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ASEAN and CGIAR launch joint program on accelerating innovation in Agri-Food systems

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The ASEAN-CGIAR Innovate for Food and Nutrition Security Regional Program was officially launched during the 45th Meeting of the ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on October 4, 2023. This program aims to scale up and scale out integrated innovations in order to enhance the resilience of ASEAN's agri-food systems to climate change.

"Over the next 10 years, the program envisions delivering better livelihoods for food producers and stakeholders, while ensuring affordable, nutritious, and healthy food for consumers. Additionally, it seeks to foster a healthier natural environment for all," said Dr. Jongsoo Shin, the ASEAN-CGIAR Regional Program Director.

Dr. Stephan Weise, ASEAN-CGIAR Program Co-Director, emphasized that "the Program aims to be bottom-up, cross and trans-disciplinary. It is being co-created and, therefore, is fully co-owned by ASEAN partners."

Datuk Seri Mohamad Sabu, Minister of Agriculture and Food Security,Â Malaysia, who is also the AMAF Chair, extended his gratitude to CGIAR for developing the Intervention Packages (IPs) that are in line with the 9 thematic areas to address comprehensively, the needs of the country's food, land and water systems. He stressed that the ASEAN-CGIAR Regional Program "underscores the dedication and commitment of AMS towards achieving a competitive, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable food and agriculture sector in our region."

Dr.Â Kao Kim Hourn, the Secretary General of ASEAN, emphasized that the program is "formulated to address the above-mentioned challenges by leveraging cutting-edge research, technology, and innovation that enhance the resilience of the agricultural system. With eight intervention packages, the Programme will catalyse transformative change, enabling us to adapt to the evolving needs of our region, particularly with the impact of climate change."Â

Under the ASEAN-CGIAR Innovate for Food Regional Program, the following eight IPs were developed:

- Regenerative Agriculture/Aquaculture Practices and Judicious Agrochemical Use
- Climate Neutrality and Circular Agriculture
- Enhancing ASEAN Agrobiodiversity Use and Landscape Biodiversity
- Enhancing Value Chains and Regional Trade
- Transboundary Pests and Diseases
- Private Sector Investment and Sustainable Financing
- Farmer-Led Irrigation for Climate-Resilient Agri-Food Systems
- Food Systems Transformation for More Nutritious and Healthy Diets

Dr.Â Ajay Kohli, the Director General of IRRI and Senior Leadership Team Member of CGIAR, represented ProfessorÂ Andrew Campbell, the CGIAR Executive Managing Director, and shared that the Program, which can be a model on how to cater to client's needs, is "not just about creating technologies, but using the policies and taking them to the farmers and industries, and making a difference and empower man's life."

Representatives from the funding partners expressed statements of support for the Program. Will Nankervis, Australian Ambassador to ASEAN, said "The Program will serve as a catalyst for even deeper collaboration to promote food security in The region". He shared that the Australian government had contributed an additional AU$1MÂ bringing its total contribution to the Program to over AU$3M. To add, Dr.Â Daniel Walker, Chief Scientist of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, shared that the Program will be a platform to strengthenÂ Australia'sÂ partnership with ASEAN and CGIAR.

Sarah Tiffin, the Ambassador of UK to ASEAN announced that UK will contribute an additionalÂ GBP 2MÂ to the Program, bringing a total contribution ofÂ GBP 2.25M. The Program Launch, which was attended by high-level officials from the AMS and CGIAR experts, as well as funders, was a celebratory event marking a significant milestone in the Program. The event also acknowledged the promise of scaling up innovative solutions for positive transformation across ASEAN's agri-food systems, benefiting various stakeholders.