

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: How FAS Surveys Crops in Burma

Country: Burma - Union of

Post: Rangoon

Report Category: Grain and Feed

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Report Highlights:

FAS Agricultural Specialist in Burma conducts crop surveys to prepare the Burma Grain and Feed reports and updates on the agricultural situation. This report describes how the FAS Agricultural Specialist performs crop surveys in Burma despite challenging political and economic conditions.

Background

The FAS Agricultural Specialist usually conducts two to three crop surveys annually in Burma. FAS Burma currently focuses on domestic rice, corn and wheat crops for preparation of required Grain and Feed reports, as well as voluntary updates on the agricultural situation. The Agricultural Specialist used to travel in Ayeyarwady, Bago, Mandalay and Sagaing regions to make these crop assessments. Due to current security concerns, Northern Shan State, Sagaing Region and certain parts of Mandalay region are not accessible for travel. All trips must follow the Department of State's travel regulations. Travel to red zone areas is considered high risk and requires RSO approval. Currently, the Agricultural Specialist can travel to yellow zone areas.

Challenges of gathering information

After the February 2021 coup, information gathering and data availability have become more challenging, and retrieving official trade data from the responsible authority has also posed challenges. As a result, Post has increased communication with private stakeholders to gather updates on policy impacts, market information, and trade statistics. To gather market intelligence, Post primarily focuses on site visits to the field and meetings with farmers, processors, traders and contacts along the entire supply chain in different locations. Post usually deals with the field staff, especially from the Department of Agriculture, during crop surveys as they are very helpful in organizing farmers and have a thorough understanding of regional data.

Information from conflict areas is very limited, and the Agricultural Specialist typically attempts to collect information via phone conversations.

How to conduct the meetings during Crop Surveys

There are different kinds of meeting designs depending on the availability of farmers, road conditions and locations, timing of survey, weather conditions, and the contact personnel in charge of organizing the meetings.

When the key farmer contact is busy, Post may visit their work place and have one-on-one meetings. Meetings with rice millers, input suppliers, and wholesalers typically take place in their mills, supplier companies, or wholesale shops. Most meetings with farmers take place in their villages, near their farms. Occasionally, the Agricultural Specialist meets a group of farmers at one central location and can talk simultaneously. In this situation, the Agricultural Specialist creates clear and concise questionnaires to prevent information from individual farmers from being duplicated, and then facilitates an overall discussion.

Post sometimes travels to flooded areas to determine how many rice areas have been flooded, how many can be recovered, and how many can be replanted. Meetings with farmers and seed suppliers in those areas are extremely helpful to gather the information.

With the current security situations in Burma, the Agricultural Specialist typically passes through several military and police checkpoints on the way to survey areas and responds to questions such as where you are going; where you come from; and reason for travelling, and other security-related inquiries.

In certain areas, the Agricultural Specialist must report to the Bureau of Special Investigation (BSI) via local contacts for security issues. If accompanied by an Embassy Officer, the Agricultural Specialist must also report locations they visited.

Burmese people are typically very friendly and welcoming to visitors. Burmese farmers and other producers are accustomed to answering questions from various organizations, including the USDA, the UN, NGOs, INGOs, and academic researchers during surveys. During meetings, farmers frequently express their needs and challenges, such as improving infrastructure for irrigation and drainage systems, accessing farm loans, and obtaining high-yield seeds, in hope of assistance from their interlocuters. Additionally, some millers and traders have expressed interest in visiting the United States to study the American rice industry.

Pictures for different meeting designs during crop surveys

Typically, a meeting with farmers takes place at the village administrative office, extension camp, their homes or farms or another location, which is easily accessible to all concerned farmers. Please see the following different meeting types during crop survey.

A. Meeting with woman farmers' group at extension camp and the flooded road to extension camp



B. Meeting with farmers at the village pagoda, the center of the village, in Kyonsote, Maubin. With the current security situation, a local contact organized farmers to meet at the pagoda.



C. Meeting with farmers at village administravice office. Farmers filled out surveys sharing information on production and planting, input costs, and other challenges in their area.



D. The meeting with farmers at an extension office near seed-producing farms. Post communicates with field staff from the Department of Agriculture in advance of visits to organize farmer group meetings.



E. Meeting with rice millers at their rice mill.



F. When Chargé d'affaires (CDA) and USAID mission Director joined the FAS crop survey in 2023, the Ag Specialist arranged rice field visit and rice mill visit. For this unique trip, Post carefully arranged the meetings and organized the trip to meet FAS reporting goals, but also gain insights on food security. For example, Post shared crucial questions and talking points to the CDA in advance.



G. Agricultural Specialist sometimes takes motorbikes and boats to villages where the rental car cannot go due to road conditions.



H. Some in-town meetings are easier to organize. Contacts are happy to meet at breakfast cafés, for afternoon coffee or at a working dinner.



I. Agricultural Specialist just stopped by on the way to communicate with farmers and collect information.



J. Some farmers are very cooperative and willing to answers many questions.



K. Flooded rice fields in Ayeyarwady Region in August 2024.



Attachments:

No Attachments.