



Strengthening SPS capacities for trade

This project aimed to enhance the SPS capacity of the vegetable value chain in Viet Nam to help the country capture market opportunities in domestic and international markets. The focus was on updating existing cultivation and post-harvest handling practices based on Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Farmer Field School (FFS) approach.

STDF/PG/259

Status

Completed

Start Date

01/03/2010

End Date

31/08/2012

Project Value (US\$)

\$641,470

STDF Contribution (US\$)

\$533,770

Beneficiaries

Viet Nam

Implementing Entities

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Viet Nam Fruit and Vegetable Research Institute (FAVRI)

Partners

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development – Viet Nam (MARD)

Viet Nam Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)

Background

Vegetable production in Viet Nam plays an important role in the country's economic development. The industry provides a significant source of income for rural populations, particularly women, and creates further employment in marketing, distribution, processing and retail. The Government set an ambitious national target for vegetable exports to reach US\$690 million per annum by 2010. One of the critical constraints to achieving this target was inadequate capacity to assure the safety and quality of produce across the value chain.

Major problems included the abuse and excessive use of pesticides and agricultural chemicals, and the lack of awareness and application of good agricultural practices at the farm level. Pesticide use is often well above recommended levels and farmers either ignore or are not aware of safe harvesting practices. The sector was also constrained by poor post-harvest handling

practices, resulting in product deterioration and low quality. Weak links between producers, collectors, distributors and retailers accentuated the problems of poor quality management across the value chain. Progress was also hampered by limited communication and coordination among the public and private sector.

Results

Increased knowledge on international market opportunities and relevant SPS requirements

The project helped to identify SPS requirements for vegetable exports to new markets. Market research was carried out to identify trends and opportunities in domestic and international markets. For instance, Vietnamese experts visited regional markets in Beijing and Hong Kong. The market studies mapped SPS requirements for selected vegetables, and identified Vietnamese vegetables with most potential for export and domestic retail markets. They explored ways to establish linkages between vegetable producers and potential buyers within the value chain, and identified particular food safety requirements of the domestic supermarket chains. The findings helped producers and traders to target domestic and international markets with the greatest potential, and to better understand the SPS requirements needed to access these markets.

Improved safety and quality of vegetables across the value chain

The project implemented a capacity building programme to improve the safety and quality of vegetables using a value chain approach. By establishing technical teams to review existing information and protocols, develop new and improved cultivation protocols for selected crops and training materials, and implement Training of Trainers (TOT) courses and Farmer Field Schools, the project enabled stakeholders to improve SPS capacity in the vegetable sector, as well as to enhance productivity and farm business management. Key products developed included: i) Guidelines on VietGAP Vegetable Production for cucumbers, cabbages, tomatoes and chayote; ii) Handbook on Quality and Safety Management in Fruit and Vegetables; iii) Farm Business School Manual; and iv) Farm Business School Handbook. The training materials produced were delivered to, and used by, trainees and other farmers in the project locations. Two TOT courses were implemented for staff from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) agencies of three provinces (including Crop Production Section, Plant Protection sub-Department, Provincial Food Quality Management Agency and Extension Centre), as well as employees of processing companies, traders and selected cooperatives and communes.

Better food quality control systems

The project helped relevant stakeholders to establish and implement an improved quality control system throughout all stages of production, distribution and marketing of fresh vegetables. Based on the establishment of safety and quality control systems at six field demonstration sites, six VietGAP certificates, approved by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), were granted to the participating cooperatives. As a result, some products were accepted for sale by some supermarkets in Vietnam. Opportunities to export certain products (e.g. baby cucumbers, cherry tomatoes) to Ukraine and France were also created. "Field Days" were conducted for provincial and district government staff, processing companies, traders and farmers to observe the field demonstrations. These events also facilitated dialogue on how to promote public-private collaboration in support of food safety and quality.

Recommendations

Ensure clarity on mandates and improve coordination

Implementing a value chain approach depends on effective public-public and public-private collaboration, given the diversity and number of stakeholders involved. Experiences in the implementation of this project highlighted the importance of having a clear government policy that endorses a value chain approach, in order to facilitate coordination among relevant government ministries (e.g. agriculture, trade, health). In cases where several different government agencies are involved in food safety management, it is also important to clarify roles and responsibilities in order to ensure a common understanding about who is ultimately responsible for food safety assurance.

Promote outreach and advocacy to sustain and scale-up activities and results

Awareness and advocacy activities should be frequent and ongoing to help sustain and scale-up project activities and results. Increased publicity through mass media, development of a brand image, and dissemination of information about the project can help to share the project's outputs and results with a wider audience within the country and region. A project website can play a useful role.

Promote networking at different levels and facilitate access to SPS/market information

This project highlighted the importance of strengthening linkages among value chain actors including farmers, extension agencies, buyers/traders and research institutes. It also demonstrated the importance of access to essential information on the availability of production, volume and type of safe products, SPS requirements, and markets (i.e. market requirements on type of products, quality, and selling prices, etc.). Developing extension networks at the province/district level can help to increase access to such information and improve farmers' technical knowledge.

Ensure ongoing efforts to access markets and measure results

While farmers involved in this project improved the quality and safety of their vegetable production, it will take more time to assess the extent to which they have been able to access the potential new markets (high-value domestic retail markets as well as regional markets) and increase their incomes. Measuring performance in terms of longer-term impacts is important to document the overall success of projects, which can help to ensure that resources are available to replicate and scale-up successful activities. Developing and using systems for monitoring results is essential in this context.