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East and Southeast Asia region program

Collectively, the countries that make up the ACIAR region of East and Southeast Asia are the most populous in the world and the region is regarded an economic powerhouse. Ten of the countries in Southeast Asia are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and engage closely in terms of trade and investment with countries in east Asia, including China.

Since 2009, China has become the largest trading partner of ASEAN nations and is also one of the most important sources of investment. Economic growth in ASEAN economies continues to demonstrate resilience with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) forecasting GDP growth rates of close to 5%. Noting some exceptions, such as Laos, which is experiencing high inflation and low growth in GDP.

With more than 100 million hectares of agricultural land, the ASEAN countries collectively are a major producer, supplier and exporter of crops, grains (including rice) and livestock products. Although agriculture only contributes to around 10% of total GDP of ASEAN nations, it accounts for approximately one-third of total employment. Given its significant role, the development of the food, agriculture and forestry sectors is vital to ensuring equitable and inclusive growth in the region.

Women's participation in equitable agricultural value chains is a prominent goal within ASEAN as an approach to addressing gender gaps in economic spheres. Food security, food safety and better nutrition remain priority concerns within the region. Overarching these priorities are the shared impacts of climate change, with increasing frequency of extreme heat, floods and storms, as well as less reliable and predictable rainfall patterns resulting in the loss of agricultural production and sustainability.

2024–25 program

Partner countries

Cambodia
China
Indonesia
Laos
Malaysia
Philippines
Thailand
Timor-Leste
Vietnam

87
projects

A\$35 million

Investment in agricultural research for development

29
small research activities

58
research projects

Drivers of regional collaboration

The principal driver of regional collaboration in the ACIAR region of East and Southeast Asia is ASEAN, which for more than 50 years has addressed shared challenges and engaged with trade and development partners, including Australia and China. Recently, regional collaboration has been driven by critical factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitics and transboundary concerns.

Australia has worked closely with ASEAN since 1974, when it became the first Dialogue Partner of the association. While commemorating 50 years of dialogue relations in March 2024, ASEAN and Australia reaffirmed their commitment to the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and a plan of action to implement the partnership, for the period 2025 to 2029.

Trade and investment are the major drivers of economic growth in the region, aided by overseas development assistance. The ASEAN-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement came into force in January 2022 with the aim of strengthening regional economic integration and improving access to markets. In the agricultural research sector, ACIAR is supporting regional collaboration through support of the Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI).

Shared concerns about imminent and increasing threats posed by climate change have resulted in ASEAN creating a 'framework of ASEAN community building, with strategies and actions to enhance regional and international cooperation in supporting adaptation'.

In the field of agricultural research for development, regional cooperation plays a significant role, particularly regarding increasing resilience and adaptation to climate change, natural disasters and other shocks. Southeast Asia is one of the most natural disaster-prone regions of the world. Natural disasters threaten food security and rural livelihoods and have economic consequences for the whole region, so disaster mitigation is a shared goal among neighbouring countries. The ASEAN Declaration of 'One ASEAN, One Response' aims to increase the speed, scale and solidarity of disaster response in the region.

Cross-border challenges such as plant and animal biosecurity remain prominent and are driving efforts for regional integration. In the Mekong region, plant diseases have recently spread across borders, destroying crops of cassava, banana and plantation forests.

Regional ACIAR program

ACIAR engagement in the East and Southeast Asia region is strongly bilateral, based on robust partnerships with national research systems, long-standing diplomatic connections, and sustained development collaborations with Australia. However, there is a growing trend towards regional collaboration between countries facing shared challenges, particularly in relation to climate change. This is consistent with the research partnerships under ASEAN, which acknowledge that collaboration among member states is a sensible path towards addressing common challenges in the region.

The ASEAN drive towards regional economic integration and connectivity will increase demand from individual countries and regional bodies for research support that harmonises approaches to shared agricultural issues, including biosecurity, food safety and climate resilience. ACIAR contributes to this by funding regional research collaboration and through our support and chairing of APAARI.



