

### Highlight on farmers, agribusiness and rural development in Laos



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### China on track to become Laos' top trading partner

VT Times, February 23, 2024

The government expects that China will soon be its top trading partner, with Chinese companies investing in 17 projects worth US\$986 million since the start of this year.

More trade with China will be a boost for social and economic development as well as creating jobs for people in Laos, according to a report delivered at a meeting of the Laos-China Cooperation Committee in Vientiane on February 21-22.

The annual meeting highlighted the extent of cooperation in trade and technical fields between Laos and China last year and discussed plans for this year.

The meeting highlighted the outstanding achievements of last year with respect to the rollout of projects funded by grants from China, including construction of a railway operations training college, construction of schools, and other initiatives designed to spur development in Laos.

China has also provided vehicles and equipment to support Laos' hosting of Asean meetings this year.

In terms of trade, the value of bilateral trade reached US\$7.09 billion in 2023, an increase of 26.6 percent compared to the same period in 2022, when the value was recorded at US\$5.68 billion.

Laos' exports to China were valued at US\$3.74 billion, an increase of 11 percent, while the value of goods imported by Laos from China was estimated at US\$3.35 billion, an increase of 48 percent.

Statistics show there was a continuous increase in the value of trade between Laos and China in the past year.

China is the main export market for agricultural produce grown in Xayaboury, where provincial authorities are overseeing the cultivation of crops for sale within Laos as well as for export.

The increased sale of goods to China has improved conditions for farmers and created more jobs.

According to the Agriculture and Forestry Department in Xayaboury province, more crops are being grown on a larger area to help bolster food security. Farmers are growing more crops and raising more livestock to reduce the amount of imported fruit and vegetables.

The department is encouraging farmers to lead their communities by example by growing crops all year round in order to boost yields.

Provincial authorities are working with business owners to exploit the potential for crop cultivation and contracts have been signed on the sale of specific products to other countries. More than 30 types of product are being exported to China and more than 10 to Thailand.

Farmers in Xayaboury are selling seven types of crop to China, with Chinese companies advising farmers to grow cassava, sweetcorn, pears, tea, beans, vegetables and watermelon.

## Germany gives boost to land title registration

VT Times, February 23, 2024

The Lao and German governments have launched the “Land Management Project for Laos” to assist the Lao government with land sector reform, with the ultimate aim of speeding up the issuing of land titles.

The land management project is funded by a grant of 7 million Euro from the Federal Republic of Germany through the KfW German Development Bank.

The aim of the project is to accelerate the systematic land registration of eligible residential areas and agricultural land as well as the land titling process in the provinces of Huaphan, Xieng Khuang, Oudomxay and Xayaboury.

This is expected to contribute to effective and efficient land utilisation for the benefit of all citizens and the environment.

The project will take place over three years and support the issuing of 125,000 titles, according to the KfW German Development Bank.

Three main components are proposed: 1) Improved infrastructure and equipment for office facilities at provincial and district levels; 2) Scaling-up systematic land registration; and 3) Training and capacity building.

The project will support the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment in its goal to accelerate nationwide systematic land registration and is one component of the Lao Land Administration Sector Programme that is coordinated by the ministry.

As the Project Executing Agency, the ministry's Department of Land is responsible for the delivery of intended project outputs and the outcome of the project.

The Department of Land will be supported by the GOPA-Lao Consulting Group (LCG) as the Implementation Consultant providing capacity building and on-the-job training on administrative and financial project management to ensure efficient and effective project implementation.

Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Dr Saynakhone Inthavong said “Increased private sector participation with high technical standards could significantly reduce surveying and mapping costs for the public sector.”

“This approach will facilitate achieving the project's objective of land surveying and map creation. It also enables the rapid integration of nationwide land data into a centralised database. Successful models from these pilots can then be scaled nationwide.”

Head of Division, Urban Development and Mobility, East and South-East Asia (KfW), Dr Wolfram Erhardt, said “The overall objective of the project is not only to issue titles, but to enhance the capacities of government agencies in the provinces in the systematic and appropriate use and maintenance of registration tools and methods.”

“This includes improved skills in conflict resolution, community communication, and arbitration. This shall enable the Department of Land and its provincial and district offices to continue with the titling process.”

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## Bolaven Coffee and Tea Festival kicks off in Champassak

VT Times, Feb 23, 2024

The Bolaven Coffee and Tea Festival is being held in Pakxong district of Champassak province during February 21-23 to promote the production of sustainable agricultural products and the trademark coffee of the region.

