



## Enhancing capacity for food safety management in the Kyrgyz fruit and vegetable industry

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The overall goal of the project is to increase the competitiveness and sustainability of the Kyrgyz fruit and vegetable industry to increase sales to high-value markets and improve the livelihoods of about 323,000 smallholder farmers.

**STDF/PG/569**

**Status**

On-going

**Start Date**

01/01/2020

**Project Value (US\$)**

\$746,210

**STDF Contribution (US\$)**

\$570,000

**Beneficiaries**

Kyrgyz Republic

**Implementing Entities**

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

**Partners**

Association of Fruit and Vegetable Enterprises (AFVE), Kyrgyz Republic

**Background**

The Kyrgyz Republic joined the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) on 12 August 2015 and is required to comply with the sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures of the EAEU regulatory framework with a transitional period of three years. Contrary to the expectation of the Kyrgyz government to expand export markets for agro-food products, joining the union resulted in a marked decline in exports and a significant increase in agri-food imports from Russian and Kazakhstan. Despite the transition period, trading partners in EAEU countries requested Kyrgyz food business operators to demonstrate conformity with EAEU regulations for market access. In the meantime, domestic supermarket retailers compete to offer high quality safe products that comply with EAEU SPS measures. To have efficient and effective systems in place, the official Kyrgyz control agencies, national experts and food business operators need to adopt international standards for the long-term sustainability of the SPS control system.

Kyrgyz food processors and farmers face major challenges in adopting modern risk-based systems to manage food safety. Food business operators and farmers are unfamiliar with risk-based control systems and require expert support, but there are a limited number of national experts on food safety management with experience in risk assessment and the practical aspects of

hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP) and good agricultural practices. There is an urgent need to upgrade the knowledge and capacities of the national experts and food business operators through regular training courses. This can be achieved by standardising food safety training with course curriculums for different levels of competence, enabling access to high-quality advisory and training materials on food safety management in Russian (the official language) or Kyrgyz (the national language).

The official control agencies of the Kyrgyz government also need to update their knowledge and practices to shift from certification of conformity and state (GOST) standards based on end products to modern food safety management systems, modern methods of food safety management inspection and auditing, and international (Codex and the International Standards Organization) standards. GOST standards are mostly product specific and contain a mixture of SPS measures and technical barriers to trade regulations.

This project plays a vital role in enabling Kyrgyzstan to meet the SPS trade agreement obligations of the World Trade Organisation and the EAEU, and thereby avoid exclusion from EAEU markets due to noncompliance with food safety requirements. The project also enables the Kyrgyzstan government to provide sufficient evidence of intent to comply for an extension of the transition period to be granted for EAEU regulatory compliance. Food business operators are in a strong position to demonstrate to their customers in major trading partner countries (such as Russia and Kazakhstan) that improvements are ongoing to manage food safety risks effectively and achieve full regulatory compliance within the life of the project.

## **Results**

### **Enhanced capacity of the Kyrgyz fruit and vegetable industry to adopt good agricultural and hygiene practices, and HACCP**

The project collects baseline data from the private sector and official control agencies to ensure the validity of the approach to reach out to and train farmers and food business operators, and to conduct a gender analysis of the target group in the private sector. Cooperation between Association of Fruit and Vegetable Enterprises industries, smallholder producers and other relevant actors in the fruit and vegetables value chain is enhanced by signing formal agreements with each company. To implement food safety management systems, awareness and sign-up sessions are held with smallholder farmers who supply products to food processing companies.

A baseline audit of infrastructure and practices for food safety management is being conducted for the selected food business operators and their smallholder suppliers to determine likely food safety risks, weaknesses in the system, and changes and additions needed to establish conformity with technical regulation TR/021/2011. Sets of supporting documentation and templates for record keeping are being developed for both good hygiene practices and HACCP in processing factories, and good agricultural practices for ensuring food safety on farms. Expert advice, technical support and mentoring are provided to food business operators and their smallholder suppliers to adopt food safety management systems that conform to EAEU regulations.

### **Increased capacity of Kyrgyz service providers on risk assessment, good agricultural and hygiene practices and HACCP in line with international standards**

Supporting materials on food safety management are being prepared in Russian and English based on the standards of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and the International Standards Organisation. Existing food safety training materials, particularly those available in Russian, are being reviewed and used. The knowledge, experience and skills of most of the identified national experts in food safety working for private sector service providers, public sector agencies and as technical advisers for specific fruit and vegetable processing factories are being formally assessed. The selected national experts are being trained as instructors to form a core of high-calibre Kyrgyz experts in food safety management, who will provide a strong basis for sustainable national expertise and reduce reliance on external experts.

A standardised training system is being developed with syllabuses and training outcomes for national technical and vocational qualifications for food safety management with four levels of competence that meet international standards for national technical or vocational qualifications. Appropriate training materials are envisaged on risk assessment, good agricultural and hygiene practices, HACCP and modern inspection and auditing techniques for different target groups (farms, processors, service providers and government inspection services).

Training programs are being delivered to beneficiaries through a cascade approach consisting of smallholder farmers, national experts, company technical advisors, relevant ministries, technical universities and relevant vocational training institutes. Electronic versions of all training and support materials are supplied to the STDF and made freely available on the Association of Fruit and Vegetable Enterprises website.

## **Enhanced capacity of competent authorities to inspect and certify HACCP-based systems in Kyrgyz fruit and vegetable processing industries as compliant with EAEU regulatory requirements**

Procedures for risk assessment and the inspection of the regulatory conformity of food safety management systems for fruit and vegetable processing industries are being prepared in line with international standards (ISO19011) and in partnership with the country's Ministry of Health. The role and responsibilities of the Ministry of Agriculture for farm audits and inspections are being strengthened. Both ministries aim for a clear, efficient and streamlined inspection system. Food business operators and agricultural producers are informed of the requirements and processes with which they need to comply.

National secondary regulations to support the uptake of good agricultural and hygiene practices and HACCP in the fruit and vegetable chain are being reviewed and updated if necessary. As an EAEU regulation, TR/021/2011 is directly transposed to national legislation and does not require any legal drafting. However, the review might show other complementary tasks that need to be addressed to clearly set out the legal requirements to be met by food business operators and farmers.