Improving safety of fresh fruit and vegetables in Southeast Asia

In Southeast Asia, the production and marketing of fruit and vegetables for domestic and export markets is a significant source of income for small-scale farmers, as well as one of the largest sources of employment in the rural area. On the other hand, rapid industrialization and urbanization with increasing wealth have surged demand for fresh fruit and vegetable products which greatly render health benefits for the consumers. Nevertheless, potential risks for food safety and fresh crops could occur throughout the marketing chain. Imprudent applications of chemical fertilizers and pesticides during production may result in dangerous levels of chemical residues in fresh horticultural products. Also fresh fruit and vegetable products could be exposed to harmful biological or chemical contaminants during handling, transportation, storage and retailing. Thus, consumers are likely vulnerable to unsafe fresh horticultural products which may not be apparent in the appearance of the product. This applies both to consumers in producer households and consumers purchasing from the market.

Food safety, as a hidden quality, is the responsibility of all actors in the whole food chain of fresh fruit and vegetables. Thus it is imperative to collaboratively work on a strategic framework for the prevention of harmful contamination from farm to plate that involves promotion and implementation of good practices and safety assurance systems throughout the agri food chain. This workshop, therefore, aims to have a meaningful exchange of up-to-date and practical information about safe production, handling storage, and transport of fresh fruit and vegetables for contributing towards the formulation of harmonized food safety guidelines in Southeast Asia. The ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint highlights food safety as a paramount concern in the agriculture sector and envisions 2015 as the year of strengthening regional food safety system by the ASEAN community.

Fourteen speakers from eight countries shared their knowledge and experiences in safety practices related to fruit and vegetables in the food safety workshop in the Philippines.
Major findings and recommendations:

- Develop safeguards to increase observance of safe practices in handling of fresh fruit and vegetables in both fields and homes;
- Document best practices in ensuring safety of fruit and vegetables and develop a mechanism to give incentives to those who initiate and promote such practices;
- Maximize the use of cyberspace and the social media in promoting safety practices related to fruit and vegetables;
- Review the ASEAN documents especially those that pertain to harmonization of GAP, MRL and traceability issues;
- Advocate the need to upgrade and align laboratories used for pesticide residue testing;
- Utilize farmers’ cooperatives in developing linkages and information dissemination activities to ensure safety of fresh fruit and vegetables;
- Engage young farmers in educating them regarding the scientific approach to safe production and handling of fresh fruit and vegetables; and
- Strengthen consumers’ participation in nutrition campaigns, food traceability education and food safety practices.

Improving safety of fresh fruit and vegetables in Southeast Asia

Held in Santa Rosa City, Laguna, Philippines, 24-28 November 2014

No. of participating countries: 8 (Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam)

No. of papers presented: 14

No. of participants: 14 resource speakers from 8 countries and 30 local participants

Co-organizer: PCAARRD

PCAARRD’s Executive Director, Dr. Patricio Faylon, clarifies a point during the workshop proper, stressing that there is a need to develop safeguards to increase observance of safe practices in handling fresh fruit and vegetables.

The food safety experts who shared their knowledge emphasized that keeping fresh produce safe is not as simple as it sounds, especially if it is viewed on a macro level.

Dr. Pauza Muda, MARDI’s Postharvest Handling Programme, Horticulture Research Center gives a glimpse of food safety handling practices in Malaysia.

Workshop delegates visit the Costales farms in Majayjay, Laguna, Philippines where they learned unique ways of handling organically grown fresh produce.
List of papers

Keynote
1. Regional collaboration in ensuring food safety in ASEAN fruit and vegetables
   - Ma. Concepcion Lizada

Resource papers
1. Policies and regulation on GAP and GHP implementation for improving fruit and vegetables product safety in Indonesia
   - Yul Harry Bahar
2. Safety of fresh fruit and vegetables in Malaysia
   - Pauziah Muda
3. R and D updates: improving safety of fruit and vegetables
   - Jocelyn Eusebio
4. Monitoring system of fruit and vegetables
   - Ma. Lourdes de Mata
5. Country report on fruit and vegetables consumption in Thailand
   - Kullanart Tongkhao
6. Safety vegetable research and production in Vietnam: status and solutions
   - Duong Kim Thoa
7. Safety of fruit and vegetables and market opportunities
   - Juejan Tangtermthong
8. Promising new technologies for assuring food safety
   - Hitoshi Nagashima
9. Improving pesticide residue detection protocol for fruit
   - Su-Myeong Hong
10. Extension of Good Agricultural Practice towards safety of fresh fruit and vegetables
    - Tze-Chung Huang
11. Managing traceable system for organic fruit and vegetables products in Taiwan
    - Lao-Dar Huang
12. Development of regulatory information system on pesticide products
    - Wen-Chi Fei
13. Japanese agri-food private sector’s efforts to assure food safety
    - Yutaka Maruyama

For further information, contact:
Dr. George Kuo, FFTC Technical Consultant

The family-owned Costales farm in the Philippines is a prime agro-tourism destination. It conducts ecological and balanced farming techniques, which aims to promote sustainable agriculture, healthy lifestyle and environmental biodiversity through integrated organic farming.

Part of the workshop’s recommendation is to document the best practices in ensuring safety of fruit and vegetables and develop a mechanism to give incentives to those who initiate such farming methods.