

From Cambodia's Forests to London's Grocery Stores: Conservation Meets Economic Development to Deliver Southeast Asian Products to UK Shelves

Success of Cambodia-based rice producer demonstrates that development, community-based conservation and nature protection can work in tandem to bring economic benefits to ASEAN region

Grown in Cambodian forests known for a rare Giant Ibis population, IBIS Rice landed on UK supermarket shelves this month, heralding an economic model that sees local communities supplying sustainable products to the global market while protecting natural areas and earning a living.

“The launch of these products comes as world leaders are set to agree on a [global framework](#) for safeguarding the planet's biodiversity later this year,” said Dr. Ken SereyRotha, Director, WCS Cambodia. “IBIS Rice highlights a viable solution that works for nature, local people and Cambodia's economic development. This is an exciting model that other ASEAN countries could replicate.”

Forest farmers produce the rice as part of an innovative farming approach that boosts incomes while conserving critically endangered wildlife. The program has brought economic opportunity to some 1,800 farming families that would have otherwise used unsustainable practices to grow less profitable crops. As a result, they have helped protect over 500,000 hectares of forest.

“All too often, nature conservation is framed as an impediment to development. But IBIS rice and other enterprises like it —such as those in the sustainable tourism field — provide evidence that protecting nature and economic development can work hand in hand,” said Rotha.

IBIS Rice was founded by the [Wildlife Conservation Society](#) with a mission to save the critically endangered Giant Ibis. Conservationists rediscovered the Giant Ibis—thought to have been extinct—in 1993 in the Cambodia Northern Plains, a dry tropical forest area.

The birds, which lived near remote farming communities growing heritage varieties of jasmine rice, faced a growing threat of habitat destruction as a result of farmland expansion, poaching and illegal logging.

“The IBIS Rice farming model sees farming communities as critical to both their own futures and the future of these forests. Overall, IBIS Rice empowers farmers to protect wildlife while lifting them out of poverty, providing them greater market access and

establishing clearer land tenure.” Said Nicholas Spencer, CEO, IBIS Rice Conservation Co., Ltd

Cambodia was the first ASEAN country to join the global [High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People](#), a coalition of nearly 80 countries supporting the global goal of protecting at least 30% of the planet by 2030. This target is expected to be a cornerstone of the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework, which will be signed at COP15 later this year.

IBIS Rice

IBIS Rice is an ethically-driven conservation enterprise working with forest farmers to protect the ecosystem while growing wildlife-friendly premium organic jasmine rice, grown in areas protected for their biodiversity value in Cambodia. The concept was developed by The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) in 2009 and in October 2017, The IBIS Rice Conservation Co., Ltd was incorporated. Now it is protecting 500,000 hectares of precious forest wetlands, increased the incomes of over 1,500 rice farming families and is conserving more than 50 endangered species (including the critically endangered Giant Ibis – Cambodia’s national bird).

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