Often referred to as the world’s rice bowl, the Asia-Pacific region indeed produces and consumes the vast majority of the world’s rice, but diets are changing and the demand for other foods derived from agriculture and animal proteins is on the rise. The consumption of dairy products in this region has skyrocketed in recent years – worldwide, one in every five glasses of milk consumed each day is in India – while China produces more than half the world’s pigs, some 500 million. Ninety percent of aquaculture takes place in this region (dealt with in a separate overview on fisheries and aquaculture). The vast majority of this agriculture and animal production originates at the hands of smallholder farmers.

FAO aims to help our member countries in Asia and the Pacific achieve responsible and sustainable management of these resources in order to ensure the people of this region, particularly the more vulnerable, are food secure and prosperous. But there are serious challenges. With the majority of land already under cultivation, and amid fierce and growing competition for natural resources like land and water, increasing food production to feed a growing population and ensure that the majority of the world’s hungry get enough to eat by 2030 (more than 60 percent live in this region), will require political will. It will also need investment and an all-stakeholder approach that includes innovation, research and development and both public and private sector involvement that includes full participation of the most vulnerable to food insecurity – namely smallholder farmers and fishers – among others.

Contribution of agriculture and animal production to nutrition and livelihoods

Asia is the world’s largest rice producer and consumer, growing 90 percent of total rice production and consuming most of it. However, the pattern of rice consumption is on the decrease across the region. To some degree, production is changing to reflect that. Almost 30 percent of maize for global consumption is produced in the Asia-Pacific region and maize production is also on the steady increase in Asia. The region produces most of the world’s fruits and vegetables. Though pulses are very high in protein and fibre, global production is steadily declining, largely conducive to lower awareness on the nutritional benefits and weak policy support to boost the production. FAO and some governments are working hard to change this perception – repositioning pulses (and other underutilized species of edible plants) as mass consumables that can help the region meet the Zero Hunger target by 2030 and boost nutrition.

Asia and the Pacific is also home to the world’s largest domestic animal populations and animal proteins resources. Increases in population and disposable income in Asian
countries are driving an unprecedented rise in demand for meat and dairy products. This growing demand is severely stretching the capacity of existing food production systems.

**Agriculture and animal production in the Asia-Pacific region – the big picture**

While the Asia-Pacific region is home to more than 60 percent of the world’s population (and the world’s food insecure), it is also home to 70 percent of family farmers. These small-scale food producers, farmers, forest producers, fishers and herders produce 80 percent of the region’s food. Family farmers in the region contribute to local market development, community level cooperation and resilience, and ultimately to countries’ global domestic products. Family farmers also help preserve and enhance local traditions, farming practices, heritage farming and food systems, as well as community ecosystems and rural landscapes.

In this highly diverse region, family farmers are threatened by climate-related events and changing weather patterns resulting in increasing floods, droughts, landslides, cyclones and tsunamis – all of which increasing threaten rural lives and livelihoods.

Likewise, the vast majority of livestock keepers in the Asia-Pacific region are small-scale household producers. Some 800 million live on less than (US) two dollars a day. Growing demand for animal products could help drive poverty alleviation and rural development. But, so far, governments have not grasped this opportunity and growth in a poorly regulated livestock sector comes with major animal and human health risks as well as with negative environmental and social impacts.

**Animal production in the Asia-Pacific region – another big picture**

Projected demand growth for protein from poultry is widespread in all regions and very high rates of increase are forecast to occur in Asia. Meantime, demand for milk and dairy products is also widespread and continues to increase across the region. The demand for pork clearly reflects food preferences determined by cultural and religious factors. For example, pork consumption in China overall is projected to increase by 22 million metric tonnes between 2000 and 2030, a 55 percent increase.

According to FAO figures, during the last 50 years, consumption of meat products has skyrocketed in East Asia, from nearly 9 kg per capita (8.7 kg) in the mid 1960’s to 50 kg per person in 2015 – an increase of more than 500 percent. Increased prosperity in the region, mainly in China, along with changing diets and demand for more protein-rich foods, are largely responsible for the increases in demand and consumption. But even without the increased consumption in China, the region still consumed three-times more meat during the same period. Japan, for example, increased per capita meat consumption from nearly 33 kg in the mid-1980’s to more than 41 kg in the late 1990’s, while its net imports quadrupled and self-sufficiency fell by around one-third.

**A vision for agriculture and livestock development in the region: FAO’s strategy**

FAO’s approaches are designed to help our member countries optimize their agriculture and animal production objectives in a sustainable manner. Sustainable crop production and intensification (SCPPI) aims to produce more from the same area of land while reducing negative environmental impacts, conserving natural resources and enhancing healthy ecosystem services.

FAO promotes the Save and Grow approach which incorporates conservation agriculture, healthy soils, improved crops and varieties, efficient use of water, and integrated pest management. While no size fits all, FAO emphasizes that both conservation agriculture on one hand and the sustainable use of agricultural biodiversity on the other. In fact, biodiversity is one of the key global resources for food and agricultural production, including fibre, fuel, fodder and many more. It underpins ecosystem resilience, adaptation to climate change and sustainable livelihoods. The Asia-Pacific region is home to the world’s richest biodiversity, with 5 of the 17 megadiverse countries in the world. There is plenty of opportunity and potential for growth as only a small percentage of the region’s biological diversity has been studied and used for agriculture and food production.

In animal and livestock production, FAO is helping member countries by working to promote animal health and prevent transboundary spread of diseases. In the Asia-Pacific region, FAO operates the Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases (ECTAD) and is actively working with FAO member countries to prevent the spread of new and old diseases and mitigate risks.

FAO is also working with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) to advocate a One Health approach (e.g. actions to holistically benefit humans, animals and the environment). The three agencies have been campaigning in recent years to raise awareness about antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and the resulting ill effects seen in both humans and animals due to the misuse and abuse of antibiotics.

Across the Asia-Pacific region, FAO specialists work closely with counterparts in government, in laboratories and farmer field schools, helping refine policies and build capacity to improve animal health and food safety at all levels.