Introduction to Workshop on 'Developing a market-driven biosecure beef industry for Laos'

Australian Ambassador Mrs Lynda Worthaisong,

Dr. Bounkhoung Khambounheung, Director General, Department of Livestock and Fisheries, Esteemed colleagues and especially my highly talented collaborator Dr Syseng Khounsy,

Greetings. As Sonevilay Nampanya has said, my name is Peter Windsor and I am the Professor of Livestock Health & Production from the University of Sydney. On behalf of my colleagues at the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research and USYD, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you here today to this very special workshop on developing a market driven biosecure beef industry for Laos. Although it's almost a year to the day since we had our project completion workshop for the ACIAR funded project 'Best Practice Health & Husbandry of Large Ruminants', we have been working hard completing work & publishing.

Our aim over the next 2 days is to prioritise the next phase of research needed to progress the so-called livestock revolution for Laos. This is massive change for Laos, where the predominant traditional smallholder large ruminant subsistence system in Laos is being transformed into a production system that engages with the cash economy of the emerging markets resulting from the sustained increasing demand for red meat in the region. However the technical and policy framework needed to achieve optimal farm productivity needs to be both better understood and implemented. Research for development can provide both the strategic directions and technical solutions that are required if this emerging red meat market opportunity is to be captured by the Lao agricultural sector.

You have been invited to this workshop in your role as either a current or potential key leader and stakeholder involved in developing the large ruminant market chain. We have been developed a project research document for funding through ACIAR and are now seeking your input and feedback on the future prospects and research required for growing the Lao livestock industry. We need your input into the aims, objectives and methodology of the new project proposal. This workshop is hosted by the DLF through Dr Syseng Khounsy with support from the UoS team, including myself, Dr Russell Bush, our PhD student Sonevilay and undergraduate veterinary students Nigel Gillan and Isabel McPhillamy. A very important partner in the research proposal is the National Agricultural and Forestry Institute and it is a great pleasure to welcome Dr Aloun Phonvisay who has returned from Australia where he graduated recently with his PhD. We are also pleased to welcome potential research partners from the Faculty of Agriculture at the National University of Laos (NUOL) at Nabong campus near Vientiane, plus the new Faculty of Agriculture at Savannakhet University (SvU).

Few need to be reminded of the importance of this work. The Government of Lao with assistance from a range of donors, has been busily implementing activities to achieve the millennium development goals, resulting in a decrease in the Lao poverty rate from 46% in 1992 to 24% in 2011 suggesting the poverty rate will be within the 24% target of the MDG in 2015. Efforts to improve production in the northern provinces of the country by provision of improved animal health and production and the quantity and quality of the meat supply, is leading to improved incomes in poor households in remote areas.

However whilst this is impressive, it is still only a beginning. There is much to be done with many research questions that we need to answer to enable the investments of the GOL and major donors to be optimised. It is by generating evidence that creates understanding of what interventions most quickly improve practises, driving investments that can strengthen the Lao rural economy. Importantly, socioeconomic research provides evidence that there are major improvements occurring in the lives of Lao citizens in rural communities. These are people
simply seeking pathways to improve the health and food security plus education opportunities for their families. I will now ask Ambassador Worthaisong to address the meeting.

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