Trilateral collaboration and new partnership models are emerging for ACIAR in the region. Driving these new partnership models are greater capacities that can be achieved when resources are pooled. This is translating into substantial co-investment from partners such as Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines. While bilateral relationships remain the predominant model for development cooperation in the region, trilateral collaboration supported by ACIAR is increasingly possible and desired by partner countries.

In Southeast Asia we work primarily with 7 partner countries. However, we also work with development and coordinating organisations based in other countries in the region, collaborating on issues and programs of regional significance. For example, in recent decades Thailand has transitioned from aid recipient to aid donor. Thailand hosts regional organisations of relevance to ACIAR programs, including APAARI (page 16), the Asian Institute of Technology and the FAO regional office. We also include Thai expertise on projects of regional significance when opportunities arise.




Current and proposed projects in the East and Southeast Asia region, 2024–25

Program	Project title & code	Country	Start	End	Total investment
	Agribusiness				
	Increasing the sustainability, productivity and economic value of coffee and black pepper farming systems and value chains in the Central Highlands Region of Vietnam AGB/2018/175	Vietnam	01/02/21	30/06/25	A\$3,460,000
	Agribusiness-led inclusive value chain development for smallholder farming systems in the Philippines AGB/2018/196	Philippines	01/08/21	31/07/25	A\$2,800,000
	Planning and establishing a sustainable smallholder rice chain in the Mekong Delta AGB/2019/153	Vietnam	25/02/22	30/12/25	A\$2,600,000
	Integrating smallholder households and farm production systems into commercial beef supply chains in Vietnam AGB/2020/189	Vietnam	25/02/22	30/12/25	A\$2,780,000
	Creating resilient communities through smallholder-inclusive tourism markets in Indonesia AGB/2021/125	Indonesia	01/07/23	31/12/28	A\$2,800,000
	Digital monitoring of VietGAP compliance for high-value domestic markets and potential export in smallholder fruit value chains from the Northwest Region of Vietnam AGB/2022/114	Vietnam	01/04/25	31/10/28	A\$2,104,039
	Evidence to underpin Indonesia's agtech transformation AGB/2023/155	Indonesia	01/09/24	31/08/27	A\$1,497,866
	Evaluate the opportunities and constraints for growth of smallholder dairy value chains in the Philippines AGB/2023/192	Philippines	14/10/24	30/09/26	A\$499,940
	Food loss in the Pangasius catfish value chain of the Mekong River Basin CS/2020/209	Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam	01/04/23	30/06/26	A\$1,441,700
	Partnering with trading companies to sustainably enhance smallholders' livelihood in the Central Highlands of Vietnam through pilot chain interventions towards high-quality Robusta coffee CS/2023/181	Vietnam	17/08/23	30/09/25	A\$500,000
	Crops				
	International Mungbean Improvement Network (Phase 2) CROP/2019/144	Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Myanmar	01/07/20	30/06/25	A\$2,257,184
	Weed management techniques for mechanised and broadcast lowland crop production systems in Cambodia and Laos CROP/2019/145	Cambodia, Laos	01/04/25	31/10/28	A\$2,257,184
	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
	Disease-resilient and sustainable cassava production systems in the Mekong region CROP/2022/110	Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam	01/11/23	30/06/28	A\$3,500,000
	Integrating the electrification and smart mechanisation of 2-wheel tractors with precision agriculture for improved productivity and sustainability CROP/2023/129	Cambodia	13/05/24	30/06/29	A\$3,229,915
	Supporting greenhouse gas inventories and targeted rice mitigation options for Vietnam CLIM/2019/150	Vietnam	01/02/23	30/06/25	A\$580,370