The festival also aims to raise the value and status of the coffee of Champassak province in the world market in order to promote the growers, processors and business operators in the coffee sector. It further aims to stimulate the development of the cultivation and production process of coffee in Laos, especially in the plateau area.

The festival is being attended by leaders from Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand.

The head of Champassak province's Industry and Commerce Department, Mr Boumyadeth Thong savanh, said, the Bolaven coffee, tea and agricultural goods festival has 54 booths set up by domestic and foreign organisations. They include coffee and craft associations, industrial plants, banks, One District One Product groups, and companies selling coffee products within the province, other provinces and abroad.

The festival features agriculture and handicrafts products, especially silk and cotton items, tea and coffee.

This festival is expected to foster business cooperation and exchanges between buyers and sellers of goods from Laos and neighbouring countries.

In addition, there will be seminars on important topics such as the Lao coffee assessment seminar 2024, promotion of farmers to raise the efficiency of coffee production, and young people becoming professional baristas to raise the quality and efficiency of Lao coffee production. There will also be activities such as roasting and tasting of coffee.

Provinces in southern Laos have numerous attractions for tourists, both nature-based and historical. Champassak is one such province and its scenic beauty attracts many travellers.

Among the natural wonders are Khonphapheng, Tad Fan and Tad Yeuang waterfalls, and activities range from adventure treks and ziplining to rest and recuperation in the lap of nature. Visitors can also enjoy produce from the Bolaven Plateau, including its famed coffee.

Tea and coffee grown on the Bolaven Plateau have surged in popularity internationally, with the number and variety of products constantly increasing.

The provincial Information, Culture and Tourism Department is expecting at least 330,700 foreign tourists to visit Champassak this year, generating revenues of about US\$64 million.

In 2025, the province plans to attract at least 350,900 tourists, generating revenues of US\$68 million.

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## **Laos opens Investment Tracking Application system**

**VT Times, Feb 28, 2024.**

The Ministry of Planning and Investment has officially opened the Investment Tracking Application system to track and monitor investment permit applications and comments on related sectors.

The ceremony for the launch of the system, held last week, was chaired by the Deputy Minister of Planning and Investment, Dr Sthabandith Insisienmay.

Speaking at the ceremony, Dr Sthabandith said the Investment Tracking Application is a tool that can help monitor comments and fast-track investment applications within the specified period.

"This integration is to increase efficiency by offering a one-stop investment service which is faster, modern and transparent. We sincerely hope that all relevant sectors will cooperate in improving the internal coordination mechanisms so that the system can be used to research and comment on investment requests in the most effective way," said Dr Sthabandith.

The Investment Tracking Application system aims to promote domestic and foreign investments in the private sector, which have contributed significantly towards the socio-economic development of Laos. Improving the efficiency of the one-door office service is another important way to fast-track investment permit applications.

To address economic and financial difficulties, the five-year national socio-economic development plan IX has charted a comprehensive transformation plan that promotes efficient investments. They effectively drive the economy and protect the environment by minimising the use of natural resources and ensuring maximum benefits in line with sustainable development goals.

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## **Action escalated to tackle wildlife crime**

**VT Times, 29 Feb 2024.**

State officials and development partners are joining forces and taking bold steps to intensify investigations into wildlife crime and bring criminals to justice.

The move, which involves the Department of Forest Inspection under the Ministry of Agriculture and

Forestry in collaboration with partners, is in response to concerns voiced by the international community about the extent of the illicit trafficking of forest resources including wildlife in Laos, especially the sale of protected animal species for financial gain and money laundering.

Speaking at a training workshop on the issue, the Deputy Director of the Department of Forest Inspection, Mr Khamfeung Sirivong, said the department is working with World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-Laos) in a project to suppress wildlife trafficking in Laos.

Project officials are partnering with neighbouring countries in a bid to stem the illicit trade in wildlife. A Memorandum of Understanding covering the period 2021-2025 was signed between the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, represented by the Department of Forest Inspection, and WWF-Laos.

Mr Khamfeung said the investigation of wildlife crime is very challenging, and training is required for the officials involved about the ways in which certain species are bought and sold for the purposes of money laundering, so that cases can be submitted to the courts for prosecution.

Conservation Director of WWF-Laos, Dr Akchousanh Rasphone, said the organisation has observed that the government is attempting to tackle the problem of the wildlife trade and to build a solid foundation for law enforcement networks at the central and local levels in an effort to stamp out corruption in relation to wildlife crime.

So far, it has proved very difficult to convict anyone of wildlife crimes and to prove that large sums of money changed hands.

