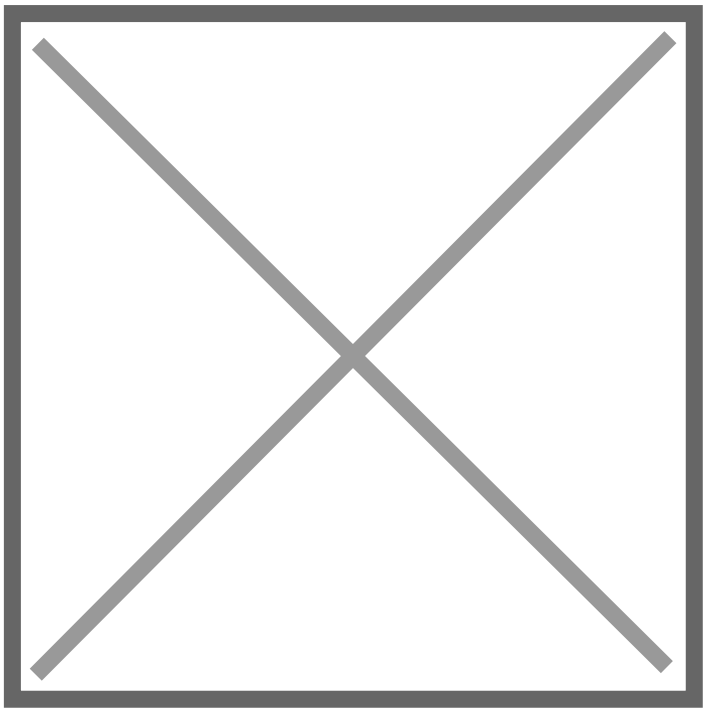
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South Korea launches aggressive crackdown on farmland speculation with nationwide audit and mandatory disposal regime

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South Korea has unveiled a sweeping policy overhaul aimed at curbing farmland speculation, initiating its first nationwide audit of agricultural land alongside a decisive tightening of enforcement mechanisms designed to restore farmland to productive agricultural use. The measures come amid heightened political emphasis on addressing misuse of agricultural land and reinforcing the principle that farmland ownership must be tied to active cultivation.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs has confirmed that the nationwide audit will examine farmland ownership structures, actual cultivation status, facility installations, land conversion activities, and fallow land conditions. Funded by 58.8 billion won (approximately $43 million) from a supplementary budget, the inspection programme will begin this month and is

expected to significantly expand the stateâ??s oversight capacity in agricultural land management.

At the core of the reform is a major shift in enforcement philosophy. Disposal orders for violations, previously issued at the discretion of local authorities, will now be made mandatory, with the government expanding their application to include immediate enforcement within land transaction permit zones. Authorities are also tightening restrictions on ownership transfers, closing loopholes that previously allowed violators to circumvent penalties by transferring farmland to spouses or direct family members.

In parallel, the government is revising its disposal order grace system, under which landowners previously had the option to defer penalties by demonstrating temporary compliance through cultivation. This provision is now set to be significantly curtailed, while financial penalties for non-compliance will be raised to ensure faster enforcement and discourage speculative retention of agricultural land.

Officials are also considering structural reforms to improve the effectiveness of disposal orders, including proposals for compulsory state acquisition of farmland that remains unsold due to inflated pricing or market distortion. At a Cabinet-level meeting, President Lee Jae-myung highlighted the dysfunction of existing mechanisms, noting that artificially inflated land prices often render sale orders ineffective and necessitate stronger corrective intervention.

The oversight framework will be further reinforced through enhanced monitoring of land under grace provisions, expanded authority for the agriculture ministry to directly issue disposal orders, and the deployment of special judicial police units to ensure continuous enforcement and compliance tracking.

President Lee reiterated the constitutional and legislative intent underpinning the reforms, emphasising that farmland is fundamentally intended for those engaged in actual cultivation. He stated that the system must be comprehensively overhauled to prevent non-farming ownership and speculative holding of agricultural land, signalling a more assertive regulatory posture in South Koreaâ??s farmland governance regime.