

## **Rapid Decrease in Market Volume with Worsening Food Situation**

The food shortage situation in North Korea has heightened with the onset of the spring lean season.

The Daily NK, the internet news outlet that focuses on developments in North Korea, reported the food situation in the North has recently worsened. It commented that in the aftermath of North Korea's currency revaluation of last year, people's cash reserves are exhausted and prices have returned to the level prior to the revaluation. Despite the relatively normal commercial activities in the marketplace, the number of transactions has noticeably decreased, affecting especially those that are trying to make a living day to day. It also reported that currently about 80 percent of the people are estimated to eat three meals a day and about 15 percent of them eat either corn porridge or corn flour noodles; 60 percent eat corn rice and only about 25 percent are eating rice. The rest are approximated to eat only two meals a day comprised of either corn noodles or porridge. Those that live outside of Pyongyang are affected more by the food shortage.

Additionally, the state distribution system has not operated normally since the beginning of the year. In January eight days and in February about ten days worth of distribution was provided. In March there was no reported distribution, and in April, with the celebration of Kim Il Sung's birthday, five days of distribution were reported.

With the irregular distribution system, many are dependent on the *jangmadang* or marketplace for food supply. Most of the food on the market is corn-related items. However, there are reportedly more sellers than buyers and both buyers and sales have significantly decreased since the revaluation.

According to a source, there are reports of people dying of famine. In Gangdong County, a number of people have reportedly died from hunger.

Nampo City is also suffering from the food shortages. However, no deaths have been reported yet. The number of *kotjebi* or homeless children is on the rise and more complaints are heard about people running out of rice and money from the discontinuation of rations. The marketplace is operating as usual but similar to other marketplaces, there are more sellers than buyers, with some people unable to make a single sale the whole day at the market.

The current price of rice is 2000 KPW per kg and the price is expectedly to remain the same. However, until early June when potatoes are harvested, the food situation is unlikely to improve and more people are likely to suffer from food shortages.