



QSA Notes

May 2026

Self-reliance reduces the impact of global conflicts on Cambodian agriculture

Fleur Bayley | Project Manager, Cambodia

When war disrupts the Middle East, the effects don't stay there. One of the first ripple effects is rising fuel prices, which then push up fertiliser costs. For farmers in developing countries, this isn't an abstract global issue. It hits directly—and often hard.

For many smallholder farmers, chemical fertilisers are one of the biggest expenses each season. When prices spike, they face an impossible choice: spend money they don't have or use less and risk a poor harvest. Either way, it can mean less food on the table and less income for their families.

In the communities where QSA's partner Khmer Community Development (KCD) works, small-scale rice farmers usually plant two crops each year—one in the dry season around December, and another during the wet season in July. But recently, KCD has seen a shift. Many farmers are choosing not to plant the second crop at all. The cost of fuel—for ploughing, irrigation, and transport—has simply become too high.

In a village in Cambodia's Kandal Province, one rice farmer, Mr Ol, knows this pressure well. For years, he relied on chemical fertilisers and pesticides. But despite working hard, he wasn't getting ahead. Most of what he earned went straight back into farm inputs.

Sometimes, I felt like I worked hard without seeing real benefits, he said.

Things began to change when Mr Ol joined a local project run by KCD¹, introducing natural and permaculture-based farming techniques.



¹ This project is supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program ([ANCP](#)).

At first, he was unsure. Moving away from chemical fertilisers felt risky—especially when your family depends on the harvest. But with training, support, and the chance to learn alongside other farmers, he decided to give it a try.

He began making his own fertilisers using what he already had: compost, natural mixtures, even snail-based inputs and plant extracts for pest control. It wasn't just cheaper—it was something he could control, without worrying about rising market prices.

The results were striking. He reduced his use of chemical fertilisers from six bags to just two per hectare, cutting his costs by around 60%. At a time when global fuel and fertiliser prices were climbing, that made a huge difference.

What surprised him most was the harvest. His rice yield increased, and the quality improved too—whiter, heavier grains that fetched a better price at market. Instead of struggling to break even, he earned more and provided greater security for his family.

After applying natural farming, I reduced my costs and increased my yield. I feel proud because my rice is healthier, and I can earn more while protecting my family's health.

There were other changes as well. Without constant exposure to chemical pesticides, he felt healthier. Farming became safer—not just for him, but for his children, who often help in the fields.

Now, as fertiliser prices continue to rise due to conflict and energy costs, he is less exposed than he once was. By relying on local resources and permaculture principles, he has built a farming system that is more stable—and more his own.

Mr Ol's success hasn't gone unnoticed. Other farmers in the village are starting to follow his lead, learning how to reduce their dependence on expensive inputs. What began as one farmer's decision is slowly becoming a community shift.

And in a world where distant conflicts can reshape the cost of growing food, that kind of local resilience matters more than ever.