Dr Akchousanh said that since 2019, WWF-Laos has tried to source funds from a variety of external donors and to hire experts to strengthen the work of the government departments operating in this field.

Through ongoing training, forest inspection officials will learn about the financing of the wildlife trade and how to carry out investigations into underhand dealings, including the use of cryptocurrency.

They will also learn about other complex aspects of the trade and how these are disguised, and familiarise themselves with strategies to prevent and intercept illicit dealings, and prosecute those involved.

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## **Wing Bank, Wing Commerce, Amru Rice and CACC join up to boost Kingdom's rice production**

phnompenhpost, 29 February 2024

Farmers now have convenient access to a one-stop solution, providing financial and digital marketplaces, to enhance their farming businesses and improve their livelihoods.

Wing Bank, WingCommerce, Amru Rice and the Cambodian Agriculture Cooperative Corporation Plc (CACC) have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on enhancing rice production and promoting sustainable agriculture in the Kingdom.

The MoU was signed during the 4th Sustainable Agriculture Summit in Phnom Penh on February 28, 2024.

The event brought together influential stakeholders from the private sector and the government for discussions on Regenerative Agriculture for Agro-Environmental Sustainability of Intensive Agricultural Systems in Cambodia, attracting around 350 participants.

"Our focus is on leveraging technology to bridge the gap between agriculture stakeholders and digital banking services," said Manu Rajan, CEO of Wing Inter Logistic Technologies Co, Ltd.

"The Wingagri platform is designed to empower stakeholders in the agriculture sector by providing efficient and accessible solutions."

The transformative partnership allows Amru Rice and CACC – along with their members as farmers and agricultural cooperatives – to utilise the Wingagri platform, expanding their market reach nationwide, and secure up to 100 million riel to boost farming production from Wing Bank without the need for collateral.

“This partnership is not merely a business collaboration – it is a commitment to the heart of Cambodia,” said Hor Bunthe, Deputy CEO of Wing Bank.

“We are sowing the seeds of sustainable practices, and with the right financial support, we are nurturing a future where every farmer thrives.”

Amru Rice, with a focus on organic and sustainable food products, has since 2013 consistently promoted a supply-by-contract model with farmers organised as agricultural cooperatives.

Nearly 30,000 metric tonnes of organic rice are supplied by 6,000 farmers in some 35 cooperatives, with an additional 16,000 households across 16 provinces engaged in sustainable rice cultivation via the AIMS project run in coordination with the Cambodian Rice Federation.

Amru Rice plans to scale up efforts by collaborating with 16,000 families over 25,000 hectares by 2024, reaching 100,000 hectares with 50,000 families by 2030.

“We are delighted to be part of this collaborative effort to boost Cambodia's rice production and promote sustainable agriculture,” said Okhna Song Saran, Chairman and CEO of Amru Rice.

“Through digital marketplace support, accessing platforms like Wingagri and financial solutions from Wing Bank, we aim to empower agricultural cooperatives and stakeholders in the agricultural value chain.”

CACC, with Amru as a stake-holder, operates on a “Producer-Public-Private Partnership” concept, facilitating the trade, storage and management of agricultural crops procured from farmers, cooperatives and contract farming agreements.

“Through this partnership, we are enabling access to cutting-edge solutions like the Wingagri platform and vital financing from Wing Bank,” said Kann Kunthy, Managing Director of CACC.

“This collaborative effort is a testament to our dedication to advancing sustainable agriculture and ensuring the prosperity of every farmer.”

The move represents a significant step towards enhancing Cambodia's agriculture, fostering sustainability and empowering stakeholders across the value chain, with the integration of technology and accessible financial solutions paving the way for a thriving and environmentally conscious rice production industry.

<https://www.phnompenhpost.com/business/wing-bank-wing-commer...>

## **Vietnam Has High Hopes for Increasing Food Exports to China**

VOA, 26 Feb 2024.

Vietnam expects to increase its agricultural exports to China this year as the two countries have agreed to review regulations opening the market to greater quantities of poultry, fish and fruits.

Pham Thi Huan, the founder of Ba Huan Corp. in Ho Chi Minh City, one of Vietnam's largest poultry and egg suppliers, said she would welcome greater access to China's market of 1.4 billion consumers.

“My company has not exported chicken meat or eggs into China mainland. Lifting this ban will open doors to my company and many Vietnamese livestock farmers,” Pham told VOA Vietnamese by phone

February 21.

