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The Development of Food Varieties for Food Safety in Taiwan

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Source: Council of Agriculture (COA)

The Rice is the major staple food in Taiwan. Around 1.31 million metric tons of rice are produced per year, enough to sufficiently supply domestic food consumption. Taiwan's Council of Agriculture (COA) regularly buys the public grains from rice farmers at guaranteed prices (three different price levels upon per farmer's quota). The system of public grains can secure national food safety by adjusting market imbalances and by motivating farmer production with a basic income. In the recent decade since Taiwan's accession to WTO, the imported brown rice also becomes a policy tool for national food security. Moreover, the excess rice reserves can be further donated to international food-aid for the hungry and the refugees. More than 33 nations have benefited from Taiwan's international food-aid enhancing the image of Taiwan's humanitarian efforts.

There are normally two harvests per year in most of Taiwan's rice production regions. During the recent three years (2013-2015), it is estimated that there is an average of 264,000 hectares of rice production fields around Taiwan, with the major production areas located along the Zhoushui River Valley, Chia-Nan Plain Area, and Hualien-Taitung Valley.

The public grains system guaranteed prices of rice purchases started from 1974, with a promise of national food safety and stable supply in the contexts of those years. Until the WTO accession in 2002, an extra of more than 94,000 metric tons of imported rice joined the system of the national food safety. The government controlled rice for food safety usually supplies military, student lunch meals, and rice processed materials. During conditions when the food price is in turbulence, or when there is an emergency, the government will release the reserved rice for the market adjustment.

Based on the three-month rice consumption volume, the level of rice safety storage is about 300,000 metric tons, or 25% of the full consumption volume, which is higher than a 17%~18% proposed level by the FAO. Thus, food safety is highly secured by a significant excess of the international standard.

As the public grains are purchased, and the industry demands upon TPP accessions, COA has extended efforts and investments in farmers' associations in some major rice production

areas since 2011, including low-temperature temporary storages, and rice-drying facilities. These efforts and investments are expected to increase the rice-drying capacity in those farmers' associations, in order to resolve the problem of wet-grain delivery for public grains, and of hard-corn to be dried. Those advance facilities become regional hubs for integrative grain processing activities, from drying, storing, polishing, and transporting, to ensure a superior quality of public grains.

In response to the Westernized domestic food consumption trend, the Agriculture and Food Agency of COA (AFA) has been investing in developing innovative rice products and rice processing applications. AFA is promoting "rice grains and emerging rice supply chain" to transfer technology via academia-industry collaborations on rice new product development, such as rice cake, rice bread, rice noodles, and rice instant noodles, in order to provide varieties of rice food choices in the domestic market.

On the other hand, COA offers free rice out of the excess reserve of public grains to the minority interest groups, or people with emergency needs. For example, the "community care stand program" in the recent programs can supply free rice to the local elders. In more 33 overseas countries, the Taiwan government keeps supplying free rice to hungry people those who are poor, and have emergency needs since 2002, gaining a global humanitarian reputation.

Because of the global climate change and unstable food supply, since 2013 the Taiwan government started to encourage domestic farmers to produce more food grains which are used to be mostly imported through the program of "Adjustment of Farmland Re-activation". In particular, hard-corn, soybean, wheat, feeding grass, and green-cut corn have been promoted as part of the contract farming scheme in order to secure a stable production and sustain farmers' income. This program intends to enhance food safety by increasing varieties of food choices through various kinds of farmland usage and sustainable farm operations.

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