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สำนักงานปลัดกระทรวงเกษตรและสหกรณ์

How sustainable agriculture can help Thailand cope with climate change



Thailand faces the grim prospects of a drought in the first half of the year and floods in the second half, inflicting losses of around 56 billion baht on the economy, according to Kasikorn Research.

The weather factors would inflict damage on the economy in terms of productivity and quality, resulting in negative sentiment on people's quality of life and economic growth, the research said, which throws the spotlight on sustainable agricultural practices.

Of the total losses, damage to Thai agriculture is estimated at 4.2 billion baht, especially from the impact of drought on rice harvests, sugarcane, cassava, corn and fruits, according to its analysis released in March this year. Sustainable agriculture practice is likely a solution for Thailand to maintain food security and boost competitiveness in the global market, as well as cope with extreme weather events triggered by the El Nino phenomenon, according to experts.

The non-profit environmental campaign organisation Greenpeace Thailand told The Nation in an exclusive interview on Monday that El Nino was triggered by a rise in surface temperatures of the eastern Pacific Ocean, leading to a phase of planetary warming.

The natural phenomenon, which brings reduced rainfall to Southeast Asia and southern Australia, is expected to last until May or June next year, said country director Tara Buakamsri. After that, an increase in rainfall could occur due to La Nina, he added

Ensuring agricultural diversity

Tara pointed out that Thai agriculture was vulnerable to El Nino due to the farmers' reliance on weather conditions and government agencies' failure to boost the sector's resilience to extreme weather events.

“Thailand has fallen behind Vietnam in rice exports due to the Vietnamese government's vision to boost the agriculture industry's resilience,” he said, adding that Vietnamese rice had been developed to tolerate extreme weather events like floods.

To tackle these issues, Tara advised the government to promote agricultural diversity, focusing on crop rotation to sustainably maintain the ecosystem of each agricultural land.

He said smart agriculture solutions like drones and satellite images could be employed to boost crop yield, but he emphasised that local farmers should be allowed to determine which crops should be grown to maintain the ecosystem.

“Smart agriculture is a new trend, but I do not think technology alone can make agriculture sustainable,” he said. “We should support local farmers to ensure better income for them.”

According to the US Department of Agriculture, Vietnam is expected to produce 27 million tonnes of rice this year, up 0.2% year on year. Thailand, meanwhile, is expected to produce 20 million tonnes, down 4.4% year on year.

The Thai Rice Exporters Association told media outlet “Prachachat Turakij” in February that Vietnam had gained an edge in rice exports due to its cheaper price — US\$655 (24,289 baht) per tonne compared to \$690 (25,587 baht) of Thai rice.

More importantly, Vietnam enjoys more than double the rice yield, of 970 kilograms per rice plot, compared to Thailand’s 450 kilograms, the association added.

Source: <https://www.nationthailand.com/sustainability/esg/40037538>