



## **Thailand Government's Preparation for Drought in 2015**

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Thailand, being one of the world's biggest rice exporters is now being threatened by drought. Deemed as one of the most severe forms of natural calamities the threat of drought to Thailand's agriculture is becoming more intense. According to Lertwiroj Kowattana, director general of the Royal Irrigation Department, 2015 could be the worst drought level in Thailand in the past 15 years.

The OAE (the Office of Agricultural Economics) of Thailand estimated that the drought will reduce Thailand's off-season crops export by higher than 30%. In particular, rice, the major export crop of Thailand, is normally grown between November and April, which is the peak lowest rainfall season. It has to rely on irrigation water due to low rainfall in many regions of Thailand.

According to Sansern Kaewkamnerd, who is a deputy government spokesman, the government has approved 7.8 billion baht which will come from the 2015 budget, to be used for water emergencies that is expected to combat drought. (Lefevre A., Feb 2015)

Following the approval of budget for preparation of drought, the government of Thailand has set up the integrated plan for drought management for 2015 by organizing a joint meeting with the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) on February 24, 2015. The ministry of Interior proposed the drought management plan which was acknowledged by the government cabinet. Thereafter, each and every province within the country was assigned to engage in this process by conducting survey on the areas which are more likely to suffer from the impacts of drought in agriculture. The government will give assistance and support to the highest drought susceptible area by formulating and developing the action plans for mitigating drought impacts based on irrigation system, artificial rains, operation of pumps, water trucks, wells and distribution of water to the area suffering from drought.

The strategies of government drought management plans in 2015 were categorized into four major parts;

a). **Prevention and mitigation of drought impacts:** the first part of strategies will be focusing on the prediction of drought prone area and developing reliable quick alert warning systems for such drought prone area in 31 provinces. For this part, the Department of Thailand Metrology, Geo-informatics and Space Technology Development Agency (GISTDA) and Hydro and Agro Informatics Institutes were assigned to carry it out. In terms of warning system and public communication, the Public Relation Department, Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Department, National Disaster Warning Center, the authorities from provinces, districts and local administrative are the key players.

b). **Preparation for disaster:** the second strategy is based on the provision of water supply to drought areas by giving high priority to basic need for water consumption. The royal Thai Police has been taking responsibility on the protection of the lives and belongings of people in the drought area while the Public Health Ministry has been taking care of the health of those victims of drought.

c). **Emergency management:** this strategy focuses on the measures which are the establishment of regional and central operation centers, and campaigning for the management.

d). **Post-disaster management:** This is emphasizes the provision of assistant measures in terms of financial compensation, employment and livelihood promotion for the victims of drought under the current laws and regulations. (Royal Thai Government, March 2015)

In addition to the drought management plan in 2015, there is also another kind of budget that the government has approved to mitigate the impacts of drought on crop production. Ten provinces from all over the country have been identified as the most serious area for suffering the impacts of drought on crop production. The total number of households that has been identified as currently under the threat of drought is 188,649 households with a total area of crop farming of 1.54 million rai (1 rai = 1,600 m<sup>2</sup>). These total areas which are suffering from the impacts of severe drought include 1,165,308 rai of rice farms, 58,160 rai of horticultural crop farms and 3 rai of other minor crops. The government of Thailand has further approved the total budget of 1,363.76 million baht exclusively for these severe drought affected provinces this 2015. As of 24 March 2015, 10.99 million baht has already been used for these 10 provinces and the remaining amount of approved budget will be used throughout the year. The general support from this scheme includes provision of water pumps, tanks, artificial rains and information on weather forecasting. (MOAC, March 2015)

Throughout this year, the government has allocated its budget for the prevention, management and impact mitigation of drought in the most severe affected areas. Several forms of assistance have been given to the farming households to help mitigate the impacts of drought on their livelihoods and further prevention from future drought.

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