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AGRICULTURE

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THE
JOURNEY
OF FRUITS
AND VEGGIES





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FROM THE EDITOR

Light Traffic *for* Fruits *and* Vegetables Matters

I still remember the first moments when the Facilitating Trade for Agricultural Goods in ASEAN or shortly called FTAG Project came into being.

It was in September 2016 when the Fact-Finding Mission visited us in Thailand, our partners in ASEAN countries and the ASEAN Secretariat. Finally, we are lucky enough to get this project started to support movements of fruits and vegetables.

Hoping to boost the intra-ASEAN trade volume, phytosanitary inspection border officers are working around the clock through FTAG Project to make sure barriers that cause a delay in agricultural trade, mainly **mango, banana, dragon fruit, lychee, longan** and **chili** between Cambodia,

Vietnam and Thailand, is gone.

Since June 2017, we are grateful for the experiences and lessons learned, which could potentially be applied in wider ASEAN region. The approaches, which induce trust building, platforms and mechanisms for peer-to-peer learning exchange and tools such as Phytosanitary Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and Manual of Morphology of Quarantine Pests can take the trade to another level.

For the remaining six months, although we cannot fulfill every task as wished, I wholeheartedly hope that ASEAN governments agency shall jointly continue and make the best of the existing approaches.

Pouchamarn Wongsanga (Oh)

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Exclusive



interview

ASEAN IS PLAYING A GAME OF HIDE-AND-SEEK WITH PESTS

Writer: Prangthong Jitcharoenkul

Junior Communication Officer, GIZ Thailand's Agriculture and Food Cluster



A journey of fruits and vegetables that are free from invasive pest and disease from one country to another isn't that easy. **Wichar Thitiprasert**, Advisor of the National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards (ACFS) has spent more than ten years overseeing phytosanitary risks that come with fruits and vegetables being transported in and out of Thailand to other countries in Southeast Asia. But much still needs to be done to improve measures to prevent and control pest and disease from entering the country.

In an exclusive interview, the former director of Thailand's Office of Agricultural Regulation outlined his vision of a more harmonized set of phytosanitary regulations and why the bloc should carry on the task.

Q: Why should ASEAN members pay more attention to sanitary and phytosanitary measures?

A In recent months, the invasion of the fall armyworm pest to Thailand left so much damage. It destroyed about 30-40 percent of maize crops nationwide, much of which is sold to the animal feed industry. The incident was actually preventable if the ASEAN member states share the same measures against the pest and disease outbreaks. It proves to be a boon for both exporters and importers because the flow of agricultural goods boosts the trade volume with ASEAN and non-ASEAN members. The measures should be internationally accepted standards and be able to boost the consumer confidence both in Thailand and foreign countries.



Q: What is the best way to prevent pests and disease outbreaks?

A The best way is to have measures that prevent pest especially, alien and invasive species from entering and establishing in the country in the first place because it is very difficult to control and eradicate them. ASEAN should come up with harmonized phytosanitary regulations and procedures while Pest Risk Analysis (PRA) being served as a tool for controlling risk from important pests. If we fail to do so, it could have a negative impact to farmers' productivity and trade across countries.



• **Mr. Wichar Thitiprasert** speaks in front of an audience at the Regional Knowledge Sharing Workshop on Facilitating Trade for Agricultural Goods in ASEAN organized recently in Hanoi, Vietnam.



- A mango is peeled off to identify pests. (left)
- Cambodian mangoes are randomly checked at the quarantine checkpoint in Chanthaburi province, Thailand before being shifted to the processing factories. (right)

The best way is to have measures that prevent quarantine pest especially, alien and invasive species from entering and establishing in the country in the first place because it is very difficult to control and eradicate them.



Q: What has Thailand done so far regarding phytosanitary controls?

A Thailand's Department of Agriculture has been developing the so-called Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for inspectors who are in charge of phytosanitary measures to ensure consistency at the operational level is in line with international standards.



Q: What're the SOP and its benefits?

A SOP is step-by-step instruction or we can call them fundamental guideline. It shows the officers how to perform daily tasks and maintain the consistency of the operations to meet international standard and improve quality of products. We will reduce cost and time-consuming processes. Most importantly, we will gain more trust from our trading partners and consumers locally and internationally. The first look of the SOP is expected to be ready by November this year.



