



**INFORMATION ON SPS-RELATED ACTIVITIES OF
THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE CENTRE (ITC)
(JULY - OCTOBER 2023)**

COMMUNICATION FROM ITC

The following communication, received on 9 November 2023, is being circulated at the request of the ITC.

The International Trade Centre is continuing its efforts to assist enterprises to meet technical market requirements. An update of selected SPS-related activities of interest to WTO Members is provided below.

1 PROJECTS

1.1 Iraq: Strengthening the Agriculture and Agri-food Value Chain and Improving trade policy (SAAVI) (September 2020 - April 2025 / Donor European Union)

1.1. This project aims to support stabilization and governance through building the capacities of key Iraqi institutions to deliver public services, as well as sustainable job creation through the development of human capital and the enhancement of private sector's competitiveness. The project focuses on the development and implementation of sector strategies for high-potential products, as well as on defining more market-oriented policies to improve predictability and efficiency in the business environment. SAAVI also provides assistance to enhance Iraq's trade policy and supports the country in its WTO accession process.

1.2. A sub-activity of the programme supports three agri-food value chains in improving food safety and quality of their products (namely potatoes, tomatoes, and poultry). Selected farmer and producer alliances are trained in good hygiene practices, codex and national standard requirements as well as storage and warehousing practices with the aim of meeting domestic buyer requirements and preparing for exports at the same time. An agri-food based farmer alliance that grows potatoes for domestic consumption is being supported to improve food safety related standards, Standard Operating Procedures, and storage practices in Mosul. A poultry-based alliance in Nineva region is being assisted in strengthening biosecurity measures and hygiene practices to increase food safety. The objective is to comply with government regulations and meet standards of large domestic buyers. As a second phase, exports are also targeted at a limited scale.

1.3. A guide on Food Safety for Iraqi small and medium sized enterprises has been prepared in Arabic language and is undergoing printing to be rolled out in the coming implementation period.

1.4. A group of quality and food safety advisers completed their training and is currently supporting MSMEs to improve their production processes. The Iraq Quality for Trade Platform remains ready for scaling. Approval for mapping of SPS/quality requirements for 'dates, fresh or dried', has been obtained by the Ministry of Trade and research will begin by end 2023.

1.2 Malaysia Arise Plus Project (February 2021 - January 2024 / Donor European Union)

1.5. In partnership with the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the project aims to support inclusive and sustainable trade growth and poverty reduction in Malaysia, while contributing to economic integration in the ASEAN region.

1.6. Activities include biosecurity of fisheries and aquaculture, plant health, animal health and sustainable agriculture practices including GAP, Organic, Green Livestock and agricultural waste management.

1.7. A second round of training and onsite advisory assistance to the Department of Fisheries (DOF) (after those in September 2022) was held from 18 to 28 July 2023 through a mission of two international experts, including site visits related to fish disease surveillance, and guidance provided on practical aspects of implementing EU requirements. Working sessions on EU audits and addressing specific constraints related to exporting to the European Union were also held. Review and advisory of the National Disease Surveillance Programme (NDSP) and controls in fisheries was carried out with recommendations developed for strengthening the programme. 22 participants from the Department of Fisheries Malaysia, attended the training and advisory sessions held in Putrajaya city.

1.8. A workshop on risk screening of aquatic alien invasiveness was held between 21 and 24 August 2023. To address shortcomings in the method that was being used in Malaysia, the present training was based on Aquatic Species Invasiveness Screening Kit (AS-ISK) risk screening decision-support tool that helps in informing decisions to manage and control non-native (invasive) aquatic species developed by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science in the United Kingdom. The training included sessions on Risk analysis and decision-support tools in the context of invasion biology and weed risk assessment, Risk screening protocol, utilization of Aquatic Species Invasiveness Screening Kit, and Statistical analysis and publication. A total of 27 participants representing 6 national agencies (DoF, National Fish Health Resource Centre, Department of Wildlife and National Parks, Johor Biotechnology and Biodiversity Corporation, Department of Agriculture, Forestry Department) attended the workshop. This training was held in Putrajaya city. Based on request from the national partner, a second workshop has been planned to be held in November to cover DoF staff from Sabah region.

1.9. A 5-day training workshop on traceability of eggs and dairy products was held from 7 to 11 August 2023 in Putrajaya, Malaysia, which included classroom sessions and site visits to eggs and dairy production facilities. The workshop aimed to provide technical support to Department of Veterinary Services (DVS) Malaysia, in developing a traceability system for eggs and dairy. Sessions included: (a) Determination and identification tools or method used to identify eggs and milk and the system to monitor their movement; (b) Identification of method most suited for Malaysia, for identification and traceability of eggs and milk; and (c). Familiarization on related EU regulations and how the European Union implements and monitors the traceability system for eggs and milk products. A subsidiary of a Dutch milk production company based in Pakistan provided practical aspects of how traceability systems are implemented at production and processing levels. This latter company is a beneficiary of support under the EU-financed GRASP project (mentioned in following section) being implemented in Pakistan. 41 participants from DVS, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAFS) attended, as did numerous private dairy and poultry farm business representatives.

