

RECENT RICE PRICES SKYROCKET IN DPRK

Even North Korea's North and South Hwanghae Provinces, an area known as the DPRK's 'Ricebowl', now appears to be suffering severe rice shortages, with prices at the end of last month hitting 4,000~4,500 DPRK Won per kg, more than three times the cost of a kilogram of rice last February, according to a June 5 report by Good Friends, a human rights group focusing its efforts on North Korea.

According to Good Friends' latest newsletter, prices across South Hwanghae Province all rose to 4,500 DPRK Won on May 30, and at the same time, prices in South Hwanghae rose to over 4,000 DPRK Won per kg. In Sariwon, North Hwanghae Province, rice was 1,350 DPRK Won/kg in February, rose to 1,700 DPRK Won/kg in March, climbed again to 2,200 DPRK Won/kg in April, then shot up to 2,500 DPRK Won/kg on the 10th of last month, 3,500 DPRK Won on the 25th, and 4,200 DPRK Won on the 30th. As the average monthly wage of a North Korean laborer is thought to be around 3,000 DPRK Won, rice selling at 4,000 DPRK Won/kg is well out of reach.

Corn prices in the Sariwon region at the end of last month was 1,950 DPRK Won/kg, 270 percent higher than the 720 Won prices seen in February, and the newsletter reported that prices throughout North and South Hwanghae Province were generally 1,950-2000 DPRK Won/kg. In particular, the newsletter stressed that at one military base in the Hwanghae area, rations have run so short that officers with children under the age of 12 will be ordered to send their families to their parents' or in-law's house until rations are reissued in November.

The newsletter drives the point home by pointing out, "These officers that send their families

will take their meals on base...this is the first time since the 'arduous march' that there has been an order to send families [away] because of this kind of ration shortage."