



Safer spices: food safety and market access for peppercorn

This regional peppercorn project in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos is aimed at improving compliance with international food safety requirements in high-value markets such as the European Union, the United States and Japan to restore confidence among the food manufacturing industry about peppercorn sourced from the region. This is expected to increase financial returns and improve productivity, safety and market access for smallholder pepper growers and processors. It is also expected to lead to an increase in the competitiveness and sustainability of the regional peppercorn industry through the consistent supply of high-quality, safe peppercorn from small-scale value chains driven by farmers. This is anticipated to be achieved through the development and adoption of a harmonized code of practices coupled with a participatory guarantee system to increase production, food safety and market access.

Check CABI's [news item](#) and learn more about the inauguration of a project office within WASI's campus in Vietnam.

STDF/PG/619

Status

On-going

Start Date

01/10/2020

Project Value (US\$)

\$906,836

STDF Contribution (US\$)

\$700,086

Beneficiaries

Cambodia
Lao PDR
Viet Nam

Implementing Entities

CAB International (CABI)

Partners

Western Highlands Agriculture and Forestry Science Institute (WASI) Vietnam
Department of Agriculture (DoA) Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Lao PDR
General Directorate of Agriculture (GDA) Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries of Cambodia

Background

Spices such as peppercorn are associated with complex and diverse supply chains. These begin with farmers (producers, both large- and small-scale) and reach processors or shippers through various intermediaries. The aggregation and redistribution of these products at various stages along the supply chain contributes to a high food safety risk profile such as excessive pesticide residue levels, pathogen contamination such as salmonella), adulteration and substitute. These spices are also exposed to dust, dirt, insects and animal waste before and after harvest due to poor sanitation and food handling practices. Additionally, peppercorn farmers face sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) issues such as pests and diseases, including Phytophthora foot rot and slow decline diseases.

An analysis of SPS issues in exported peppercorn suggests that all main food safety and hygiene-related noncompliance (high maximum residue levels, and bacterial and physical contamination) results from either poor farm-level decisions or handling practices. Most village-level activities at the production, harvesting, drying and initial storage phases were identified as the point of breakdown in SPS control. Such noncompliance can be corrected by improving the development of practical capacity among farmers and creating a conducive environment to encourage them to adopt improved practices.

The project is aimed at combatting SPS issues related to food safety, and improving quality and traceability in the production, post-harvest and processing of peppercorn. This is expected to be achieved by identifying, developing and disseminating good practices that focus on village-level peppercorn production. A code of practice will be designed around Codex standards to address SPS issues identified with peppercorn. An implementation model will be developed for the code of practice based on the participatory guarantee system. This is expected to ensure safe produce through social cohesion, peer-to-peer learning, and a heightened awareness of community responsibility.

Results

Farm- and village-level codes of practice for peppercorn based on Codex standards and national good practices

A first expected result is the provision a regionally harmonized code of practice based on Codex standards, and existing national good agricultural and hygiene practices for adoption by farm-level pepper producers, collectors and input providers in peppercorn supply chains in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. The code of practice is being pilot tested with two farmer groups in Vietnam and one group each in Cambodia and Laos, and tailored to meet the local conditions, requirements and cultural norms.

Knowledge resources on codes of practice

To support the code of practice, a range of practical communication tools and knowledge resources are being developed, including information fact sheets and practical implementation guides such as a farmer manual and posters. An electronic knowledge hub is also being developed to share all information and materials generated by the project. This will facilitate global access to the knowledge generated by participants in the peppercorn value chain in the project countries with stakeholders in international peppercorn trade.

Stakeholder workshops with farmers, collectors, local government officials and lead firms are being organized to solicit stakeholder input on the updated code of practice, supporting materials and management framework.

Participatory guarantee scheme models to implement the code of practice

To facilitate the implementation of the code of practice, the participatory guarantee scheme model is being piloted in all three countries with a number of pepper-producing farmers. A team of advisory experts is being trained in each country to provide ongoing support to the farmers in implementing the participatory guarantee scheme and code of practice, including developing market-orientated management skills for farm businesses.

Strategies for the wider rollout of the code of practice

An assessment is being conducted to suit the piloted code of practice, participatory guarantee scheme model and supporting documents to identify approaches and strategies for wider rollout. Progress is periodically communicated to industry partners, particularly buyers and processors.

A seminar and regional workshop is being planned to raise awareness and encourage wider uptake of the STDF peppercorn project's successful outcomes among pepper-processing and exporting companies, the network of international pepper buyers, the International Pepper Community and major donor organisations.