

NORTH KOREA EXPECTING LIMITED HARVESTS THIS YEAR

Harvests from North Korea's small farms are expected to be only one-third the amount of last year's yield, according to the November 2 issue of 'North Korea Today', a newsletter published by the DPRK human rights advocacy group, Good Friends. In this issue, it was mentioned that much farmland in the DPRK's south-central region was washed out during summer flooding, and in border regions, drought led to severely reduced yields. It also stated that the lower yield partially could be attributed to the fewer individual farming plots (as compared to last year).

Because the North Korean government reinstated the rationing system in the fall of last year, authorities required individual plots to be registered for taxation purposes, so that rather than reducing rations for those producing their own food, a 'land tax' and a portion of each harvest had to be turned over. This prompted a significant number of North Koreans to abandon efforts at individual farming.

The report emphasized, "As the rumor circulates that the food shortages will become grave in the future, those with money have been purchasing and storing between 1 and 3 tons of corn each. . . while on the other hand, farmers without money have been stealing food from collective farms." In addition, "As October rolled around, the first grains were harvested and food prices dropped slightly, but there was no significant difference. . . Citizens worried about food supplies focused their efforts on amassing provisions."

Currently, flood-damaged regions are receiving rations in two-, three-, and five-day intervals.

Up until now, food deliveries have been comparatively good, but it is difficult to predict how long this can continue. With harvests amounting to around two million tons, or less than half of what was collected last year, the outlook is dismal. As food rations have been used up in rain-damaged regions, the residents in these areas face disease and starvation. Having exhausted every resource, these people cannot survive in the market. There is much speculation that any curtailing of rations by government authorities will lead to a large number of defections and mass movement of residents.