



GOODFRIENDS



Weekly Newsletter

No.278 May 2009

["Good Friends" desires to help the North Korean people through humanistic point of view, and publishes "North Korea Today" describing the way the North Korean people live as real as possible. We at Good Friends also hope to be a bridge between the North Korean people and the world.]

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[Hot Topics]

**150-Day Battle in Agriculture Begins**

Starting on May 10, the 150-day "battle" began nationwide and in the agricultural sector in particular. Every work unit, factory and enterprise of the nation intensified its propaganda and encouraged residents, claiming that, "Unless we produce in all of our work, our national economy will fall behind by more than ten years." Accordingly, all residents were charged with joining agricultural projects such as rice transplanting from five in the morning until nine at night. Those who could not show up for work are required to pay 1,000 NK Won for each day missed. The collected money is used to provide lunch to those who work. Those who neither showed up for work nor make the payment are criticized through a 'struggle of ideology meeting' in the neighborhood unit. In cases where those who have been warned do not change their attitudes, they are criticized for having 'rotten ideology' and are sent to a 'training center.' During the next 150 days, there will be police inspections on the streets. Anyone who is on the street without a 'good reason' will be forced to join the mobilized residents in agricultural projects. Residents claim that this kind of '150-day battle' is nothing new. That is because annually there is general mobilization for farming starting in May.

What is different this time is the designation of 150 days. Although they are not specifically designated as such, the 'transplanting battle' of rice plants during May and June, 'weeding out and grass cutting battle' during July and August, and 'fall farm mobilization' during September and October all add up to 150 days. Residents say, "Now that 150 days are designated, it will be very difficult to sleep soundly at night. Even without this 'battle,' neither paddies nor small patch farming is allowed. What other restrictions will be imposed on us? We already begin to suffer from headaches." A party leader in *Pyongyang* made a comment on the reasons for the 150-day battle, saying, "People do not do any work. They move around at will, peddling goods. They farm small plots illegally. That is why they are forced to do this 'battle.' If people use shovels to move dirt and plant one more grain, won't there be more production of grain?"

### **Middle Schools of South *Hamgyong* Province Begin Support "Battle"**

Middle schools in the areas of *Hamheung*, *Heungnam*, and *Shinpo* in South *Hamgyong* Province simultaneously began a support battle for farming villages on April 27. There are some areas where the battle began on May 5. Those middle school students, who are between their 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year, had to prepare a 2-day supply of food by themselves while they support the villages. Food supply beyond that was supposed to be whole corn or noodles to be provided by each farm. Any side-dish items and other necessities are the responsibility of the students.

### **The Poor Get Poorer and the Rich Get Richer Even in Individual Small Patch Farming**

While individual small patch farming is officially prohibited, some influential individuals are able to do it with hired laborers. This is tenant farming. The daily wage for these tenant farmers is two meals and 3 Kg of whole corn. In cases where plowing is involved, the tenant receives meals for the day and 2,000 NK Won per 100 *Pyong* (unit of land, 1 *pyong* is 3.954 sq. yards.). This level of payment has become the average, although the wage level varies a little depending on the situation of the employer. Poor residents welcome this kind of opportunity and try to find such employment.

*Choi Hyun-jung* (40s) of *Hamjoo*, South *Hamgyong* Province, said he has been working as a tenant farmer. "The other day, I went to plant corn and soybeans and got porridge with noodles for a meal. The porridge had small pieces of tofu with spices. Just next to the field I worked on are two other fields. One is owned by the former leader of the county Party and the other by the head prosecutor. Many military leaders own plots of around 500 to 600 *Pyong* also. These leaders hire laborers almost for free. Poor people put new land into cultivation on top of the mountain. Poor people have to carry human excrement and farmyard manure to be used as fertilizer on top of the mountain. It is painful to imagine what kind of hardship they have to go through. On the other hand, wealthy and influential people pay low wages and can afford to buy chemical fertilizer at planting time." He said that even in small farming, the poor get poorer and the rich get richer.

