

Timor-Leste

A\$3.4_{million}
investment in agricultural
research for development

9 projects



7

Bilateral and regional
research projects



2

Small projects and research
activities



6

Projects specific to
Timor-Leste



3

Regional projects

Note: Additional projects may be commissioned during 2024–25.



With approximately 70% of its population residing in rural areas, Timor-Leste relies heavily on agriculture for livelihoods.

Despite recent progress, challenges persist in the form of low agricultural productivity and significant food insecurity. The agriculture sector, employing nearly 38% of the workforce, remains underdeveloped, leading to a reliance on imports and constrained domestic revenues. Timor-Leste's National Strategy Plan prioritises the sustainable increase in agricultural productivity, diversity and profitability, aligning closely with ACIAR objectives in the region.

Rural communities

Timor-Leste experiences a significant youth bulge, with around 60% of the population under 24 years old. This demographic presents socio-economic challenges, including the need for employment, education and societal integration, which necessitate targeted interventions. The country is looking for potential opportunities to improve its planning, prioritisation and implementation of research and development to effectively address the challenges in the agriculture sector. Creating an enabling environment that can attract younger farmers to engage will contribute to supporting the challenges.

Political and economic environment

The political and economic environment in Timor-Leste continues to evolve, affecting agricultural and rural development. Stability and development policies remain crucial for fostering a conducive environment for agricultural growth and sustainable development.

Climate change

Weather variability in Timor-Leste, marked by inconsistent rainfall and extreme events, significantly disrupts agricultural production. Compounded by infertile soils, limited access to inputs and pest outbreaks, these factors collectively diminish farm productivity, and the ability of farms to support livelihoods.

The impacts of climate change, such as increasing temperatures, changing precipitation patterns and increasing incidence of heavy rainfall events, further intensify the threats to agricultural productivity.

Food insecurity

Over half of Timor-Leste's population grapples with food and nutrition insecurity, a persistent issue despite improvements in essential services. The prevalence of stunting among children under 5 years of age is alarmingly high (47% in 2020). The country's food supply is reported to be less than adequate to meet the dietary needs of the population and there is high dependency (60%) on food importation. The country's heavy reliance on cereals and low consumption of animal-sourced foods leads to dietary imbalance.

The Government of Timor-Leste has set a 'vision for food and nutrition security policy that by 2030 Timor-Leste will be free from hunger and malnutrition and Timorese people will enjoy healthy and productive lives'. It is seeking potential opportunities and better strategies to increase its focus on improving food and nutrition security. Last year, the government approved a decree-law for the regulation of the National Council for Food Security, Sovereignty and Nutrition in Timor-Leste (CONSSAN-TL) with the aim of establishing a regulatory framework for the effective implementation of food and nutrition security in the country.

Partnering with Australia

Timor-Leste and Australia enjoy a thriving bilateral relationship built on mutual development objectives and a strong commitment to scientific cooperation. This partnership is particularly evident in the agriculture sector, where collaboration with Australia is fostered between key stakeholders such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in Timor-Leste and various local research institutions.

ACIAR plays a pivotal role in the alliance between Timor-Leste and Australia, emphasising long-term partnerships aimed at bolstering agricultural productivity and sustainability. ACIAR's strategy aligns closely with Timor-Leste's National Strategic Development Plan and other vital national strategies, ensuring a shared vision for promoting sustainable agricultural practices and achieving developmental goals. This collaboration not only facilitates the exchange of knowledge and expertise but also creates opportunities for mutual benefits, reinforcing ties between the two nations through impactful scientific endeavours and developmental initiatives.

Country priorities

The Government of Timor-Leste is focused on modernising its agrifood systems to boost productivity and ensure food security. ACIAR engagement for 2024–25 aligns with these priorities, collaborating closely with key institutions such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Forestry, the National University of Timor-Lorosa'e, the Ministry of Health, and the National Council for Food Security, Sovereignty and Nutrition.

These partnerships aim to enhance agricultural productivity, improve food security and address nutritional needs. ACIAR research initiatives, such as the 'Learning space on food systems' research, support the implementation of the Consolidated National Action Plan for Food and Nutrition Security. These efforts promote sustainable agricultural practices, crop diversification, and advancements in the livestock and fisheries sectors, fostering productivity, dietary diversity, climate change resilience and soil fertility.