Program	Project title & code	Country	Start	End	Total investment
	Fisheries				
	Increasing technical skills supporting community-based sea cucumber production in Vietnam and the Philippines FIS/2016/122	Philippines, Vietnam	01/10/18	31/12/24	A\$2,565,000
	Half-pearl industry development in Tonga and Vietnam FIS/2016/126	Tonga, Vietnam	01/09/17	31/12/24	A\$1,450,515
	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
	FishTech: integrating technical fisheries solutions into river development programs across Southeast Asia FIS/2018/153	Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand	01/01/20	31/12/25	A\$8,509,334
	Regional coral restoration networks and appropriate technologies for larger-scale coral and fish habitat restoration in the Philippines and Australia FIS/2019/123	Philippines	01/12/20	31/10/25	A\$2,559,960
	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
	Institutional effectiveness and political economy of coral reef restoration in the Philippines FIS/2021/112	Philippines	01/09/21	30/06/25	A\$1,783,101
	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
	Addressing key technical bottlenecks in the grouper supply chain in Vietnam (and Australia) through manufactured feed and hatchery developments that aim to improve small and medium-sized enterprises sector profitability FIS/2022/148	Vietnam	01/06/24	01/12/27	A\$2,585,434
	Enhancing maritime environmental governance in Indonesia and the Philippines FIS/2023/185	Indonesia, Philippines	01/07/24	30/06/27	A\$2,272,727
	The value of using a South-South triangular cooperation approach in mariculture for Cambodia and Indonesia FIS/2024/105	Cambodia, Indonesia	01/04/24	31/12/25	A\$382,908
	Increasing capacity in population biology and harvest strategy implementation for sustainable tuna fishing and food security in Indonesia FIS/2024/110	Indonesia	01/06/24	31/03/26	A\$499,414
	Forestry				
	Managing risk in Southeast Asian forest biosecurity FST/2018/179	Indonesia, Vietnam	24/09/21	31/12/25	A\$1,900,220
	Building an effective forest health and biosecurity network in Southeast Asia FST/2020/123	Cambodia, Laos	01/11/21	30/06/26	A\$1,898,717
	Forest restoration for economic outcomes FST/2020/137	Laos	01/07/23	30/06/28	A\$4,306,332
	Retaining the jewels in the crown: Kalimantan peat forest remnants FST/2021/145	Indonesia	13/06/22	31/05/25	A\$250,000
	Diversified livelihoods from native tree species in the Northwest Region of Vietnam FST/2023/150	Vietnam	20/07/24	30/06/26	A\$347,643
	Sustainable expansion of forestry and wood processing in Laos and Australia FST/2023/153	Laos	15/11/24	14/11/29	A\$3,100,000
	Scoping new co-governance research in Indonesian peatlands CLIM/2022/138	Indonesia	01/07/23	31/03/25	A\$294,283