In 2023, livestock products accounted for only 1% of the \$12.2 billion in agricultural, forestry and aquatic products exported to China, according to the official news outlet Vietnam Plus. Exports of milk and milk products account for 93% of the total export value of Vietnam's livestock products to China, according to the minister of agriculture and rural development.

Tran Thanh Nam, Vietnam's deputy minister of agriculture and rural development, announced after his five-day trip to China last month that China had agreed to consider lifting the ban on poultry imports from Vietnam, the official Vietnam News and Vietnam Agriculture reported on January 31.

### **High demand for meat**

Nam said that China's consumer demand for meat products is worth about \$400 billion annually, and there is great potential for exporting meat from Vietnam, China's Xinhua reported.

Nam's working trip to Beijing and Guangzhou January 14-20 was aimed at boosting the two nations' cooperation in farm produce import and export activities, he said.

On January 16, Nam had separate meetings with Ma Youxiang, China's vice minister of agriculture and rural affairs, and Zhao Zenglian, deputy chief of the General Administration of Customs, to request that China open its market to Vietnamese products.

China's General Administration of Customs has agreed to a prompt completion of the documentation to sign three protocols, Nam said.

These would cover the export of sustainably caught seafood, the export of farmed crocodiles, and the export of monkeys raised for scientific research from Vietnam to China, according to the website of Vietnam's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Also, the two nations reached a consensus on reopening China to Vietnam's tropical rock lobsters, Nam said, adding that China is considering importing Vietnamese avocados and passion fruit as well.

"Nam's business trip [to] China will help flourish fruit, vegetable exports to China in 2024," Dang Phuc Nguyen, general secretary of the Vietnam Fruit and Vegetable Association, who accompanied Nam to China, told VOA Vietnamese by phone on February 21.

### **Active partners**

Vietnam has been China's largest trading partner among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations since 2016, with bilateral trade accounting for 25% of China's total trade with the 10-member regional bloc in the first 11 months of 2023, according to China's General Administration of Customs.

The two neighboring countries have "large space for cooperation in the agricultural sector," Xinhua reported on December 13.

In the first 11 months of 2023, China imported 44.62 billion yuan or more than \$6.2 billion worth of Vietnamese agricultural products, marking a year-on-year increase of 20.3%, according to the Xinhua report.

In 2023, Vietnam's livestock products constituted only 1% of the total agricultural, forestry and fishery export value to China, amounting to \$12.2 billion, according to the International Trade Council.

The ITC said this modest share was primarily attributed to Vietnam's lack of official authorization for meat product exports to China, referring to China's Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI)-related import bans.

For many years, many of Vietnam's livestock products, including pork, beef, chicken and buffalo meat, have been subject to unofficial quotas at border crossings, also according to the ITC, which has 179

member nations. These products have encountered assorted border-related obstacles, as well as heightened scrutiny and stricter control standards, according to the ITC. China is the biggest import market for Vietnam's fruit, with the import turnover reaching \$3.7 billion in 2023, up nearly 250% in value and 65% in market share compared with 2022, Vietnam media reported.

Vietnam has 14 types of fruits and agricultural products officially licensed to enter China - dragon fruit, watermelon, banana, lychee, longan, rambutan, jackfruit, mango, mangosteen, durian and passion fruit, plus black jelly, sweet potato and bird's nest - according to the official Vietnam Economy website and Voice of Vietnam.

The watermelon agreement was signed during Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit to Vietnam last December, in addition to five others, which had been included in previous protocols: mangosteen, black jelly, durian, banana and sweet potato.

Dang said that the Chinese market is ripe for Vietnamese fruits and vegetables. He added that Chinese consumers favor Vietnamese durian products. If an agreement allowing export of frozen durian is signed, he estimates that the Chinese market "for fresh and frozen durian will bring in about \$3.5 billion" to Vietnam.

<https://www.voanews.com/a/vietnam-has-high-hopes-for-increas...>

### **Why Thailand picked two communities for its first "Amazing Organic" trips**

27/02/2024 by Yeoh Siew Hoon

#### **Ban Bang Rong, Phuket and Mae Tha, Chiang Mai showcase for local efforts to protect communities through organic farming and sustainability practices**

**As part of efforts to support the Organic Tourism movement in Thailand, the Tourism Authority of Thailand has been promoting "Amazing Organic Trip" routes around two communities – Mae Tha Organic, Chiang Mai and Ban Bang Rong Community, Phuket.**

These two communities were present at the TAT booth during the 9th annual Sookjai Organic Fair, held at Suan Sampran, Nakhon Pathom, the last weekend of January every year.

