

Korea Wants Rice Out of FTA

Korea Times

February 13, 2006

SEOUL (Yonhap) _ Improving the quality of locally grown agricultural products will be a key government goal this year as more imports are expected to be sold on the South Korean market, the country's agriculture minister said Monday.

Outlining the annual policy goal for 2006, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Park Hong-soo said free trade agreement (FTA) talks with countries, including the United States and Canada, will inevitably involve the opening of the domestic agricultural market and difficult times ahead for local growers.

°FTA discussion with countries like Singapore and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) did not involve agriculture, but that will change this year,± he said, adding that every effort will be made to ensure the United States understands the sensitive nature of agriculture.

He also said that the rice deal signed with nine exporting countries in late 2004 will be used to build up the competitiveness of rice producers.

°South Korea will use the rice tariff waiver that has been extended to 2014, to improve quality and build up brand recognition for locally grown rice,± Park said.

On the World Trade Organization's Doha Development Agenda talks, that could be agreed upon by the end of the year, the policymaker said the emphasis will be to win °developing country status± in the agricultural field. This, he said, would allow South Korea to hold onto so-called sensitive products that can be exempted from tariffs.