

## Korea's Agriculture Ministry champions rural transformation, digital innovation, and record export growth

25 June 2025 | News

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In just over a year into her tenure, Minister Song—Korea's first female agriculture minister—has prioritized three key transitions: the digitalization of agriculture, generational renewal in farming, and the revitalization of rural spaces. These pillars underpin the ministry's long-term vision to reposition agriculture as a future-facing, high-tech industry that supports both economic resilience and community well-being.

Among the ministry's most ambitious initiatives is the deployment of smart technologies. Newly enacted legislation, including the Smart Agriculture Act, Food Tech Act, and Green Bio Act, supports the private sector in pioneering innovations such as vertical farms and green bio hubs. The ministry also aims to convert 35 per cent of Korea's 55,000 hectares of greenhouses into smart farms by 2029 and introduce digital systems across 20 per cent of major crop fields.

To address the aging rural population, the ministry is scaling up support for young farmers, offering monthly startup grants, smart farm rentals, and entrepreneurship training. The number of young grant recipients has grown from 4,000 in 2023 to 5,000 in 2024, with a goal of cultivating 30,000 new agricultural leaders.

“The future of Korean agriculture lies in smart, sustainable, and socially appealing rural spaces,” said Minister Song. “Young people increasingly seek meaningful lifestyles, and the countryside offers new possibilities as a ‘third space’—not just urban or rural, but a hybrid zone for innovation, work-life balance, and lifestyle-driven enterprise.”

A landmark project underway is the development of Korea’s first agricultural satellite, scheduled for launch in 2026. The satellite will gather high-resolution crop and climate data every three days, enabling data-driven policymaking, real-time production forecasts, and private-sector innovation.

Despite global tariff headwinds, Korean agri-food exports are surging. The ministry reported record K-Food Plus exports of \$ 13 billion in 2024, with a 9.4 per cent year-on-year rise as of April 2025. Fresh produce exports reached \$ 1.57 billion, while sauces like gochujang hit an all-time high of \$ 394 million. U.S. exports alone grew by 37 per cent in April year-on-year, despite evolving trade dynamics under the current U.S. administration.

To bolster global outreach, the ministry has expanded support for exporters through the aT (Korea Agro-Fisheries & Food Trade Corporation) Export Information Desk and initiated reciprocal tariff seminars to navigate international policy changes. Flagship initiatives such as the K-Ricebelt, which shares Korea’s high-yield rice technology with 14 African nations, further demonstrate Korea’s role as a global agri-tech leader.

Sustainability and animal welfare also remain core priorities. In a historic move, Korea enacted a ban on dog meat in 2024. By early 2025, 40 per cent of dog farms had shut down, with plans to close over 60 per cent—around 938 farms—by year’s end. A full ban is targeted by 2027.

“South Korea’s agricultural transition is about more than food security—it’s about climate resilience, cultural diplomacy, and ethical progress,” said Minister Song. “With innovation at the core, we are building an agricultural future that is sustainable, inclusive, and globally connected.”