### **[Food]**

### **Lecture at Munitions Factory "Resolve Problems of Their Own Food Crisis"**

Problems with food distribution are expected to continue for a while, including in munitions factories. At the Laborers Lecture, all munitions factories in *Kanggae City, Jagang Province*, announced, "Everyone needs to satisfy their own food needs until September." The main point of the lecture was that there should not be any decrease in number of workers coming to the factory every day. The factory officials said, "We heard *Ryangjung Enterprise* stopped their operation due to lack of grain. This is a worldwide food crisis which includes our own country so we need to work hard to become self sufficient and organize the business well to overcome this food catastrophe." The laborers said, "Starting from April, our small portion of food ration discontinued. We don't know how we are going to survive the Spring Austerity Season."

### ***Danchun City, Statistics of Families in Poverty for February***

According to February 2009 statistics of 'The Households in Severe Food Crisis' in *Danchun City, South Hamgyong Province*, there are many households with extreme food deprivation including 100 families in *Keumbong Town*, 90 in *Bokchun Town*, 120 in *Yangsan Town*, 190 in *Naemoon Town*, 80 in *Hangku 1 Town*, and over 100 in *Hangku 2 Town*. Most of these households do not have any laborers in the family, no financial businesses, or have a disabled member in their family. According to the research, these families barely managed to stay live and barely survived on soup. They only ate thin soup for dinner and missed breakfast and lunch during winter. In worse situations, 1-2 persons of the 4-5member households had nothing to eat.

### ***Danchun Farmers, "It will be hard to pass through June."***

Farmers in *Danchun City, South Hamgyong Province* complains that it will be hard to get through June due to the food crisis. According to an official, "There are approximately 30 farms in *Danchun City*. Farmers can be classified into upper, middle and lower class - the upper class constitutes about 15%, the middle class 25% and 60% is the lower class. The middle class farmers will be able to get through June. The lower class farmers are already suffering from food shortages." *Ko Byung-deuk* (40s) works at a farm in *Ohbong-ri* and commented, "(Our farm) has low productivity because of massive magnesium pollution leftover from the Japanese Colonial period." *Ko* added, "Dust from the magnesium clinker factory has substantial effect on soil. Nothing has grown in areas where this dust settled. Low productivity is a guarantee. It is no surprise that farmers are talking about removing the factory. It will be hard even if the government compensates us, and how can there be any food left for ourselves when we have to submit our crops to the government in the fall." The smoke from the *Danchun Refinery* causes severe damage to farm production at the *Shinho Alliance Farm*. *Chung Soon-geum* (40s) said, "We need to remove that factory or let our farmlands idle. We work all year long for such a low crop production, and even these crops are taken by the government. This is why over half of our farm members are in poverty. There are many people who want to move."

### **Danchun city, *Moonam Cooperative Association* Farmers Live on Seaweed Porridge**

*Danchun* city, South *Hamgyong* Province, *Moonam* cooperative association farmers have been surviving with seaweed porridge. Since the farm is located by the seashore, which has thick sand layer and thin soil layer, the land is unproductive. Even after working hard for one year, they are hardly able to eat grain for meals. Instead, the farmers work on catching seaweed and kelp. They also borrow some corn from the rich in the town with the promise of paying back three-times the amount in the fall. They called their farm, "One worst place to live."

### [Economy]

#### **The Department of Trade, "Secure Farming Utilities by Selling Special Products of North Korea"**

The Department of Trade issued an urgent order to trade officers in foreign countries requesting to modify contract items saying, "Secure farming supplies by selling special products of North Korea." The order was to change the existing contract to get high demand utilities for agriculture. In this context, people of *Samjiyeon* County in *Ryanggang* Province are worried because they had planned to sell potato starch, but they could not find appropriate buyers. The County Party had trade officers sell it at a lower price to buy fertilizer as soon as possible. Every district of North *Hamgyong* Province is troubled by the shortage of seeds. The rich can secure seeds in the market although the price is high. However, farmers were not able to purchase seeds due to lack of funds. As the preparation for farming was delayed, they are much worried about the higher authorities' criticism. An official of the Department of Agriculture said, "Because we have experienced severe shortage of important supplies for farming such as fertilizer, seeds, and sheets of vinyl in this year, we are trying to receive aid from China in bulk."