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	Horticulture				
	Development of area-wide management approaches for fruit flies in mango for Indonesia, Philippines, Australia and the Asia-Pacific region HORT/2015/042	Indonesia, Philippines	01/01/20	31/12/25	A\$3,037,493
	An integrated management response to the spread of Fusarium wilt of banana in Southeast Asia HORT/2018/192	Indonesia, Laos, Philippines	01/01/20	31/12/25	A\$3,037,493
	Preparedness and management of huánglóngbīng (citrus greening disease) to safeguard the future of citrus industry in Australia, China and Indonesia (Phase 2) HORT/2019/164	China, Indonesia	01/01/21	30/06/26	A\$1,789,999
	Smarter use of pesticides in tree crop systems in the Philippines and Indonesia for reduced fruit loss and improved safety HORT/2022/125	Indonesia, Philippines	01/07/24	31/12/28	A\$3,150,000
	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
	An integrated management response to the spread of Fusarium wilt of banana in Southeast Asia (Indonesia phase) HORT/2022/178	Indonesia	01/01/23	31/12/25	A\$252,944
	Scoping the opportunity for urban and peri-urban agricultural development in Southeast Asia HORT/2023/147	Philippines, Vietnam	01/07/23	31/12/25	A\$400,858
	Pan genome analysis to support innovative utilisation of coconut germplasm resources in the Pacific and Southeast Asia HORT/2023/158	China, Fiji, Indonesia, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu	01/01/25	30/06/29	A\$3,700,000
	MeloRisk Australasia: reducing the risk of exotic root-knot nematodes in Australasia HORT/2023/167	Indonesia, Laos, Philippines, Vietnam	12/06/23	31/03/25	A\$87,500
	Scoping Vietnam's citrus industry priorities to inform the development of a research roadmap HORT/2023/179	Vietnam	01/02/24	31/07/25	A\$299,999
	Livestock Systems				
	Investigating and developing interventions to mitigate food borne parasitic disease in production animals in Laos LS/2014/055	Laos	15/11/20	31/12/24	A\$1,600,000
	Evaluating zoonotic malaria transmission and agricultural and forestry land use in Indonesia LS/2019/116	Indonesia	01/01/20	30/06/26	A\$4,620,467
	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
	Indo-Pacific Initiative for Sustainable Animal Health Cooperation LS/2022/143	Bangladesh, Kenya, Philippines, Vietnam	01/01/24	30/06/27	A\$1,400,000
	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
	Country research update and policy support to the Philippines' national surveillance and control programs for African swine fever, avian influenza and antimicrobial resistance: a One Health systems approach to food animal security and public health resilience LS/2022/162	Philippines	12/12/22	31/12/25	A\$1,000,000
	Livestock enhancement through Ecohealth/One Health assessment in Southeast Asia LS/2022/163	Indonesia, Laos, Philippines	12/12/22	31/12/25	A\$997,838
	Detection and characterisation of foot-and-mouth disease in Indonesia LS/2022/166	Indonesia	01/02/24	31/05/25	A\$155,855

Program	Project title & code	Country	Start	End	Total investment
	Social Systems				
	Next generation agricultural extension: social relations for practice change SSS/2019/138	Cambodia	11/01/21	31/12/26	A\$4,500,002
	Building the evidence base on the impacts of mobile financial services for women and men in farming households in Laos and Cambodia SSS/2020/160	Cambodia, Laos	01/09/21	31/05/27	A\$2,998,851
	Indigenous food systems knowledge exchange SSS/2022/118	Timor-Leste	14/08/23	14/02/25	A\$250,000
	Pathways for future farmers in Southeast Asia SSS/2022/134	Laos	01/08/24	31/03/26	A\$957,210
	Developing co-management options for sustainable peatland livelihoods in Indonesia SSS/2022/155	Indonesia	01/07/24	30/06/29	A\$2,790,999
	The role of agricultural and forest landscapes on human and environmental health in Cambodia SSS/2022/164	Cambodia	14/04/23	31/12/25	A\$999,999
	Harnessing the potential of digital agri-market services for inclusive and competitive markets in Cambodia and Laos SSS/2023/105	Cambodia, Laos	01/07/25	30/06/30	A\$3,500,000
	Assessing the social and economic implications of transitioning to low-input and organic rice production in Laos SSS/2023/137	Laos	01/10/23	31/12/25	A\$500,000
	Evidence-based policies to support Vietnam's agricultural and rural development SSS/2023/138	Vietnam	01/10/23	31/12/25	A\$500,000
	Reframing the yield gap: Integrating farmer knowledge, culture and agroecological conditions for sustainable rice yields in the Philippines SSS/2023/139	Philippines	01/10/23	31/12/25	A\$500,000
	Strengthening the research-policy nexus in the Laos for agricultural and rural development SSS/2023/160	Laos	01/03/25	30/07/30	A\$3,190,000
	Pathways to build a gender inclusive and climate resilient food sector: country focus Cambodia, Indonesia and the Philippines SSS/2023/191	Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines	01/01/24	30/06/26	A\$320,000
	Support policymakers and farmers in green agriculture reform: rice production in Vietnam SSS/2024/107	Vietnam	01/05/24	31/12/24	A\$149,546
	Vietnam small holder farmers: challenges and opportunities for a sustainable future SSS/2024/108	Vietnam	01/06/24	30/06/25	A\$383,775
	Agricultural policy development in Mongolia SSS/2024/109	Mongolia	15/08/24	30/06/25	A\$202,339
	Extending climate and disaster risk and resilience to community level in the Philippines: a proof-of-concept CLIM/2023/195	Philippines	22/07/24	10/10/25	A\$500,000

