

World's first sustainability standard for rice pilot-tested in the Philippines

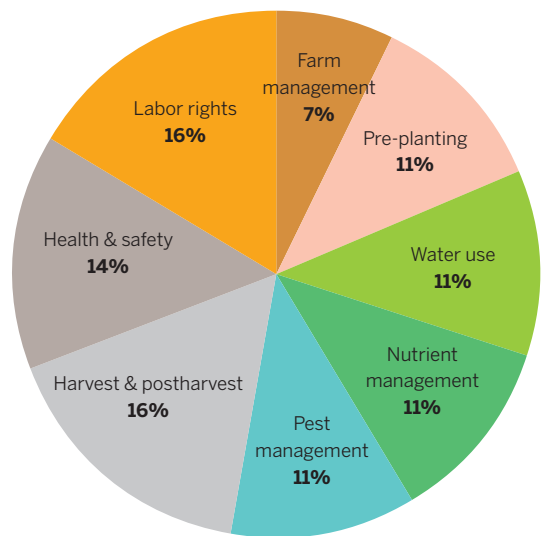


The Philippines has joined the pilot testing of the Sustainable Rice Platform, the world's first sustainability standard for rice. Initiated by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ) under the Better Rice Initiative Asia (BRIA) project, this effort has been implemented with the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and the Department of Agriculture (DA) Regional Field Office in Western Visayas as part of the global effort to field test the SRP standard in different rice ecosystems.

Developed by IRRI and the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), the SRP promotes sustainable farming practices as a sustainability standard for rice cultivation. Overall, the standard covers eight thematic areas from pre-planting to post-harvest, including labour rights and health and food safety.

Based on the standard, a scoring system was developed as a tool to assess whether a farm is sustainable or working towards its sustainability. The score, which ranges from zero to 100, may be obtained based on the checks a farmer may earn against the 48 good farming practices. To say that rice cultivation is sustainable when a farmer earns at least 90 out of 100.

The SRP Standard for Sustainable Rice Cultivation: 8 themes, 46 requirements



The SRP Standard: theme weighting



Field testing of SRP

The field testing kicked off with a training workshop for field agronomists who were subsequently employed in the field to interview farmers. Organised by GIZ and the DA, the training was facilitated by Mr. Joel Janiya, IRRI's Senior Associate Scientist and SRP expert, to get the field agronomists familiarised with the SRP standard and to learn the tools to collect and aggregate SRP data. The field agronomists were composed of agricultural extension workers, local farmer technicians, local BRIA coordinators, and DA RFO6 staff.

Next, the field interviews were piloted in four municipalities in Iloilo province: three BRIA-FARMERS sites where the local extension has strengthened through a GIZ grant; and one adjacent town with no extension support from GIZ.

In the BRIA-FARMERS sites, farmers have received more extension services with AEWs (agricultural extension workers) trained in the FARMERS School's Training of Trainers (ToTs). With the GIZ grant, the AEWs have mainstreamed their learnings via the local extension programmes, such as BRIA School Days and Farmer Field Schools (FFS), to name a few. Meanwhile, the DA RFO6 has provided seeds, fertilisers and crop protection products to farm associations whose farmer members are both involved in the SRP field testing and the agency's compact demos.

	Average Score	High	Low
Leganes			
Score on standard	70.4	85.6	46.0
Missed Thresholds	7.5	17	3
Pototan			
Score on standard	67.7	78.0	49.5
Missed Thresholds	7.6	12	3
San Miguel			
Score on standard	64.1	78.0	42.1
Missed Thresholds	9.2	16	5
Zaraga			
Score on standard	75.7	88.6	54.3
Missed Thresholds	5.2	12	1

Rice science for a better world



Sustainability scores of farmers

How many checks did the farmers get with the fist SRP assessment? Results show that farmers interviewed during the wet season (April to September 2016)) scored an average of 68 points. Farmers obtained higher scores in pest management and post-harvest while they posted lowest in food safety and labour rights.

Farmers in Leganes and Zaraga, both sites of BRIA-FARMERS, earned higher scores with an average of 70.4 and 75.7, respectively. The town of San Miguel, which is a not a site of BRIA-FARMERS, has the lowest average score of 64.1.

The sustainability scores of the farmers have revealed where they stand in the SRP standard. By knowing about it helps programme planners in the rice sector to fine-tune ongoing programmes to target the areas where the farmers need to be strengthened. It can also provide a reliable basis to develop tailored capacity building programmes, factoring in the areas for interventions towards helping farmers make his or her rice farm sustainable.

So, what is next?

An ongoing activity has been carried out in the wet season of June to October 2017 to understand and compare any differences or similarities of the sustainability scores of farmers in both seasons. BRIA and the four sites have identified gaps that will be addressed during this wet season. The scores will be calculated at the end of each cropping season.

Promoting the SRP as a sustainability standard for rice is a workable approach that farmers can adopt in their farms to sustainably make rice cultivation productive and environment-friendly. As growing rice is both a culprit of and vulnerable to the threats of climate change, sustainability is the only way to go to mitigate the effect of climate change and sustainably produce enough food for the ever-growing population.

Contributed by Jaime Gallentes