#### **Lectures on Management of Market**

Each Neighborhood Unit nation-wide gave a lecture about how markets are to be managed according to the Central Party's Plans. The lecture summarized current issues about the market. Peddling and wholesales are to be strictly banned, saying, "Markets are the breeding ground of anti-socialism and the base of capitalism." They also emphasized several times that they would be more diligent about uncovering trading of items banned by the country. Besides these regulations, they enumerated specific situations that must be eradicated such as trading around the market places, organizations and enterprises stimulating and promoting individual trade, enterprises opening their own markets, young women continuing to trade, the *Pyongsung* Market becoming a nationwide wholesale market, a market operating stand-alone stands, many people wheeling around handcarts for trading purposes, etc. To accomplish this, they have decided their plans and said, "It is necessary to conduct ideological lectures thoroughly. 'Let's devote our patriotism to the emerging Strong and Prosperous Nation.'"

#### ***Heungnam* United Fertilizer Factory Has Low Productivity due to Frequent Breakdown of Machines**

*Heungnam* United Fertilizer Factory of South *Hamgyong* Province has mechanical problems too often, causing low productivity. *Hong Nam-sik* (pseudonym, 50s), a mechanical engineer in this company, said that the most difficult part of repairing work was to remove the sediment of electrolytic bath in the water supply department. It is a large-scale job that usually takes more than one week that requires 150 workers to finish. However, workers who do not receive any ration do not work, saying, "We cannot work because we are so hungry." Although petty officers of the Party shouted at them, they did not care. *Chae Bang-suk*, a Hero of Great Achievements, created water pumps to remove sediment, but they frequently have mechanical breakdown and their function was not effective. Changing the catalyst is another issue. When the synthesis department changes the catalyst, a worker must go into the catalytic tank and weld, but nobody wants to volunteer for the job. They wanted to step back from work. Last March, the secretary of the Party in the enterprise let the heads of units, cell secretaries, officers of the elementary party work with the 40-minute-shift system. Because the gas leaked from the tank, two people were suffocated and one of them died.

### [Politics]

#### **A Deputy Manager of the Central Party Dismissed as Mt. *Baekdu* Construction is Held Up**

A Deputy Manager of the Central Party, who was in charge of *Baekdu* Mountain Highway Construction, was criticized and dismissed as the construction in progress was delayed by a shortage of labor. Shock troop brigades have been organized from various regions of the country and have participated in *Baekdu* Mountain Highway Construction; however, escapees came out one after another as food was not ensured. Even though various regions such as *Wonsan* in *Kangwon* Province, *Pyongsung* in South *Pyongan* Province, *Soonchun*, *Gimchaek* in North *Hamgyong* Province and *Chungjin* drafted and sent the shock troop brigades consisting of hundreds of people, only tens of them remain. Food must be ensured during these periods when the laborers are engaged in construction, and the laborers must be replaced by other laborers after a certain period of time, but most of these are not kept up well. There was even an occasion when among 300 people in a shock troop brigades, everyone except 40-50 people went home. As a result of massive escapes of laborers, *Baekdu* Mountain Highway Construction was at one point completely stalled. A Central Party official ended up getting dismissed, taking responsibility for the situation.

#### **Dismissal Given in Advance for Officials Who Cannot Ensure Laborers for Mt. *Baekdu* Construction**

The Central Party and the Ministry appointed new officials after the dismissal of the official in charge of *Baekdu* Mountain Highway Construction. These new officials examined the remaining numbers in each shock troop brigade, and made distribution of supplies immediately upon arrival. Then emergency meetings were convened, summoning the company commanders of shock troop brigade under each brigade and the commanders of the political directive officers. No particular plans and schemes came up despite meeting after meeting. Therefore, on May 2nd, the Central Party conveyed a policy to Leading

Secretaries of each city and county who were in charge of all living expenses of shock troop brigades. The essential features of the policy were for each city and county to ensure the supply of labor mobilized for *Baekdu* Mountain Highway Construction by May 15th, and to ensure meals and other necessities of shock troop brigade members. The Central Party warned seriously that any Leading Secretaries of the city and county who cannot ensure them will be referred to a Security Committee under Central Party, and will be dismissed and punished.

