

Asia-Pacific nations urged to study biofuels more carefully

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The nations of Asia and the Pacific are being urged to study the issue of biofuels with greater care before deciding on how they will use their agricultural products to generate energy.

Scientists say there is an urgent need to support the current rush toward major decisions on biofuel policies in Asia and the Pacific with solid research and unbiased information about their potential benefits, impact, and risks.

This appeal was issued at the end of a recent Expert Consultation on Biofuels organized by the Asia Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI) together with the Philippine-based International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics in India, the Washington-based International Food Policy Research Institute, and the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center in Mexico. The consultation was held at IRRI's headquarters in Los Baños, Philippines, on August 27-29.

“There’s no doubt biofuels will have an impact on agriculture in Asia and the Pacific and present some very interesting new opportunities,” APAARI’s executive secretary, R.S. Paroda, said. “But we need to be absolutely sure this will not affect the region’s food security and its continuing efforts to alleviate poverty.”

In the Asian region, both China and India are gearing up for substantial investments in biofuels. Malaysia and Indonesia are investing heavily in

oil palm plantations for biodiesel production. The Philippines has mandated the blending of gasoline with 5 percent biofuel.

However, at the same time, countries such as China have currently banned the use of maize – a vital food crop for national food and feed security – as biofuel.

The consultation focused on important issues such as (i) how bioenergy production may have an impact on global and regional food security, (ii) understanding bioenergy options for key crops and cropping systems in Asia, (iii) identifying research priorities for designing and evaluating integrated food-bioenergy production systems, and (iv) developing a framework for research on biofuels in key agricultural systems of Asia.

Source: International Rice Research Institute

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