

# Ministry vows push to lift rubber prices

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The Agriculture Ministry has promised to push for changes to the Rubber Aid Fund to allow a portion of it to be used to shore up falling rubber prices.

Amendments to the Office of the Rubber Replanting Aid Fund Act could help turn around falling rubber prices, a source at the ORPAF said.

The ministry made the promise yesterday at a three-hour meeting between Agriculture and Cooperatives Minister Theera Wongsamut, officials, and rubber farmers.

The negotiations were held after southern rubber farmers parked trucks loaded with latex on the Asian Highway in Songkhla's Rattaphum district on Tuesday, blocking the road to put pressure on the government.

The farmers had earlier threatened to pour latex in front of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra's house if the government failed to address their problems.

During the talks, both sides agreed the ORPAF Act must be amended to allow a tax on exports of rubber products to go into a fund in order to stabilise rubber prices.

The amendments would give the office a greater role in the rubber market.

The ministry has also been asked to support the registration of farmers' institutes as juristic entities, the source said.

The ministry will submit the results of the talks to the National Rubber Policy Committee, chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Kittiratt Na-Ranong, on Jan 17. The committee is expected to forward the proposal to the cabinet meeting on Jan 24.

Chart Thai Pattana MP Thanin Jaisamut, in his capacity as adviser to a ministry committee tackling falling rubber prices, promised to push for the measures.

The source said the price of rubber sheets had nosedived to 80 baht a kilogramme over the past four months. The production cost of raw rubber sheets is about 79.35 baht/kg, while that of rubber latex is 77.42 baht/kg.

Chayant Sangpaithoon, a member of the ministry's committee on tackling the falling rubber price, said farmers wanted the government through the Rubber Policy Committee to intervene in the market to lift rubber prices to 120 baht/kg for 200,000 tonnes of rubber sheets.