### ***Chungjin* City, Troubled by Instruction to Ensure Labor Supply for Mt. *Baekdu* Construction**

The City of *Chungjin* in North *Hamgyong* Province is very troubled by the instruction to ensure the supply of labor for *Baekdu* Mountain Highway Construction. The Labor Mobilization Department in People's Assembly was supposed to draft laborers and prepare support supplies such as ground *pungpungyi* (Korean-style popcorn) processed from whole corns, kidney beans, salts, brown seaweeds, socks and gloves. However, the drafted laborers are firmly refusing to go, and the City Party does not know what to do. No matter how forcefully the Secretary of the Party commands pursuant to the policy of the Party, each laborer has been continuously protesting against going to work based on various reasons. Each labor enterprise says that the laborers will be promptly replaced every three or six months, and that at least 200,000 won up to 500,000 won will be provided as living expenses by collecting 2,000 won or 5,000 won from laborers who were not mobilized this time, but the laborers are not willing to move up readily. The laborers say jeeringly, "People may be fooled once or even twice, but who would believe the word? If the Party is able to do that, why did it let people escape so far?"

### **[Society]**

#### **May 1, The Labor Day Celebrations Held Nationwide**

Diverse events were held to celebrate May 1 labor day. Each factory and public enterprises had a field day, playing games of pulling rope, *yut*, turning around grabbing ears, running with basket on the head, running, and treasure hunting. Everyone seemed happy and fairly competed for the prizes. Women participated in a dancing party, which was held in front of the station. No women could get into the dancing hall without wearing a skirt. In the mean time, when the market opened at 2:00 pm, a fair amount of members of Democratic Women's Union gave up going to the dancing party and continued to working at the market. Electricity was also provided from 9:00 am to celebrate the holiday. In some areas, the streets became empty because people stayed at home in order to watch TV as electricity became available.

#### ***Danchun* City, Campaign for One Meal per Day Policy**

In *Danchun* city, South *Hamgyong* Province, the poor residents have voluntarily started a campaign for one meal per day. In *Dukheung-dong*, only 20 % of residents have enough food to eat. Thirty percent barely make ends meet and the rest 50 % of residents have a very difficult time to survive. The poor people often skip meals and usually eat porridge for

meals. Big families and the family with chronic patients are hardly able to have one meal for a day. *Kim Jung-Hyun* (30s) in *Bokchun-dong* lives with his parents, wife and two children. He hasn't received a salary for a while. Mr. *Kim* and his family tend to have brunch around 10:00 am, which is the only meal of their day. They usually cook porridge using corn and cornhusk with cabbage. It has been a while since the elderly are confined at home as they suffer from malnutrition and children left their home to beg around as *kkotjebi*.

### [Women/Children/Education]

#### **Early Graduation and Military Enlistment for Students on Leave of Absence**

The People's Military Department asked the Ministry of Education for assistance because, this year, the heights of recruits were not up to the military standard. The height of a recruit should be at least 158 cm but it is difficult to find such a recruit. The Military Department discussed with the Ministry of Education the possibility of early graduation of students on leave of absence. The Ministry of Education positively considers early graduation of students who started school either 1-2 years late or are on leave of absence for 1-2 years for medical treatments in order to send them to the military. The Ministry said, "Our plan is to first graduate those students who are old enough to join the military and then send them to the military. The plan will be immediately implemented across the entire country."

#### **Parents Worry About Their Children's Spring Picnic**

With the start of May, many schools, including kindergarten, have begun to go on spring picnics. Rich parents carefully prepare for their child's lunch. They pack foods they wouldn't eat on a regular basis, such as egg, rice cake, *Kimbab*, imitation meat, pork, candy, fruit, and so on. The parents also prepare food for the teachers. Rich children are well prepared with various, abundant food, but poor children don't even think of going on these picnics. If poor children go, they only feel timid and embarrassed. As a result, many average parents have a headache not to discourage their children, while, at the same time, not to spend a lot of money on food.

