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*US urged not to alter catfish rules *Construction of Sai Gon-Hiep Phuoc port begins *Officials eye rural development
*Rubber earnings tumble 49%

General Information:

Welcome to "News Summary" from Vietnam, an occasional summary of issues of interest to the U. S. agricultural community. The report includes information that has been garnered during travel within Vietnam, reported in the local media, or offered by host country officials and agricultural analysts. Press articles are included and summarized in this report. Significant issues may be expanded upon in subsequent reports from this office. Minor grammatical changes have been made for clarification.

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US urged not to alter catfish rules

WASHINGTON, DC — "It would be a mistake for the US Department of Agriculture to expand the definition of catfish to include tra and basa (or Vietnamese pangasius)," said US National Fisheries Institute (NFI) president John Connelly last Friday.

In an interview with the Vietnam News Agency's Washington correspondent, Connelly stressed that the US Congress had not classified Vietnamese tra and basa as catfish, so administrative efforts now to redefine the products in order to stem import competition with US catfish producers were problematic and ultimately unfair to American consumers and soybean farmers.

The move would cause harm to both countries, Connelly said. For one, if Viet Nam's pangasius production were limited, it would reduce Vietnamese purchases of US soybeans used in feeding pangasius.

In addition, a ban on imports of Vietnamese pangasius would impact seafood processing and packaging plants in the US states of Idaho, Massachusetts and Florida, as well as reduce choices of US consumers who would lose the opportunity to enjoy the Vietnamese product, Connelly said.

Vietnamese tra and basa were safe and healthy, and trade in the fish was an important element of the US-Viet Nam relationship, Connelly said. Stronger US imports would, in turn, help boost US exports to Viet Nam.

At a time when US President Barack Obama was trying to renew American leadership abroad and take steps to repair relationship with developing nations, it would be wrong to crack down on seafood imports from Viet Nam, he added. Vietnamese Ambassador to the US Le Cong Phung has written to nearly 140 US congressmen, asking them to look into draft US Department of Agriculture rules relating to Vietnamese tra and basa fish.

Under the US Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008, the department was required to issue regulations governing the inspection of imported catfish. Under its draft regulations, it would include tra and basa within the definition of catfish.

Source: <http://vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn/showarticle.php?num=05BUS270509>

Construction of Saigon-Hiep Phuoc port begins

A groundbreaking ceremony for the first phase of a project to build Saigon-Hiep Phuoc port was held at Hiep Phuoc commune, Nha Be district, Ho Chi Minh City on May 16.

The port will be built on 546 ha and have a total length of 800 meters. With total investment capital of around VND3,700 billion, the port is expected to begin operating by 2011 and facilitate the development in the key southern economic zone and the country in general.

The project is being carried out by Saigon Port one-member Limited Liability Company.

Source:

http://www.cpv.org.vn/cpv/Modules/News_English/News_Detail_E.aspx?CN_ID=340747&CO_ID=30105

Officials eye rural development

The second ASEAN Senior Official Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Plus Three (SOMRDPE+3) started May 26, 2009 in Hanoi.

"The meeting is important because agriculture helps maintain political stability and socio-economic development in each member country and the wider region," said Agriculture and Rural Development Minister Cao Duc Phat.

It is a chance for member countries, as well as China, Japan and South Korea, to enhance co-operation and offer ideas at a regional level on rural development and poverty eradication.

During the meeting, officials will focus on finding ways for a common approach to strengthen co-operation for the benefit of rural people, particularly farmers, and narrow the gaps among regional countries and between ASEAN and the plus three countries.

The delegates will also exchange experiences in building rural development models and improving skills in the areas.

The joint projects and activities proposed during the first SOMRDPE+3 meeting last October, such as addressing poverty among the socially vulnerable groups and climate change adaptation, will also be detailed.

Source: <http://vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn/showarticle.php?num=01AGR270509>

Rubber earnings tumble 49%

The US\$245 million in profit from rubber exports in the first five months of this year is 49 per cent lower than the same period last year, according to the Viet Nam Rubber Association.

The decline was due to the drop in exports to key importers of Vietnamese rubber products, the association said. This month, the country exported 35 million tons of rubber, earning \$51 million.

Vietnamese rubber is exported to 70 countries and territories, but the main markets are mainland China, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Germany, the US and Japan. Rubber exported to China accounted for 60 per cent of the country's total rubber export volume.

Tran Thi Thuy Hoa, general secretary of the association, said the export price of rubber in the world market was rising due to increasing demand and a current shortage of supply.

Rubber exports currently fetch \$1,500-1,600 per ton, the highest rate so far this year. However, this price is still \$700-800 less per ton as compared with the same period of last year.

The association had anticipated that this year's supply and demand levels for rubber in the world market would be lower than that of last year.

Viet Nam was expected to export 700,000 tons of rubber this year and earn about \$1 billion, which would be significantly less than the \$1.6 billion earned last year the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development said.

Source: <http://vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn/showarticle.php?num=04BUS270509>