality food and maintaining safety at top priority. Urgent increase in food

availability from smallholder farms is necessary while ensuring and enhancing safety. Productivity is very important to reduce post harvest crop losses, improve food stocks along value chain and addressing basic energy needs of smallholder farms and rural households.

Smallholder farms can play a vital role as in Asia 80 % are small farmers with the age of 60 which could benefit the availability of food if the governments provide them safe transport and other required items like post and pre harvest essential items like seed etc. Thus by providing a good supply chain the problem can be irradiated. With an immediate support as identified “Essential Critical Service” need to ensure from port authorities, to provincial governments enforcement officer, permit issuing authorities etc. An aligned support to farmers could enable them to produce and to support national agriculture economy and to ensure the country population is assured safe, affordable and nutritional food.

Government largely exempting food and agriculture sector are adopting and driving food production, but disconnect between policy decisions and on the ground realities persist. The fragile nature of food security in Asia is now clear opportunity how to drive home necessity of making smallholders as productive and protective and thus could turning the crises into opportunity.

### **Recommendations**

The regional stakeholder’s COVID 19 to do list is to ensure demand from markets and supply chain reaches farmers so that they can meet the needs in a timely manner, may include the following:

- By exempting agriculture as an essential service, providing necessary equipment and training can secure the safety of the farming community.
- Adapting regulations and policies to deliver timely agriculture inputs, raw materials and technologies to farmers.
- Encouraging innovation development through agile and flexible regulatory approach.
- Fast tract registration introduction of agricultural innovative solutions.
- Cross border sharing of science based, predictable regulations to promote digital agriculture applications, utility of drones, breeding innovation etc.

### **Questions & Answers**

**Question 1** What is the likely impact of the lock down in the coming season of cultivation and production?

**Answer** Indian Prime Minister has provided green channel for agriculture and 70 to 80% of input supply being distribute to all provincial governments. Indian government is also doing good in the COVID lockdown by increasing testing. Therefore, there would not be panic buying. Collectively government is saying that we have enough food and everyone can buy, but in the back end continue to work well and to support the farmers. In Asia alone there are over 100 million farmers and if 30 % of these farmers cannot get their produce to market, it means that 30 million farmers will not be able to produce, which would be a scary number, so we should protect the farmers that they can produce.

**Question 2** How perishable goods should be handled in COVID-19 situation.

**Answer** Governments are opening chain to smallholder farmers to start the product. Smallholder farmers do not have the facility in Asia to do post harvest management. This is the

mobilization time across many countries and opening up national facilities to help farmer keep safe. Secretary Da from Philippine Government is a champion and at the forefront of this driving so that they ensure farmers can produce effectively and going a go through market. It is a wakeup call for many governments and I am impressed that many governments are supporting the farmers and allowing the farmers proper input in the timely manner out to the marketing level.

**Question 3** What do you think is the most critical productivity driver.

**Answer** Productivity has many components and not only having seeds will resolve this. It is the whole agriculture practice, which needs to be step up, so that how to protect these plants using IPM to further reduce its cost and then gets GAP certification. So that we can really enhance with backhand technology in buying good seeds so seeds in genetic is the underlying properly to go effectively and good protection products. Using under IPM context products, good maintenance can give value to the food and to sell with higher and better quality price.

**Question 4** Will the agricultural input supplies be able to meet the demand of the farmers soon after the COVID is over?

**Answer** During January, February, March period China and many other countries were continually producing for the market. China did very well in protecting its workers to get back its workers to operation, so we are not seeing a lot of destruction in terms of manufacturing site. Generally, the market is able to supply for this in the coming season. Are we able to bring the products from the part to the dealer and down to the farm, that was the critical path, that is why we have to work very closely with the government to make sure that green lane, that if we cannot get material for the farmers to groom vegetable for the consumer then it doesn't work. If the farmers cannot get input we are not able to grow because 35 days for vegetable, 60 days for corn, 138 days for rice. For the coming season we are very much intact and farmers would have the technology and increase for them.

**Question 5** How farmers can cope with impact like this and turning to new opportunities?

**Answer** Going back to the innovation, how do we digitize agriculture, how do we tact date texture for farmers. If put a drone out, the farmers will not go out for spray, the drone will do it and safe his time, safe his cost and safe his exposure. So that is one technology and easy technology, if correct regulations has been put in place for them to be deployed. China has been very supportive, Japan, Korea, Taiwan many countries are moving in, but we needed to be accelerated so that the farmers can adopt the technology even as soon as next season to benefit from it. So the other technology innovation from seeds to crop protection, needs to be happen by accelerated pipeline. The farmer need new technology to cope with COVID, before the crops are destroyed. As COVID is just a situation for human, but beyond that consistently the farmers are being challenged by climate and by pits disease etc. so they continue needs a way to produce sufficiently and effectively and this is the chance that Governments can come together and accelerate introduction of new technology from which the farmers can get benefit.