Q: What does it mean to the consumers?

A This is to ensure that certified pest-free products meet phytosanitary standard, free from quarantine pests and safe for consumers. It can also minimize the risk of exotic pests in importing countries.



- Bananas imported from Cambodia are inspected at the quarantine checkpoint in Binh Phuoc province, Vietnam.

Facilitating Trade for Agricultural Goods in ASEAN (FTAG) Project

FTAG, initiated in June 2017, has picked longan, banana, dragon fruit, lychee, mango and chili as potential crops to be developed through peer-to-peer learnings for aligning regulatory framework and procedures on phytosanitary measures to facilitate faster border crossing of fresh agricultural goods.

FTAG organizes trainings and workshops for inspectors and technical officers dealing with phytosanitary measures in trade of agricultural goods in Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand.

Exclusive interview

Facilitating Trade for Agricultural Goods in ASEAN (FTAG) Project



BRIA

Section

Better Rice **for** Better Life



Being a farmer is not just a career choice

For decades, the farm sector has been a driving engine behind Thailand's economic growth. Every government has come up with many policies to better the quality of life of rural farmers.

But why are Thai rice farmers not wealthy as a consequence?

Despite the hardship, rice farmers continue to plant rice because this is the only thing they know about. Rice is so vital to the Thai society, especially in the northeastern region. Rice is a way of life.

For five years, I've been a part of **Better Rice Initiative Asia (BRIA) Project**. I visited farmers in more than 150 villages in Ubon Ratchathani, Srisaket, Surin and Roi Et. I don't doubt why most of them still live in poverty. It is not just about struggling to earn more money, but lacking technical know-how to make a living from rice farming in the long term.

My team and I are making sure every small farmer we met understands and applies Good Agricultural Practice or GAP, which covers not only food safety, but also environmental standards.

Thai farmers are capable to bring positive change and right now they are learning more about the concepts of the Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP) and adapting their practices to prove that their small-scale rice farming can be a profitable business.

I feel the wind of change is coming. Nowadays, in every village I go, there are more organic rice farmers who can earn more income, while at the same time enjoying good health.

And this change I believe will continue.

Montree Promaluksan,
Field Manager, Better Rice Initiative Asia
(BRIA) - Thailand Project, GIZ Thailand

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSIONISTS DRIVE POSITIVE CHANGE FOR SMALL RICE FARMERS IN NORTH SUMATRA

Writer: **Nurhayati Lubis,**

Junior Professional Officer for Public Relation, Monitoring and Evaluation, GIZ Indonesia

In the northwest of the island of Sumatra, Mrs. Tiniar Saragih, now 50 years old, wakes up each morning to travel to see her family's two-hectare rice field, the activity she has never foreseen until she got married with a rice farmer 18 years ago.

Mrs. Tiniar, who already works as a civil servant, just wanted to fulfil her role as a wife by helping her husband whose earning depends mainly on rice farming.

At first, she found it hard to combine daily activities of a farmer with her full-time job, but those days are long gone.

Mrs. Tiniar is now an active field facilitator of the **Farmer Field School (FFS)**, a part of the **Better Rice Initiative Asia (BRIA) Project**, in her hometown in Simalungun, Panombean Pane sub-district.

“I am very lucky to have an opportunity to join the project. I attend BRIA’s Training of Trainer for Field Facilitators and my knowledge and facilitation skills have improved,” she happily shares her feeling.

Since June 2019, Mrs. Tiniar has served as a Head of Extension Office in the sub-district. She monitors and supervises the agricultural extensionists to ensure all government-supported programmes are being implemented properly to bring the economic and environmental benefits for the small farmers.

Mrs. Tiniar is not the only one who puts great effort into making a difference in the rice fields scattered across North Sumatra where small farmers are facing considerable challenges, from land and water scarcity and climate change to a lack of access to knowledge and technical expertise.

After finishing his high school education from Sekolah Pertanian Pembangunan with agriculture as a major subject, Andisya Putra, 34, decided to become an agricultural extensionist without having second thoughts.

