The Feed Gap: Southeast Asiaâ??s Maize Deficit and the Price of an Egg

10 November 2026 | Features | By Ankit Kankar | ankit.kankar@mmactiv.com

ASEAN grows enough rice, sugar and cassava. It does not grow enough maize, and that single gap quietly sets the cost of chicken, pork and eggs across the region



Ask a shopper in Manila, Ho Chi Minh City or Kuala Lumpur what drives the price of a tray of eggs and you will hear about bird flu, supermarket margins or the weather. Very few will mention a cornfield in Mato Grosso or the port of Rosario. Yet for much of Southeast Asia, the single biggest cost behind an egg begins as a grain grown on the other side of the world.

Rice is the regionâ??s food security story, and rice is where ASEAN is strong: it is the one staple the bloc produces in surplus. Maize is the opposite. Analysis published by East Asia Forum found that ASEANâ??s maize harvest met only about three-quarters of regional demand, while soybean production covered less than a tenth of need and wheat was almost entirely imported. Maize and soybean meal are the twin pillars of a poultry or pig ration, which means the regionâ??s protein economy is plugged directly into global grain markets.

This piece follows that one input, maize, from the field to the plate. It explains where the deficit is deepest, who fills it, how cost shocks travel through the chain, and what feed millers and governments are doing to loosen the grip.

Where the gap is deepest

The regional average hides very different national positions. The shortfall is most extreme in the fast-growing livestock markets of Vietnam and Malaysia, and narrower in the Philippines and Indonesia, where governments have pushed hard for domestic output.

Vietnam is the clearest case of a protein boom outrunning its grain base. According to the USDA, Vietnamese maize production is forecast at just 3.7 million tonnes in the current marketing year, down from 3.8 million tonnes, as farmers switch land to fruit and coffee. Consumption is forecast at 18.1 million tonnes in 2026 to 2027, up from 16.75 million tonnes. The gap is filled by imports projected to reach 15 million tonnes, and first-half 2026 arrivals of 6.8 million tonnes

were 49 per cent higher than a year earlier.

Malaysia barely grows maize at all. The USDAâ??s Grain and Feed Annual forecasts Malaysian maize use at 4.15 million tonnes in 2026 to 2027, of which about 3.8 million tonnes goes to feed, against imports of about 4.12 million tonnes. Poultry is the driver.

Thailand, a traditional exporter, now runs a deficit too. Domestic demand of 8 to 9 million tonnes compares with a crop of around 4.8 to 5 million tonnes, leaving a structural gap of up to 3 million tonnes.

The Philippines and Indonesia sit closer to balance, but both are tightening. Philippine production is projected to fall to 8.1 million tonnes in 2026 to 2027 against total demand of 10.4 million tonnes, with high fertiliser prices and tighter irrigation cited as constraints. Indonesia, which has pursued maize self-sufficiency aggressively, is forecast by the USDA to produce 13 million tonnes in 2026 to 2027 while importing around 800,000 tonnes.

Table: Maize balance in five Southeast Asian markets, 2026 to 2027 (USDA-based forecasts; ratios calculated by AgroSpectrum Asia)

Market	Production (mt)	Consumption or demand (mt)	Imports (mt)	Approximate self-sufficiency
Vietnam	3.7	18.1	15.0	About 20 per cent
Malaysia	Minimal	4.15	4.12	Under 5 per cent
Thailand	4.8 to 5.0	8 to 9	Up to 3 (gap)	About 55 to 60 per cent
Philippines	8.1	10.4	2.3	About 78 per cent
Indonesia	13.0	Feed 9.5, food 4.4	0.8	About 94 per cent

Table: ASEAN self-sufficiency by staple (regional estimates)

Crop	Position	Source
Rice	Surplus	East Asia Forum
Maize	About three-quarters of need	East Asia Forum
Soybean	Less than one-tenth of need	East Asia Forum
Wheat	Almost entirely imported	East Asia Forum

Who fills the hole

The suppliers are a short list, and that concentration is the vulnerability. Vietnamâ??s customs data show Brazil supplied 57 per cent of the 1.44 million tonnes of maize imported in January 2026, with Argentina at about 13 per cent and India above 8 per cent. In earlier seasons Argentina led: it supplied 55.5 per cent of Vietnamâ??s imports in the first seven months of 2024. Malaysia sources mainly from Argentina, Brazil and the United States.

Thailand has gone a step further and written supply diplomacy into feed policy. In early 2026 it opened a window for 1 million tonnes of US maize, with the stated aim of cutting feed production costs by 8 per cent, but importers must buy domestic and imported grain at a ratio of three to one. Unlocking the full quota therefore requires about 3 million tonnes of

local purchases, roughly 60 per cent of the national crop.

Ukraine, once an important origin for Asian buyers, has become a far smaller factor in some markets. S&P Global reported that Chinaâ??s imports from Ukraine fell 95 per cent year on year in January to October 2025, a reminder that Black Sea supply can disappear from Asian balance sheets quickly.

The pricing has, for now, been kind. Vietnamâ??s average import price in January 2026 was US$243.83 a tonne, slightly lower than a year earlier, and analysts describe global maize supplies as ample. The risk is that importers have grown used to cheap grain just as the costs around the grain, freight, currency and energy, have started to move.

How a grain cost becomes an egg price

Feed dominates the economics of intensive poultry, commonly cited at up to 70 per cent of production costs, and maize is typically the largest single ingredient by volume. That makes the path from grain to retail egg unusually direct. The cost-build below sets out the stages through which a maize shock travels.

