

Second LSFM Regional Training Workshop
Complying with Market Requirements on Food Safety and Product Quality
January 19 to 23, 2009
Monoreach Angkor Hotel, Siem Reap, Cambodia

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS

FOOD SAFETY AND PRODUCT QUALITY ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

Country Presentations from Philippines, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Indonesia

Philippines. Mr. Luis Caballero Jr., Vice Chairperson of Zamboanga Sibugay High Value Marketing Crop, presented their community's experience in maintaining food safety and quality standards for calamansi. In terms of maintaining product quality, this involved the processes before planting, the maintenance requirements during planting season, as well as the safeguards during picking, sorting, and storage. Mr. Caballero enumerated the following issues and challenges: (1) Some farmers / pickers do not follow the guidelines in size and maturity of calamansi during picking; (2) Branches dry out due to excess water and fungi; (3) Regular monitoring of an accredited agriculturist is needed; (4) An official monitor is needed during sorting; (5) Some farmers, especially those who live far from farm-to-market roads, tend to go back to old farming practices.

Cambodia. Mr. Noun, chicken producer from FNN, presented Cambodia's experience in marketing dressed chicken. He related that chicken feed during the dry season are not sufficient. They also experience difficulty in transporting the product given the great distances of markets from the farms. Because of these, the traders are able to really push down the price. They buy live chickens and slaughter them after three days. This situation has led to questionable claims about hygiene and safety that affects the credibility of dressed chicken as a product.

Vietnam. Representatives from Vietnam reported the following issues and concerns with regard to their product, tea: limited farmers' access to knowledge and information about food safety and product quality; poor processing techniques and equipments; limited quality management and limited access to product quality certificates; and difficulties in trade market development.

Indonesia. Mr. Haryono, explained that their organization consists of 60 cooperative groups of farmers in the forests of Sumatra that have 30 member-households each. The cooperatives help in the marketing of ten tons of organic rice per month by ensuring that market demands are met and by lending to farmers in need. Since they process rice manually, the main obstacle is in drying seeds especially during the wet seasons. As small farmers, they face obstacles in marketing and product quality, and would like to have some information on the practices in food safety and product quality in other countries. They also have 50 farmer-members who are into honey production. This could be expanded to include a greater number but the organization's capacity to organize them is limited at the moment. They are now starting to market the honey to Bina Desa outlets even as the product quality is not yet fully developed.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STANDARDIZATION OF FOOD SAFETY AND PRODUCT QUALITY

By Dr. Wen-Chi Huang

Associate Professor, Graduate Institute of Agribusiness Management

National Pingtung University of Science and Technology, Taiwan

Dr. Wen-chi Huang, Execom member of the AsiaDHRRA and its Chairperson for LSFM Project Advisory Committee, discussed about the nature and definition of product (food) quality, standardization processes, and the importance of certification. She cited specific cases of agricultural food product traceability in Taiwan to illustrate her points, which are helped by bar code-scanning and inquiry using 3G cellphones and the internet. Dr. Huang also related about the Han Kwan Fruit and Vegetable production cooperative which introduced modern production techniques and innovations in developing multi-faceted marketing strategies for enhancing competitiveness in the market.

ISSUES ON FOOD-BORNE DISEASES /ILLNESSES

Mr. Winfried Scheewe

German Development Service

CEDAC Marketing Adviser

Winfried Scheewe, DED, Marketing Consultant to CEDAC discussed about food-borne illnesses in terms of its definition, effect and impact, transmittal, and origination (from and through food). He also discussed its causes (fungal spoilage, pesticide residues, industrial chemicals, bacteria) and symptoms. He enumerated the major food-borne illnesses (such as salmonella and e-coli) and common problems of food-borne diseases. He noted that the looming climate change will probably worsen some problems, such as higher temperature and moisture and more flooding and extended droughts due to polluted water, which may lead to new problems with food-borne diseases. In conclusion, Mr. Scheewe cited Dr. Lederberg who said, "Microorganisms are opponents with whom we cannot race on their terms." The best we can do, he said, is to try to avoid conditions in which harmful microbes can develop.

HIDDEN THREATS FROM GENETICALLY-MODIFIED CROPS

Mr. Winfried Scheewe

German Development Service

CEDAC Marketing Adviser

Mr. Scheewe traced the history of GMOs as originating in the '80s, pioneered mainly by Monsanto and other companies (Bayer, Pioneer, Syngenta). He discussed the nature and processes of GMOs as artificial organisms, the types of GMO crops, and its risks for consumers especially the risks due to GMO transformation process. He said that something unforeseen could come out of the unnatural process, and residues of such experimental accidents could go to the consumer. The harmless protein in one organism could be harmful in another. He explained that one study has shown that rats fed with GMO potatoes had lesions in their intestines. Four studies, three of which have been published, raised the specter that human beings have been accumulating toxins in their bodies from eating GMO crops and food products. The problem in terms of food safety is that food products made from GMO crops are not labeled as such.