“BRIA has provided a lot of positive changes for me and for the farmers who participate in the Farmer Field School,” Andisya said, adding that the programme offers not only good rice cultivation practices, but also introduces financial access through banks to farmers.

He directly works with small farmers in Tanah Jawa sub-district. His primary role is to aid the farmer groups to make better decisions and increase agricultural production.



Mr. Albiker Sidabutar, a 53-year-old farmer from Hutabayu Raja sub-district, is still full of spirit. (Photo credit: GIZ Indonesia)

“I am a farmer and will always answer this to whoever asks me what I am doing for a living,” says Mr. Albiker Sidabutar, a 53-year-old farmer from Hutabayu Raja sub-district of the same province.

Though he is not young anymore, his passion for experimental farms to pass on successful new farming methods to other villagers never fails.

“The most interesting session for me is seed selection and treatment and also the usage of the soil test kit. I hardly can wait to apply the climate-friendly and sustainable farming techniques on my field and share the results to my friends.”

These three people had joined the intensive course called: Training of Trainer for Field Facilitators which provides practical knowledge covering all stages of farming cultivation, from the land preparation to harvesting and post-harvest management.

The training educates the field facilitators about Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and facilitation skills through active methods such as working group discussion, role-play and field practices causing participants to be actively involved. The expectation is with their improved skills, they would be able to transfer the knowledge to the farmers during the FFS.

One cannot underestimate the importance of the field facilitators. The better the roles of the field facilitators is, the greater the opportunities for adaptation of the low carbon emission farming techniques that as a result will increase the yields and create successful farmers in each village of Indonesia will be.



Mr. Andisya Putra poses for selfies with local farmers. (Photo credit: GIZ Indonesia)

Mr. Andisya has high hopes for the banks' plans of taking 'uncomplicated' approach to offer soft loans for small-scale farmers who are still in deep debt due to lack of financial resources.

He also looks forward to seeing more young people taking up a career in agriculture and work together to drive positive change for farmers.



Mrs. Tiniar Saragih, 50, Head of Extension Office in Panombean Pane sub-district. (Photo credit: GIZ Indonesia)

FEATHERY COMPANIONS MAKE PEST CONTROL EASIER

Writer: **Nguyen Ngoc Son**

Project Officer for Land and Agriculture, GIZ Vietnam

For more than two decades, small-scale rice farmers in Dong Thap and An Giang provinces in southern Vietnam have found a way to reduce the investment costs in getting rid of pests and weeds with the help of their valuable feathery companions: wild birds and ducks.

Mr. Nguyen Xuan Thai, a 41-year-old small farmer, is one among many others who feels really happy to see these animals in his 2.5-hectare rice field.

“I love these animals. There are a lot of them here. They eat snails and pests, which in turn have great benefits of decreased costs because chemical inputs are not needed,” said Mr. Thai from Dong Thap province.

“We do not kill them here. We protect them,” he added.



Wild birds eat snails in Mr. Thai's rice field in Dong Thap province, southern Vietnam.
(Photo credit: GIZ Vietnam)



Thousands of ducks roam around the rice fields.
(Photo credit: GIZ Vietnam)

“It is a good chance for rural farmers to access the sustainable techniques. All cooperative members will practice the suitable rice farming techniques to improve product quality to meet the sustainable requirements,” said Mr. Nguyen Thanh Khoa, 38, farmer leader of Thuan Tien Cooperatives, considering biological pest control an ideal sustainable practice.

The training, supported by the BRIA project, advised Vietnamese farmers to adopt the SRP's rice cultivation standards, which consist of 41 requirements covering a set of priority topics such as improved productivity, food safety, effective use of water, nutrients and pesticide, biodiversity, community, greenhouse gas emission, labour rights and ethics.

Since May this year, over 1,400 farmers from eight cooperatives were intensively trained to pass on knowledge built around the concept of the SRP.

48 master trainers, who are technical staffs of the Sub-Plant Protection Department and Extension Services under Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will pass on knowledge of the SRP modules to at least 3,000 farmers.

Several wild bird species feed on golden apple snails that eat young and emerging rice plants.

“I conserve the wild birds at the very early stages when rice is still very young and always maintain natural resources and the environment,” Mr. Thai shared his thoughts.