### [Accidents]

#### ***Hoeryong* City, Forest Fire Damage Amounts to 49,000 Acres**

The size of damage from a large-scale forest fire occurred last April 11 in *Hoeryong* City, North *Hamgyong* Province is announced. According to the Forestry department of Forestry Management office, total of 79,080 square yards of forest was damaged because of the fire. So, this fire was recorded as the fire with the largest damage among the fire happened recently.

#### **Two Fugitives from No.16 Labor Detention Center in *Hwasung* County Caught in Flight**

Last April 28<sup>th</sup>, two prisoners were caught in flight in No. 16 Security Labor Detention Center in *Hwasung*, North *Hamgyong* Province. One was caught, within less than an hour after running away, the other founded in *Chungjin* City on the next day, confronted for some

time but was killed at the scene. At that time, this fugitive took a knife of security agent and scuffled with him. Finally, he was gunned down by other security agents and died at the scene. One escaper who was caught suffered public execution the next day in the all prisoners of re-education center. On the one hand, two prison guards in agriculture unit who charged them at the time of incident were discharged from service because they didn't watch them properly.

### [Commentary]

#### **What Do People Gain From The 150-Day Agricultural "Battle"?**

On May 4, *Rodong Shinmun* carried an editorial titled, "We the Party, passionately appeal that the whole Party, military and all people eagerly participate in the 150-day battle." On the 6<sup>th</sup>, two days later, the Central Radio reported, "The 150-day battle will begin a transformational stage in the construction of a strong nation. On the 5<sup>th</sup>, numerous purposeful meetings were held throughout the nation to rally attack units to battle." The following 7<sup>th</sup>, *Rodong Shinmun* again carried an editorial stating that, "the power of unified resolve will bring about a shining victory in the 150-day battle." This on top of the propaganda posters that have appeared everywhere proclaiming, "Ride the dragon-horse to charge forward and storm our way through." The season of battles seems to have begun.

For the duration of the 150-day battle, the daily schedules of all North Korean residents will be strictly regimented. Everyone must follow the same daily routine, starting when they rise early in the morning until they report to their evening meeting for personal assessment. For example, citizens mobilized for a farming battle must work from five in the morning till nine in the evening on various farming projects, such as the transplanting of rice. Police will arrest anyone caught roaming the streets without explicit permission from the head of their work unit. There are no acceptable excuses for tardiness to work and permission is never granted to leave early for personal reasons. For the duration of the battle, schedules must be kept without exception. If you defy your schedule in any way, your mistake will invariably be made known at the end of the day during the Party Secretary's criticism session at the daily residents assessment.

This year's New Year Combined Editorial urged, "As the advanced *Chollima* Movement established a strong nation after the war, let us rally another revolution to leap forward toward the reestablishment of a strong nation by 2012." Four months later, all references to the *Chollima* Movement disappeared from public proclamations. In its place, an involuntary organizational project, called the '150-day battle, was created.' This can be seen as a response to the ineffectiveness of the *Chollima* Movement. It appears that residents did not respond well to the *Chollima* Movement, which was largely voluntary. In North Korea, every sector of the economy lacks the raw materials and capital necessary to be self-sustaining. For this reason, increased productivity through the mobilization of a large scale of labor force is often viewed as the only option for economic viability.

The country’s party leaders claim, “If people use shovels to move dirt and plant more grain, wouldn’t we be producing more grain? People do not work, so we must force them to do work.” Times are challenging everywhere and it is not difficult to imagine why North Korean authorities have hard time giving the impression they lead a strong nation. With this in mind, we must ask: What will ordinary citizens get out of the 150-day agricultural battle? Even if North Korean residents are used to working without pay, how are they supposed to survive the harsh spring without a proper food supply? Those who have developed strong survival skills will likely find ways to survive after the 150-day battle ends, but there are those who are not strong enough to survive on their own. How could these people possibly outlast the 150-day battle once the harsh, hungry spring begins? For this reason, we must ask, “Who is it that benefits from the 150-day battle?” We are skeptical of the value 150-day battle, regardless of its output. How can we not be, when it is so easy to imagine the pain and suffer awaiting the campaigns participants?

