



18TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE GREATER MEKONG SUBREGION (GMS) WORKING GROUP ON AGRICULTURE (WGA)

7-8 July 2021

Virtual Meeting

RECORD OF DISCUSSION

1. The members of the Working Group on Agriculture (WGA) from the five countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), namely, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), the Kingdom of Thailand, and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, met virtually on 7-8 July 2021 for the 18th Annual Meeting of the WGA (WGA AM-18). The meeting deliberated on the theme "Achieving Agri-food Safety and Quality Harmonization and Traceability in the GMS in the context of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) and Climate Change".

2. The WGA noted that the GMS has enormous potential to produce safe, nutritious, and environment-friendly agri-food products, and that advancing subregional cooperation on harmonization of safety and quality standards is critical. It agreed that COVID-19 and climate change are posing serious challenges to food safety and quality, and thereby food security and intra- and inter-regional trade of agri-food products. Each participating country identified priority actions to minimize value chain disruptions and enhance quality and safety of agri-food products, through promoting institutional, technological, financial, and capacity-enhancing innovations. The WGA recognized disparities among the GMS countries in terms of capacities, institutions, and facilities for food safety and quality management. It stressed the need for harnessing the collective wisdom and experience of the subregion in addressing transboundary issues of agri-food resource management and achieving harmonization of safety and quality standards.

3. The WGA confirmed that GMS ASEAN member countries have high potential to be early adopters of the ASEAN Multilateral Arrangement for the Mutual Recognition of Agri-food Standards and Conformity Assessment (MAMRASCA) by tackling country-specific and regional challenges on policies, capacities and investments in food safety and quality.¹ The meeting noted the multisectoral and cross-cutting nature of food safety and quality and underscored the need for streamlining institutional systems for food safety and quality monitoring and management in each GMS country. It stressed the importance of (i) adopting a value chain approach in piloting mutual recognition arrangements and conformity assessments, (ii) enhancing capacity of certification bodies, accreditation bodies, inspection bodies, and laboratories, and (iii) standardizing the procedures and regulations for food safety and quality management. The meeting pledged support to the ASEAN Food Safety Regulatory Framework agreement to be signed in late 2021 and strengthen efforts to implement the ASEAN Food Safety Policy with the goal of protecting the health of consumers within and beyond the GMS.

¹ As PRC is not a member of ASEAN, it has not endorsed MAMRASCA.

4. The WGA agreed that the private sector should be proactively involved early on in achieving the objectives of MAMRASCA towards harmonization of agri-food standards on safety and quality, and a greater regional integration in the agri-food sector. The private sector representatives noted that the lack of agreement on sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS) among the GMS countries and limited understanding of the stakeholders along the value chain on the protocols and guidelines for good agricultural practices (GAP), good animal husbandry practices (GAHP), and good aquaculture practices (GAqP) remain as major bottlenecks. They called for an improved enforcement of regional and international food safety and quality regulations, including organic certification, good manufacturing practices (GMP), and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) by responsible public sector agencies and for promoting third party audits on quality and safety monitoring along the value chain. The private sector representatives also sought support of the public sector, civil society organizations, and development partners in (i) building producer capacity in GAP to expand access to higher value markets, (ii) ensuring traceability and data sharing standards through public private partnerships, and (iii) investing in facilities (e.g., laboratories) to support compliance with regional and global standards.

5. The WGA confirmed five priorities on food safety and quality management to be pursued up to 2025, with specific activities and targets under each priority.

- (i) support to achieve policy coherence on food safety and quality through mutual recognition of standards in GMS countries
- (ii) build institutional and technical capacities for mutual recognition of standards for safe and climate-friendly agri-food products
- (iii) deploy digital technologies (e.g., blockchain) for enhanced traceability of safe and climate-friendly agri-food products, and for accelerating harmonization of food safety and quality standards
- (iv) contribute to COVID-19 recovery efforts by supporting measures to improve direct access of producers to higher value markets
- (v) engage with development partners and the private sector on harmonized food safety and quality management systems and digital transformation

6. The members of the WGA extended sincere appreciation to the financing partners of the GMS Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security Program: the PRC Regional Cooperation and Poverty Reduction Fund, and the Asian Development Bank. The members of the WGA encouraged ADB and other development partners to continue to coordinate and support the program and strengthen shared commitment and partnership for a more integrated, prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable GMS.

7. The WGA expressed its appreciation to the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand and its Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives for co-hosting the meeting.

8. The WGA also thanked the Government of Viet Nam and its Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development for agreeing to host the 19th Annual Meeting of the WGA.