

PROLINNOVA Cambodia paving the way for agricultural innovation

Local farmers' markets are its latest initiative to support organic farmers in Cambodia

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In the face of a rapidly warming globe and changing climate, local, sustainable innovations are more important than ever. As university students studying and concerned with the shift in climate patterns and the way this shift affects the global population, we were eager to learn from the Cambodian Center for Study and Development in Agriculture (CEDAC), a member of PROLINNOVA Cambodia, about their farmer-led innovations that have led to increased and sustainable productivity for local Cambodian farmers. We engaged with PROLINNOVA Cambodia through CEDAC to learn about many of their institutional innovations, including but not limited to farmer-organized markets for organic produce, rice mill cooperatives, savings groups, and producer groups.

Born out of the desire to connect small farmers to the market, local farmers' markets are the most recent institutional innovation supported by CEDAC and have already elicited strong farmer investment. Through these farmers' markets, CEDAC farmers are able to bring or send their organic produce to a local stand or shop in their own province at premium price, rather than being limited to the stores in the capital, Phnom Penh. This provides local consumers the opportunity to access fresh, organic products, such as vegetables and poultry, grown and raised by their community members. The additional benefits of this type of market are that farmers are able to see their produce through every step of the supply chain, and they can familiarize themselves with the current market's demands and prices.

While in Takeo Province, we had the opportunity to interview the leader of the local farmers' market. He explained that the market, the fifth of its kind to open, was created a short five weeks prior to our conversation. Still, more than forty farmers, representing all five Takeo districts, were already involved. These farmers have been trained by CEDAC on topics such as marketing skills, production planning, and communication with local authorities. They then use these skills when engaging in the marketing and sale of the products, which are transported from Takeo farms to the market through a fortified CEDAC-organized van pick-up service.

Raving about the farmers' initial efforts and the market's early development, the leader made it clear that he was dedicated to cultivating a long-lasting, self-sufficient, and stable Takeo farmers' market. He expressed his hope that CEDAC and the farming community would work hard to ensure that the market lasts, as he and fellow community members are invested in its success.



The farmer leader (left) at the farmers' market in Takeo province (photo: Avery Moyler)

We were able to not only speak to the leader of the Takeo farmers' market but also visit the market, which allowed us to have a full understanding of its value. There we saw many farmers we had previously met and interviewed and we were inspired to see them having personal interactions with the community members buying their produce. We were informed by a CEDAC field staff member that consumers choose CEDAC produce because they know who grows it, they know it's organic, and they have trust in CEDAC, its farmers, and their produce.

CEDAC has been able to develop a strong community presence through PROLINNOVA partners, such as National Farmer and Nature Net (FNN), a nation-wide farmer organization network, and the Provincial Department of Agriculture (PDA) of Takeo. PDA has provided administrative support through lobbying efforts at the local governmental level to get the permits needed to approve and open the market. Local government officers are key clients at the farmers' markets and are active in market information dissemination, as they spread word to friends and relatives.

For CEDAC, farmers' hands-on relationship with the market is key for their 2012-2022 strategic plan. When farmers actually see demand, they can better monitor supply. When farmers interact with customers face-to-face, they become more attuned to the impacts of advertising and marketing techniques. As contributors and sellers at their local markets, farmers gain perspective on the realities of the produce market, immediately accumulating greater agency over their

income. It will be initiatives, such as local farmers' markets, that will foster the strong foundation of collaboration, organization, and personal involvement needed for CEDAC's and PROLINNOVA Cambodia's services and influence to expand over the next six years.



A CEDAC organic farmer engaging with a customer at the market (photo: Avery Moyler)

We were utterly impressed by the farmers' market and this is just one of CEDAC's many initiatives. During our time working with the organization we were also able to witness many of CEDAC's other programs, such as "Young Agri-Entrepreneurs" and training of self-help leaders on small business management, and were equally inspired by them as we were by the farmers'

markets. CEDAC is an expert in leveraging the existing skills, creativity, innovation and networks in a farming community to strengthen the production and supply of organic produce in Cambodia. Their work is all encompassing and successfully supports farmers and the communities in which they live.

Seeing the hands-on work of CEDAC and its farmer members gave us insight into the importance of “the last mile” in delivering a service or a message. CEDAC field staff make frequent visits to their farmers to ensure that the farmers get all of the information, training, and services they need from CEDAC and feel a strong network of support from the organization. Reaching farmers in the provinces through visits to their farms, local meetings, and events is an important cornerstone of CEDAC’s functioning and it is what allows farmers to feel the level of support that enables them to enact such programs as a farmer-run market.

Local farmers’ markets are vital for connecting small-scale producers to local consumers and making organic produce available in provinces throughout the country. As the global food system becomes more industrialized, which has daunting effects on our environment, health, and small farmers’ livelihoods, the importance of “knowing your farmer” increases as a form of micro protest against this industrialization. These farmers epitomise sustainable, local farming and CEDAC and PROLINNOVA Cambodia’s support in making their produce more accessible to community members and simultaneously supporting these farmers’ livelihoods is a local and impactful example that organizations worldwide can follow.