

## **North Korea Exerting Extra Effort to Increase Food Production**

North Korea is calling for national effort in increasing food production with the spring farming season approaching. Agriculture was emphasized as the “lifeline of the people” from early this year.

All the major news media outlets of the DPRK including the Rodong Sinmun, Minju Joson, the Korean Central News Agency and Korean Central Television were utilized to deliver daily news encouraging food production.

The premier of the DPRK, Choe Yong Rim, was reported to have visited various fertilizer and agriculture facilities recently and farmers’ organization held rallies to increase food production.

Rodong Sinmun last month praised South Hwanghae Province -- the grain belt of the western DPRK -- for rising up on its own feet to improve food production. The newspaper also stated, “We should charge forward for a fruitful autumn this year,” and emphasized not only the role of farmers but also the people of North Korea to participate in the agricultural efforts in preparation for the spring farming season.

Also last month in Chongsanri in Nampo City, the Agricultural Workers’ Union of the DRPK held a rally to complete spring farming on time with its chairman, Ri Myong Gil present.

North Korea’s recent effort to improve food shortages reflects the urgency to accomplish the national goal of building a “strong and prosperous nation” by 2012, which is less than a year away.

However, the prospects for this year’s harvest are reportedly dim. The past winter -- one of the coldest in history -- had a negative effect on the production of double crop potato, wheat, and barley. The spring harvest of potato is already reported to be lower than expected. Chronic shortage of fertilizer is another impeding factor affecting this year’s harvest.

Fertilizer aid to North Korea halted with the deterioration of inter-Korean relations and even China that produced one-third of the world’s fertilizer is restricting fertilizer export to stabilize its domestic prices, adding to North Korea’s predicament.

Premier Choe Yong Rim recently visited Namhung Youth Chemical Complex and held a special meeting after inspecting the fertilizer production process, suggesting that this year’s harvest is dependent on distribution of fertilizer. The KCNA reported, “The meeting emphasized the important role of the Namhung Complex in contributing to the fertilizer production. In addition, new measures of boosting fertilizer production, updating the gasification project based on the state-of-the-art technology, and ensuring a timely and sufficient supply of raw materials and power by all the appropriate units were reiterated.”

Despite such efforts, however, North Korea is expected to undergo hardship in securing sufficient supply of fertilizer. Although North Korea is making extra efforts to beef up its independent fertilizer production, the country's undersupply of raw materials will make it difficult to significantly increase production. With the thawing of inter-Korean relations, North Korea is most likely to request for fertilizer aid.

In addition, the North is also reported to be suffering from forest pests and diseases. According to a South Korean official who recently visited the Kaesong Industrial Complex, a North Korean official complained of a severe pest problem and requested for pesticide aid. Until 2009, South Korea provided North Korea with pesticides but this aid was also halted with the onset of the Cheonan and Yeonpyong attacks.