There are 5 key goals for agricultural research for development in Timor-Leste:

- » **Improving crop productivity and profitability**
to address the challenges of significant food insecurity and a reliance on imported products, finding solutions for safe effective use of inputs – seed, fertiliser and herbicides, and introducing innovations, such as mechanisation, new crop options, horticultural seed development techniques, and better conservation agriculture practices
- » **Improving livestock systems**
to combat nutritional insecurity and increase return
- » **Biosecurity and disease management**
to improve smallholder productivity through sustainable farming practices and enhanced crop and livestock management
- » **Effective land and water resource management**
for sustainable agricultural and water security
- » **Supporting rural youth**
to develop skills and entrepreneurial opportunities in agriculture sectors to address demographic challenges.

To address Timor-Leste's development needs, ACIAR research and capacity development will focus on improving the productivity, sustainability and resilience of smallholder agrifood systems, enhancing biosecurity and food safety, supporting sustainable fisheries, building climate resilience, and engaging rural youth through education and entrepreneurship in agriculture.

The objectives of the 2024–25 ACIAR research program include:

- » enhancing soil health and fertility to boost agricultural productivity and sustainability.
- » integrating crop and livestock management to improve biosecurity and on-farm productivity.
- » developing inclusive agrifood value chains to promote sustainable livelihoods and income generation.
- » improving aquatic ecosystem sustainability for continued food production and biodiversity conservation.

Recognising the significant youth demographic in Timor-Leste, ACIAR-led capacity development programs aim to engage young people in agriculture through targeted education, vocational training and entrepreneurship initiatives. These programs promote innovation, technology adoption and agribusiness, supporting the development of a skilled and resilient agricultural workforce.

2024–25 research program

In 2024–25, ACIAR supports 9 agricultural research-for-development projects in Timor-Leste, 6 of which are specific to this country and the remainder are part of regional projects.

The projects address the high-level objectives outlined in the ACIAR 10-Year Strategy 2018–2027, as well as specific issues and opportunities identified by partner countries and ACIAR.

All research investments have the underlying goal of contributing to:

- » agrifood systems and rural communities resilient to the impacts to climate change
- » equitable research benefits and outcomes for all community members
- » increased scientific and policy capability of individuals and partner institutions.

Country Manager, Timor-Leste







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Research Program Managers

Visit aciarc.gov.au for contact details



Current and proposed projects in Timor-Leste, 2024–25

Program	Project title & code	Country	Start	End	Total investment
	Agribusiness				
	Agricultural innovations for communities: intensified and diverse farming systems for Timor-Leste CROP/2021/131	Timor-Leste	01/11/22	31/10/27	A\$3,198,681
	Fisheries				
	A nutrition-sensitive approach to fisheries management and development in Timor-Leste and Nusa Tenggara Timur Province, Indonesia FIS/2017/032	Indonesia, Timor-Leste	01/09/21	31/07/25	A\$2,465,139
	Innovating fish-based livelihoods in the community economies of Timor-Leste and Solomon Islands FIS/2019/124	Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste	01/09/21	31/12/25	A\$2,444,000
	Extending integrated analysis for improved food system outcomes in Timor-Leste and the Pacific region FIS/2022/121	Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu	01/10/23	30/09/26	A\$2,500,000
	Horticulture				
	Scoping for the implementation of plant health support in Timor-Leste HORT/2022/127	Timor-Leste	01/10/23	28/02/25	A\$150,688
	Livestock Systems				
	Bacteria enteropathy and nutrition in infants and children in Timor-Leste through a One Health approach LS/2021/126	Timor-Leste	15/04/23	31/12/27	A\$2,100,000
	Developing strategies to reduce brucellosis transmission in Timor-Leste based on One Health collaboration LS/2022/161	Timor-Leste	05/12/22	31/12/25	A\$999,943
	Social Systems				
	Indigenous food systems knowledge exchange SSS/2022/118	Timor-Leste	14/08/23	14/02/25	A\$250,000
	Soil & Land Management				
	Increasing on-farm labour productivity for sustainable production, nutrition and inclusive livelihood gains in Timor-Leste SLAM/2020/141	Timor-Leste	01/07/24	30/06/28	A\$2,950,000

Note: Additional projects may be commissioned during 2024–25.



More information about our projects is available on the ACIAR website. Search for the project title or project code.

www.aciar.gov.au