**[Investigative Report]**

**Analysis of Grain Prices during Difficult Springs of 2007 Through 2009**

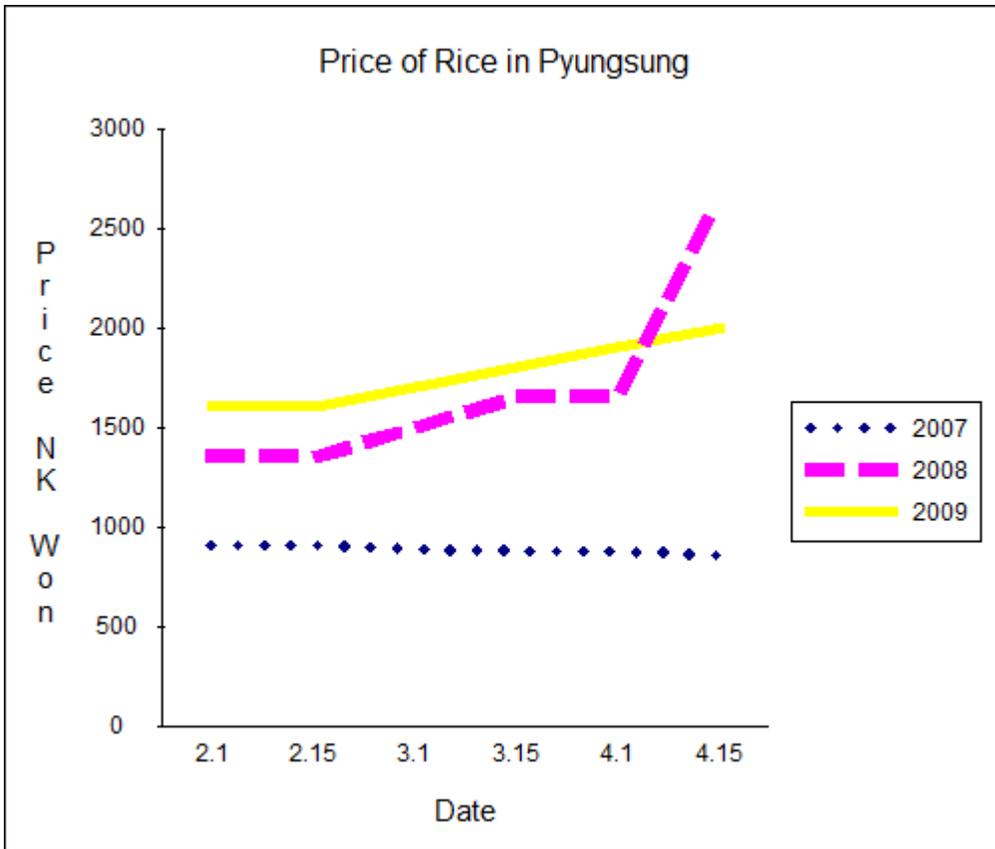
As of early May, grain prices show signs of increasing throughout the nation. Nonetheless, grain prices up to the end of April seem to be stabilizing in comparison to the first half (February – April) of 2008. What is peculiar is that the corn price remains low relative to the price of rice in 2008. The fact that the price of corn, which is the staple food of ordinary residents, remains lower relative to the price of rice in 2008 indicates that the food shortage situation is less severe than it was at this time last year.

