

Contributing to Food Security in Bangladesh



Mizanur Rahman (left), has been enjoying a higher income and greater crop yields after receiving farmer training on good agricultural practices.

Bangladesh's huge rural population works toward boosting output and income, thanks to the farmer training initiative of the Bangladesh Crop Protection Association and CropLife Asia.

When Cyclone Sidr struck Bangladesh in 2007, Mizanur Rahman's eight-hectare farm in Comilla escaped the devastation that killed 15,000 in coastal villages and damaged crops that were ripe for harvest. While Rahman is fortunate to be alive, he, like scores of other farmers in the country, used to struggle to boost productivity while grappling with problems such as pest infestations, financing and power shortages.

Industry associations such as the Bangladesh Crop Protection Association (BCPA), in partnership with the non-profit organization CropLife Asia, aim to improve the country's food security and livelihoods of farmers by providing training on boosting crop yields, protecting harvests and ensuring food safety.

In 2009, the partners aim to train 6,000 farmers, up from 5,000 this year, in 120 villages nationwide on the responsible use of pesticides. The program includes educating farmers about the proper disposal of empty containers, secure storage and following instructions on the labels to minimize pesticide residue just before harvest.

"I was farming for 10 years, but I didn't enjoy good yields until I attended a training program last November," says Rahman, 39, who grows rice, potatoes and corn.

"After being trained, I applied pesticides more efficiently. This resulted in a 20 percent drop in expenses. At the same time, production rose 10 percent. My crops are also bigger and healthier these days," he adds.



Securing a better harvest with farmer training and agricultural technology.

The top three skills he has acquired from the training are firstly, the ability to identify specific pest problems; secondly, knowing how to choose the appropriate crop protection product and applying it judiciously; and lastly, protecting the environment by burying empty pesticide glass bottles and plastic bags, instead of throwing them into the streams and on roads, says Rahman.

Some five months after Cyclone Sidr, the BCPA resumed training for farmers in the disaster area to help people rebuild their lives and grow more food by harnessing agricultural technology. The work of the BCPA and CropLife Asia complements the efforts of the international aid organizations, and farmer training is on-going in the villages, says BCPA's General Secretary Shoaib Choudury.

Bangladesh's agriculture industry, which grew 5 percent in 2006, is a key contributor to the economy. It accounted for 20 percent of Gross Domestic Product in the same period, according to statistics from the World Bank.

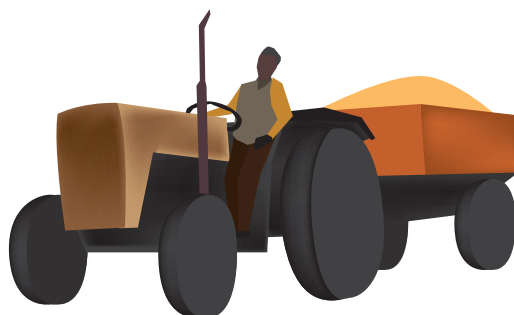
Yet, despite the country's huge rural population, farmers struggle with a myriad of other problems, including obtaining microcredit. In a bid to improve the lot of Bangladesh's huge rural population, the work of the BCPA and CropLife Asia is transforming lives, as are efforts by other organizations such as the World Bank, which supported a \$62.6 million project in fiscal 2008 to improve productivity and farmers' incomes by revitalizing

the national agricultural technology system, according to the World Bank's South Asia Regional Brief 2008.

To be sure, the country is gradually rebuilding its agriculture industry in the coastal areas wrecked by the cyclone of 2007. According to Choudury, the country reaped a bumper rice harvest between January and April, and good harvests are expected in the future.

For Rahman, the training on how best to tap agricultural technology has boosted his income and living standards for his family. He can afford to rent a house in Comilla town, 20 km away from his farm house in Shialdhair, so that his elder daughter, who is eight years old, can save on an arduous daily commute to school.

"Farmers must be trained in order to improve crop yields and income," says Rahman. "With knowledge from the training, not only has my income risen, I'm also contributing to food safety."



About CropLife Asia

CropLife Asia promotes the benefits and responsible use of crop protection and plant biotechnology products, as well as sound regulatory frameworks in support of sustainable agriculture in the Asia-Pacific region. As a regional unit of CropLife International – a global federation of the plant science industry in over 90 countries – CropLife Asia supports the work of 15 member associations and is led by member companies at the forefront of crop production research and development.