

Asia Biologicals Platform moves into deployment with first crop programmes across Southeast Asia

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Rice, cassava and cocoa will provide three different starting points for building a regional approach to biological deployment across Asia



One year after convening its first regional dialogue on what it would take to advance agricultural biologicals across Asia, the Asia Biologicals Platform is moving into implementation. Convened by Agrifood Futures, the Platform is developing its first crop deployment programmes across rice, cassava and cocoa, generating comparable evidence and learning what it takes for biologicals to move into use across different production environments and markets.

The three crops provide deliberately different starting points: rice as one of Asia's most important staple systems, cassava as a major industrial crop, and cocoa as a globally connected value chain. "The opportunity is to generate evidence we can compare across countries and production environments, and use that learning to make each subsequent deployment better informed," said Joshua Soo, Co-founder of Agrifood Futures. "When something genuinely works, we want to understand what it takes to get it into the hands of farmers and industry, creating a clearer pathway to scale where it can make a meaningful difference."

The goal is not simply wider use of biologicals. It is to understand where they can contribute to more productive, healthier and resilient agricultural systems, and build the conditions for those solutions to scale.

Building science and adoption into deployment

The Platform is working with the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and CABI as scientific and institutional partners, connecting scientific validation with questions of where and under what conditions biologicals perform, and what is needed to

support adoption in practice. “There is still much we need to understand about the complex interactions between plants, soils and their microbiomes,” said Dr Yvonne Pinto, Director General of the International Rice Research Institute. “Understanding a biological solution also means understanding the environment into which it is being introduced, and the conditions needed for it to perform reliably and responsibly.”

Crop deployment partners including Thai Wah Public Company Limited, Mars and Salim Agrochemicals Division bring production, commercialisation and distribution perspectives to the Platform, helping ensure industry requirements and pathways to market are considered alongside scientific evidence. Rather than validating technologies in isolation and addressing commercialisation later, the Platform brings scientific, farmer and industry perspectives together around defined agricultural problems from the beginning.

“We have real production challenges that need solutions, but identifying the right biological solution is not straightforward,” said Hataikan Kamolsirisakul, Head of Strategy, Sustainability and New Business Group, Thai Wah. “We need practical ways to find promising solutions and test that they deliver under real conditions before asking our farmers to change their practices.” The programmes build on work that began with the inaugural Asia Biologicals Symposium in November 2025, developed in partnership with Wharf42, where more than 120 participants helped shape the Platform’s priorities.

Building the next crop programmes

The longer-term ambition is a multi-crop, multi-country approach that builds confidence in biological performance and creates pathways for trusted solutions to scale. The work also has wider relevance to soil and plant health, input efficiency, and how biologicals can complement other agricultural inputs and practices within more integrated and regenerative approaches to agriculture.

The Platform is now looking to work with partners who can bring agricultural challenges, production environments, scientific capabilities and resources to develop its next programmes. Future crop programmes will also create opportunities for biological companies to put forward relevant solutions as individual challenges are defined. The Asia Biologicals Summit 2026, taking place on 26 October at CHIJMES in Singapore, will continue the conversation, with the Singapore Economic Development Board (EDB) as Strategic Summit Partner. Leaders across science, industry, government and investment will examine critical questions shaping biological deployment across Asia and surface priorities to inform the Platform’s next phase.