TAT's deputy governor for Policy and Planning, Numfhon Boonyawat, who has been assigned for the past three years to work on the Policy Lab, a project to promote Organic Tourism under the BCG Model, said TAT wanted to share their stories with the public "so that people can learn and live harmoniously with the nature".

She explained, "The BCG model was initiated by the government. It aims to apply the concepts of bioeconomy, circular economy, and green economy. In order to develop high value products and services that are eco-friendly, require less resource input, while conserving natural and biological resources."

She said TAT had started with the two provinces because they are key destinations for both Thais and foreigners. Partners in the project include Thai Ecotourism and Adventure Tourism Association (TEATA), travel agent, Siam Rise and a golf reservation platform, Golf Digg .

"The cities are not known for sustainability as well as organic agriculture, but for overcrowding during long weekends and air pollution especially Chiang Mai which is affected by PM 2.5 every dry season. We would like to wake people up to stop and think about the relationship between people and nature so that we stop exploiting our natural resources and support those who work on sustainable ways."

She said both Ban Bang Rong and Mae Tha Organic had faced similar problems of environmental exploitation. "Ban Bang Rong experienced imbalance of living caused by the concessions of mangrove forests while the people in Mae Tha Community suffered from chemical agriculture for years.

“They stepped up to protect their homelands by stopping the concessions and turning to organic agriculture. With the cooperation of the people in the communities, they set rules of living sustainably.”

She said that visitors, when in Ban Bang Rong, can pick pineapples which are registered as a GI product of Phuket. “The villagers will bring you on a local bus, “Po Thong”. You can also try making traditional local sweets, made of fresh coconut and palm sugar. You’ll taste local dishes made of fresh seasonal ingredients by local chef. Moreover, you can enjoy a less known island.

“At Mae Tha organic, a small village amid a mountain range, you can enjoy all organic products. Fresh and sweet baby corns, sweet potatoes, homemade tomato sauce and many more, of course they are all seasonal products so every time you visit, you will have a chance to taste variety of products.

“The villagers will take you to the Community Forest, the source of water for people of Mae Tha. You will understand how villagers work hard to protect their forest which is also the world asset. They will show you how they survive in the forest and cook a simple but tasty food from what they can find. Then at the common area of the community, local chefs will cook for you using local, seasonal vegetables. It’s simply delicious.”

She adds, “We use local dishes as a tool to encourage people to consume seasonal products because it reflects the richness of biodiversity. The more we consume seasonal organic products, the more organic cultivations happen. When we have more organic cultivations, the farmers will reduce using chemical fertilizers. Insect predators and insect parasitoids will survive and the circle of life will go on. The environment will be recovered, eventually, we can keep the biodiversity.”

Numfhon said TAT had joined the fair to “continue promoting these two communities and to emphasise our endeavors to push sustainable tourism to the public with our theme concept “Organic Tourism, be good without efforts”.

“We believe that the target group of this fair was the same as ours, people who care for others and environment, so this was a very good opportunity to reach out to them. Moreover, we wanted to know how people react to our activity because this is a very good Voice of Customer (VOC) which is very important. We can monitor and adjust our work to meet the VOC and our goal accordingly.”

She sees positive signs around the progress of the Organic Tourism movement in Thailand. “The partners who have worked with us last year would like to continue their support to this project as well as the communities. In addition, this year, we might have new partners. Apart from that, Voice of customers via our social media platforms are positive too.”

The relationship between TOCA and TAT is symbiotic. TOCA works on the supply side by coaching and consulting with the private sector such as hotels, restaurant and farm owners on organic agriculture and its TOCA platform, where consumers can buy organic products direct from the farms. TAT works on the demand side to promote Organic Tourism and introducing the TOCA platform to the public via social media, mainly Facebook Amazing Green Thailand.

Numfhon said that TAT would continue working with partners “who have the same goals of sustainable tourism and those who realize that ‘sustainable’ is not a trend but beyond.

“TAT will continue to promote Sustainable tourism by creating a simple but understandable and attractive content to the audience. We would like to change the behaviors and people’s way of thinking. As a result we will see people consume more organic products as well as realize that their role is to protect and conserve the environment. We will have a bigger organic network and link to each other. We also try to make them understand what TAT is doing by setting KPIs by which we can monitor the progress of our works.

“Increasing the number of targeted followers to our Facebook “Amazing Green Thailand”, as well as the growing number of shares and positive comments are our leading indicators to show we are heading in the right direction.”

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Phonsinuane village, Sisattanak district, Vientiane capital,  
Lao People's Democratic Republic

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