He cited that nine percent of global primary crops are GMOs, and in 2006, around 100 million hectares in 22 countries are planted to GMOs. Citing Bt corn and soya GMO products as case studies, he observed that humanity has been turned into a pack of guinea pigs catching cell-damaging residues without their knowledge. He cited studies in Russia, Germany, and India supporting this observation, but the USA with its massive interest in GMO kept ignoring the facts. Mr. Scheewe related about Europe's policy banning GMO, and stressed the producers' responsibility to ensure that the food they offer to consumers are in compliance with ethical and legal requirements. He is strongly in favor of rejecting and/or banning GMO products from the market.

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS: A BRIEFING ON THE INTERNATIONAL FOOD SAFETY BODY AND ITS DYNAMICS

By Mr. Peter Sousa Hoejskov

Food Quality and Safety Officer, FAO Regional Office in Asia Pacific

Mr. Peter Hoejskov started his presentation with a discussion on the importance of food safety and standards. He cited that food safety and control systems provide: the basis for inspection, testing, and certification activities; guidance to industry, consumers, government and other players in the food supply; and a general view of requirements for international trade in food. He explained the meaning of Codex Alimentarius, and introduced the founder and members of the CODEX Alimentarius Commission. Mr. Hoejskov further related its objectives, strategic goals, and strategic plan for CCAASIA.

He discussed the Commission's structure and management, subsidiary bodies, organizational chart, standards, food safety areas of concern and the CODEX process for standards development. He listed the Commission's achievement so far, and explained Codex in relation with WTO agreements. Finally, he discussed about international food safety regulations and standards, CODEX trust fund and FAO capacity-building programs, private food quality and safety standards in relation to CODEX, and the general challenges of private food safety standards. In conclusion, he stated that all countries have an interest in ensuring that CODEX standards protect human health and achieve this without hindering trade and economic development.

External assistance by organizations and an internal commitment by countries to provide the needs for effective participation in CODES are both essential to achieve this, he added. Mr. Hoejskov also noted that one of the main challenges for CODES is the rapid development and implementation of private standards and requirements, and that goodwill based on an understanding that development of relevant standards is a shared responsibility, should enable CODEX to keep moving forward.

MECHANISMS FOR PRODUCT QUALITY AND FOOD SAFETY: TIPS FOR ENTRY INTO THE SUPERMARKET

By Rene Guarin, Executive Director,

Upland Marketing Program

Mr. Guarin introduced the Upland Marketing Program and related about its nearly twelve years of experience in selling directly to supermarkets. He said that direct selling to supermarkets is inevitable given the worldwide trend of increasing rate of grocery sales due to various factors, such as the modernization of procurement, increasing incomes, and the growing preference of buyers for safety

and convenience which the supermarkets can offer. He explained about the three waves of supermarket diffusion and noted that increasingly, supermarkets are adding more and more carts of fresh produce <vegetables, fruits, fish, pork, beef and chicken>, fully allowing retail purchases for such just as the public markets would.

More and more have flocked to the supermarkets instead of the usual public wet markets, as the latter has stricter standards for food safety and product quality. In some countries, such as in India, prices in supermarkets are even lower than other outlets. He related the major concerns for suppliers who are dealing with supermarkets, which are volume, and reliability/ availability of consistent supplies of products. He narrated UMF's experience to illustrate the point about the need to meet the high standards set by the supermarkets, and their requirement for consistent, steady supply of products in huge stocks or volume. He also talked about mechanisms for product quality and food safety, and the matter of who sets the standards < public, own, private?>.

He said that observing standards involves a lot of cost and effort, and standard setting will not really work if production remains small scale. He gave examples of products that cost less to produce in good quality if done on a large-scale basis. Dealing with supermarkets means dealing with the issue of scale, which determines cost benefit and recovery for suppliers. In conclusion, Mr. Guarin said that compliance per se will not make the products sell, but it is in really knowing, and giving, what the customers like.

MECHANISMS FOR PRODUCT QUALITY AND FOOD SAFETY: CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS

By Jing Pacturan

Chairperson, Organic Certification Council of the Philippines <OCCP>

Mr. Pacturan started his presentation by enumerating the factors that drive product quality and food safety. These include consumer demands, environmental concerns, health concerns, social concerns, and government requirements for international trading. He then related the various reasons why certification programs exist, and explained the meaning and definition of certification. He enumerated the various types of certification, and enumerated and explained the different types of mandatory and voluntary certification. Finally, he explained about organic certification in terms of what organic agriculture is, why the need for such, the balance of interest <where trust is the operative term>, the certification process, and the validity and cost of certification.