Mr. Thai's rice fields are also home to over 5,000 domestic ducks. The ducks, Mr. Thai said, have a high affinity for seeds made by weeds that grow rapidly just before the harvest.

Their waste released into the fields also improves the soil fertility, which later results in higher yields.

“
I love seeing this every morning.
”

he said, looking at his rice paddy fields that are filled with dozens of wild birds.

From April to July this year, local farmers and the farming cooperatives in the Mekong Delta had joined the training on Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP) standard and have been working on sustainability issues under the project called: Better Rice Initiative Asia (BRIA).

BRAI Project, which carries on to phase II, aims to improve market access for resource-poor rice farmers in four provinces of Vietnam - Can Tho, An Giang, Bac Lieu and Dong Thap.



Local farmers fill the daily farm records during the Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP) class.
(Photo credit: GIZ Vietnam)

NEWS

01

“THAI RICE NAMA” BRINGS LOW-CARBON FARMING TECHNOLOGIES TO LOCAL FARMERS IN SUPHAN BURI

More than 300 local farmers gathered last Friday at Bann Hua Mai Sung community rice center in central Thailand to gain more experience and knowledge in earth-friendly farming practices.



<https://www.asean-agrifood.org/thai-rice-nama-brings-low-carbon-farming-technologies-to-local-farmers-in-suphan-buri/>

02

THAI RESEARCHERS TRACK GREENHOUSE GASES FROM RICE FIELD

The Thai government has strived for more precise and verifiable measurement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the rice farming.

<https://www.asean-agrifood.org/thai-researchers-track-greenhouse-gases-from-rice-field/>



03

CROP INSURANCE HELPS INDONESIAN FARMERS RECOVER AFTER NATURAL DISASTERS

The Indonesian government is stepping up their efforts to make more rice farmers understand the benefits of the rice insurance scheme.

<https://www.asean-agrifood.org/crop-insurance-helps-indonesian-farmers-recover-after-natural-disasters/>



04

THE WORLD MARKET OPEN FOR THAILAND'S SUSTAINABLE PALM OIL

Thai government officials are making sure that palm oil growers adopt the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) standard to meet the international criteria, in which sustainability is main objective.

<https://www.asean-agrifood.org/the-world-market-open-for-thailands-sustainable-palm-oil/>



Contributors



**Nguyen Ngoc Son
(Son)**

***Project Officer for Land use
and Agriculture
GIZ Vietnam Agriculture team***

With passion for green landscape, rice fields and nature, Son has worked for the agriculture development in the Mekong Delta at GIZ Vietnam for more than 4 years since 2015. The sustainable agriculture sector is an important field that is supported by Land use and our agriculture team. He was responsible for the Integrated Pest Management between 2015-2017 and is right now working hard for the Better Rice Initiative in Asia Phase II project that encourages sustainable rice farming in Vietnam.



**Nurhayati Lubis
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***Junior Professional for
Public Relation, Monitoring
and Evaluation
at GIZ Indonesia -
BRIA II Project***

Truly a newcomer in writing world. Used to be a field and admin staff for almost 18 years at several INGOs projects - EU Leuser Management Unit, JICA, USAID, and GIZ in Medan, North Sumatra Province, Indonesia. Always eager to expand her knowledge on new and challenging issues. Love spend most of her spare time travelling with her children and actively involve on social activities taking care of kids with cancer.



**Naylinya
Chappanapong
(Oh)**

***Senior Communication
Officer for Agriculture
and Food at GIZ Thailand***

Spent several years in creative communication and fundraising at different leading organizations - Oxfam, Habitat for Humanity Thailand, Plan International Thailand, and Action Aid Thailand. Nothing satisfies her more than creating new activities for the cluster, contributing the overall growth of the organization and a cup of Caffè Cappuccino every day.



**Prangthong
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***Junior Communication
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Former journalist recently joined GIZ Thailand in November 2018, bringing along with her five years' experience of reporting, writing and interviewing. Her articles - straight news and features - on varied topics appear in Bangkok Post and Kyodo News. She secured a full scholarship from the Indian government to study for a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) with a triple major in history, economics and sociology and had lived in Southern India for 3 years.



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Sustainable Agrifood System in ASEAN