Table: From grain to retail egg, the cost-build stages (editorial framework)

Stage	What gets added	What moved in 2026
Farm-gate grain abroad	Grain price in Brazil, Argentina or the US	Ample global supply kept prices relatively weak
Ocean freight and insurance	Shipping, war-risk premiums	Middle East tensions lifted risk costs
Currency	Conversion into local currency	A weaker yen pushed Japanese feed costs up
Port, duty and quota rules	Tariffs, licensing, domestic purchase ratios	Philippine tariff review; Thai 3:1 rule; Indonesian import halt
Feed mill	Soybean meal, premix, energy, margin	Energy and logistics costs
Layer farm	Feed conversion, flock health, biosecurity	Avian influenza culls in north Asia
Grading, packing, retail	Distribution and store margin	Retailers absorbing losses on eggs

North Asia shows what happens when several of those stages move at once. Japanâ??s National Federation of Agricultural Cooperative Associations raised feed supply prices by about 3,200 yen a tonne for October to December 2026, its fourth consecutive quarterly increase, citing Middle East tensions and a weaker yen. A Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries survey of 470 stores in September found a carton of ten eggs averaging 309 yen, matching the record. The same ministryâ??s August survey found pork loin at a record 290 yen per 100 grams and chicken thigh at a record 156 yen, as costlier imports pushed buyers towards domestic meat.

Japan is also living with six consecutive seasons of avian influenza. The 2022 season saw a record 17.71 million birds culled, and the ministry is now considering vaccination. Food manufacturer Kewpie, which uses about 250,000 tonnes of eggs a year, has been importing eggs from Brazil since 2023. When grain cost inflation and disease losses arrive together, retail prices go to records.

The El NiÃ±o multiplier

Southeast Asiaâ??s own maize crop adds a domestic layer of risk. With the US Climate Prediction Center giving better than 83 per cent odds of a strong to very strong El NiÃ±o through early 2027, rain-fed maize growers in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand face the prospect of lower yields in the 2027 dry-season crops. Indonesiaâ??s statistics agency already expects September to November output to fall 5.5 per cent year on year, even as January to August production rose 3.8 per cent to 11.86 million tonnes.

A weaker domestic harvest pushes more demand onto imports at the moment when freight and currency costs are least predictable. Indonesia is the market to watch. It halted maize imports for consumption from 2 January 2026 under a broader zero-import drive covering rice, maize and sugar. The USDA reports that wet millers, who need low-aflatoxin, high-starch dent corn, have been squeezed by reduced import allocations. If El NiÃ±o trims the 2027 harvest, the policy will face its first real test.

What feed millers are doing about it

The industryâ??s response falls into four categories, and none of them closes the gap alone.

The first is grain substitution. Vietnamese feed millers have been replacing some maize with imported feed wheat, a shift the USDA links partly to new ethanol blending demand for maize after Vietnam mandated bioethanol in all gasoline in June 2026. Thailandâ??s cassava sector, one of the worldâ??s largest, offers another energy source, although its use in feed depends on price spreads against maize and on the protein that must be added back.

The second is new protein. Black soldier fly larvae, reared on food and agricultural by-products, are moving from pilot to industrial scale. Malaysiaâ??s Nutrition Technologies, which counts Bunge Ventures among its investors, produces insect meal, insect oil and frass-based fertiliser and ships to Europe, Asia and South America. Insect meal mainly replaces fishmeal and soybean meal rather than maize, but every tonne of imported protein displaced eases the overall import bill.

The third is policy. The Philippines is reviewing a cut in out-of-quota maize tariffs from 15 per cent to 5 per cent. Thailand is tying imports to domestic purchases. Indonesia is betting on self-sufficiency.

The fourth is contract farming. Integrators across the region have long contracted maize growers to secure quality and volume, and the Thai three-to-one rule effectively turns that practice into national policy. For integrators, guaranteed local supply with aflatoxin controls is worth a premium, because poor-quality grain shows up later as weaker flock performance.

The strategic question

The deeper issue for policymakers is that maize self-sufficiency competes for land with higher-value crops. Vietnamese farmers are leaving maize for durian and coffee because the returns are better, and it is hard to argue they are wrong. For most of the region, the realistic goal is not to eliminate the feed gap but to manage it: diversify origins, hold strategic stocks, invest in yield and post-harvest quality, and keep tariffs predictable so millers can hedge.

There is a commercial angle here for the private sector as well. Companies that can offer aflatoxin testing, grain drying and storage close to the farm gate, or reliable logistics from Brazilian and Argentine ports into secondary Asian harbours, are selling directly into the regionâ??s most persistent structural weakness.

That is a less dramatic message than a self-sufficiency target, but it is closer to how the price of an egg is actually set.

What to watch in 2027

- Vietnamâ??s monthly customs data, to see whether imports track the USDAâ??s 15 million tonne forecast and whether Brazil keeps its lead over Argentina.
- Indonesiaâ??s dry-season maize harvest and whether the zero-import policy survives an El NiÃ±o shortfall.
- The outcome of the Philippine review of out-of-quota maize tariffs.
- Japanâ??s feed price announcements each quarter and the ministryâ??s decision on avian influenza vaccination.
- Commercial-scale insect meal contracts with major feed mills in Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam.

Â

Ankit Kankar | ankit.kankar@mmactiv.com