Program	Project title & code	Country	Start	End	Total investment
	Soil & Land Management				
	Farmer options for crops under saline conditions (FOCUS) in the Mekong River Delta, Vietnam SLAM/2018/144	Vietnam	01/01/20	30/06/25	A\$2,313,286
	Crop health and nutrient management of shallot-chilli-rice cropping systems in coastal Indonesia SLAM/2018/145	Indonesia	01/08/20	31/12/26	A\$2,000,000
	Managing heavy metals and soil contaminants in vegetable production to ensure food safety and environmental health in the Philippines SLAM/2020/117	Philippines	01/02/23	31/01/27	A\$2,036,586
	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
	Quantifying the impacts of nitrogen use and developing sustainable agricultural nitrogen management strategies in Laos rice-based farming systems SLAM/2022/102	Laos	01/01/24	31/12/28	A\$3,089,448
	Cambodian soil information system supporting sustainable upland agricultural development SLAM/2022/103	Cambodia	23/07/24	30/06/29	A\$2,838,392
	Meeting the biophysical information needs of peatland restoration and management stakeholders to support improved and integrated decision-making SLAM/2022/104	Indonesia	23/07/24	30/06/29	A\$2,500,000
	Assessment of the adoption and adaptation of conservation agriculture and direct seeded rice in South and Southeast Asia SLAM/2022/172	Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Laos, Philippines, Vietnam	19/12/22	31/03/25	A\$357,424
	Soil microbial interactions with crop replacement options in the Vietnamese Mekong Delta SLAM/2022/175	Vietnam	12/12/22	31/12/24	A\$250,000
	Supporting practice change to improve the sustainability of agronomic management in vegetable production systems in Cambodia SLAM/2023/100	Cambodia	01/01/25	31/12/29	A\$3,640,333
	Assessment of soil condition for coffee, pepper and fruit tree production in the 5 provinces of the Central Highlands of Vietnam SLAM/2023/142	Vietnam	03/06/24	30/11/25	A\$500,000
	Developing soil knowledge, information and capacity to improve the productivity and sustainability of key cropping systems in Philippines SLAM/2023/146	Philippines	01/11/24	30/09/29	A\$3,500,000
	Exploring soil hydrological function in degraded and intact tropical peat swamp forest SLAM/2023/197	Indonesia	09/02/24	30/09/25	A\$150,000
	Carbon flux pathways: from ecosystem to the global carbon market SLAM/2024/116	Indonesia	15/07/24	31/01/26	A\$500,000
	Management practices for profitable crop livestock systems for Cambodia and Laos SMCN/2012/075	Cambodia, Laos	22/03/16	31/12/24	A\$3,142,140
	Defining the potential for mangrove-based agribusiness transformation in the coastal Mekong Delta CLIM/2023/190	Vietnam	01/03/24	30/09/25	A\$471,200
	Water				
	Water for rice and fish: co-design and piloting of water management interventions for enhanced productivity of rice-fish systems in the Mekong floodplains WAC/2022/153	Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam	01/12/24	30/11/27	A\$2,100,000
	Understanding the role of remote sensing in supporting agricultural water management in Southeast Asia WAC/2023/117	Vietnam	01/10/24	30/09/25	A\$370,000

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.
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