**Table 1. Price of Rice in Pyungung**

Feb.-Apr. 2007-2009

(Unit: KG/North Korean Won)

Date	2/1	2/15	3/1	3/15	4/1	4/15
2007	900	900	880	870	870	850
2008	1,350	1,350	1,500	1,650	1,650	2,650
2009	1,600	1,600	1,700	1,800	1,900	2,000

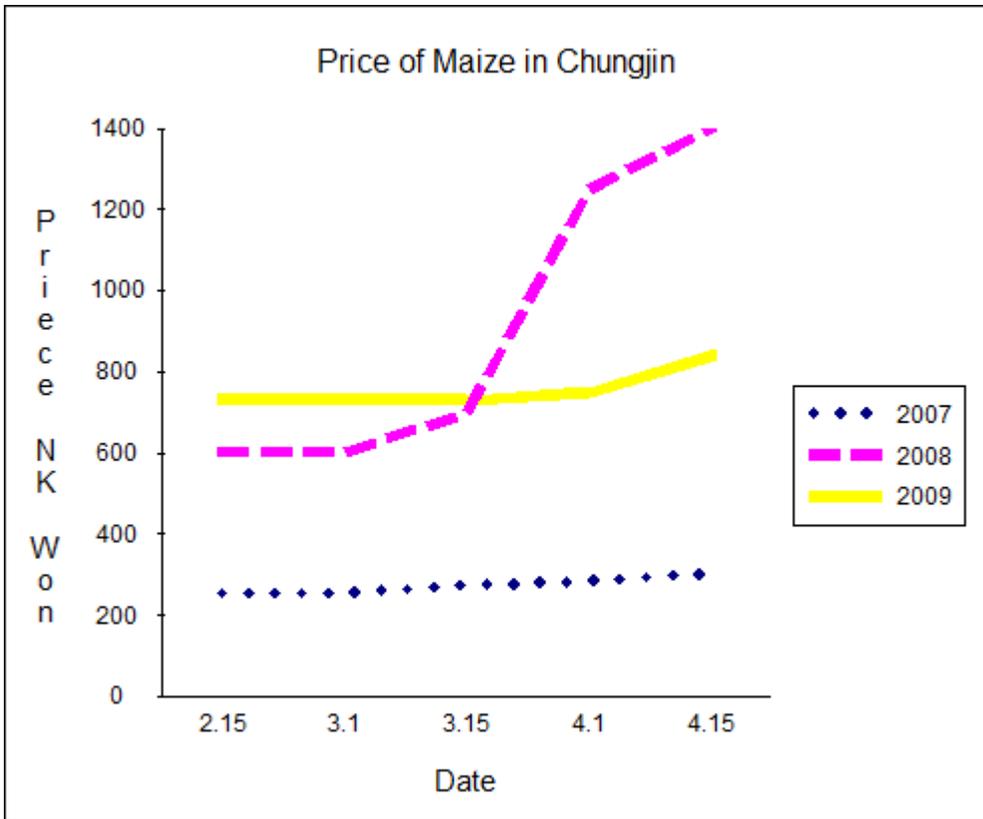


**Table 2. Price of Maize in *Chungjin***

Feb.-Apr. 2007-2009

(Unit: KG/North Korean Won)

Date	2/15	3/1	3/15	4/1	4/15
2007	250	250	270	280	300
2008	600	600	700	1,250	1,400
2009	730	730	730	750	840



for Peace, Human Rights and Refugees



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### Good Friends– An International NGO for Peace, Human Rights and Refugees

Good Friends provides relief works for international refugees to become all lives' friend, peace movement to fundamentally resolve disputes and conflicts that human beings face, and human rights movement to protect human rights

Good Friends has been providing information on food shortages in North Korea, raising funds for humanitarian assistance, dispatching activists to national border areas between China and DPRK and having them investigate local situations, and publishing reports on food shortages in North Korea.

Now Good Friends USA intends to improve humanitarian and human rights situation of North Korean residents and to inform this situation to the international community by

- 1) collecting information on severe food shortages and bad situations in health, education, and transportation and providing them to other humanitarian aids organizations so that they can support North Korean people effectively.
- 2) investigating current situations of North Korean refugees in China, and providing protections and aids for them.
- 3) assessing human rights violations occurring in North Korea, informing them to the international societies, and requesting the North Korean government for improvement on human rights and living conditions.

Also, Good Friends USA publishes the newsletter [North Korea Today \(English edition\)](#) to inform the international public.

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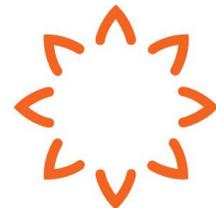
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