1.10. The Electronic ASEAN Catch Documentation Scheme (eACDS) application: traceability tool from sea to plate developed by Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) is currently being piloted at two sites in Malaysia. Guidance on the utilization and operationalization of the system is being provided by SEAFDEC. Moreover, an EU expert is advising on compatibility/alignment with Regulation (EC) 1005/2008. In this regard, a series of training workshops were held with DOF to support the set up and operationalization of an electronic catch and traceability system. Training included information sessions on requirements under the EU legislation 1005/2008 to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. These trainings were held between 3 September and 27 October in Kuala Terengganu, and Kota Kinabalu cities.

1.11. 45 participants from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food security (MAFS) and private sector attended a 3-day training on agricultural project management towards overall sustainability of farms and with the specific focus on environmental sustainability (19-21 September). The training provided an overview on issues, challenges, successes and lessons learned of agricultural projects and provided the basic elements of agricultural project management and environmental sustainability.

1.12. A 3-day training workshop on Organic Agriculture and sustainability took place 22-24 August. The training covered the new EU organic regulation (EU 2018/848), its implications on future trade and impact upon the current 'equivalent' system of trading of organic products coming into the European Union to a 'compliance' system post 2024.

1.13. The project is also supporting the Plant Biosecurity Division of DOA on pest identification and management of EU-quarantined pests for vegetables, flowers, tropical plants and aquatic plants. A series of 4 training courses took place between June and September 2023, to train officers from Plant Biosecurity Divisions, State Agricultural Officers of DOA. The compilation of information for ten important species of pest and diseases of: (a) rice, leafy and fruity vegetables grown in the glasshouse and fields and their natural enemies; and (b) of quarantine important in EU countries and natural enemies was prepared in advance and used during the training sessions.

1.14. A series of four workshops on Integrated Pest Management for vegetables, flowers and rice took place between June and September 2023. Attended by 60 DoA plant biosecurity officers, these workshops covered: (a) General Concept and Basic Principles of Integrated Ecological Pest Management (IEPM); (b) IEPM and Biological Control in Rice; (c) IEPM and Biological Control in Vegetables and Flowers; and (d) EU experiences in IEPM with a focus on Biological Control in vegetables and flowers under glasshouse condition.

1.3 Philippines Arise Plus Project (March 2021 – February 2025 / Donor European Union)

1.15. The project aims to foster inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction in the Philippines through improved Philippines' trade performance and competitiveness and specifically by putting in place a National Quality Infrastructure (NQI) that promotes export competitiveness, and a quality management and control systems for exported food products better aligned with international best practices.

1.16. Planning of a series of trainings on microbiological testing including advanced methods, related method validation, implementation of decision rule, and commercial sterility has commenced to be held in the first half of 2024.

1.17. Following the development of guides consisting of risk-based inspection checklists, guidelines, procedural manuals, and SOPs in fresh fruits and vegetables, processed coconut and fisheries sectors a series of trainings on implementing the protocols developed has been held for officers of the related Competent Authorities - the Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), Bureau of Plant Industries (BPI) of the Department of Agriculture, and the Food and Drug Authority - between June and August 2023. 90 participants, all inspectors from head office and regional offices from the said CAs attended the trainings. Classroom sessions were complemented with site visits and mock inspections to practice the use of the revised inspection protocols.

1.18. Support is ongoing to BFAR's regional laboratories for accreditation against ISO 17025: 2017 to test for veterinary drug residue analysis aiming at expanding BFAR's capacity to the many regions in Philippines.

1.19. Quality and food safety/SPS requirements for priority product market combinations have been identified under the project for selected priority products - Virgin Coconut Oil, Coconut Water, Coconut Flour. This information is now available on the Philippines Quality for Trade Platform. (website: Qualityfortrade.intracen.org/Philippines/compass)

1.20. Moreover, a team of 20 Quality Champions developed and qualified under the project coached enterprises to improve food safety over a period of 5 months having undergone training on related general aspects and specific methods and systems (GHP, HACCP, ISO 22000). The qualified Quality Champions are now envisaged to roll out a series of trainings for MSMEs in collaboration with national public institutions and private sector partners.

1.4 Myanmar Trade-Related Assistance (Arise Plus – Myanmar) (July 2019 - May 2024 / Donor European Union)

1.21. The ARISE Plus project aims at building inclusive and sustainable trade growth in Myanmar through support to MSMEs in selected value chains enhancing food safety and SPS compliance (targeting tea, coffee, honey, horticulture products) and trade policy formulation and implementation.

1.22. Work is advancing on Myanmar Platform on Quality and Food Safety. The site already contains information on SPS and quality requirements for selected product-market combinations (avocado, coffee, honey, and tea, dried mango and dried pineapple targeting EU markets) and now features similar requirements for mango puree and canned pineapple. The site also features 25 expert (Trainer-cum-Counsellor and Quality Champion) profiles and 12 service provider institutions in Myanmar. A series of awareness workshops for each of the product associations is under consideration for 2024.

1.23. Following the successful submission of the National Residue Monitoring Plan (NRMP) 2023, Myanmar maintains EU market access for honey and the project continues its work on the continuation and sustainability of the plan beyond the end of the project implementation period (expected for May 2024). A training programme customized to non-compliant cases of honey samples was designed, and pesticide residue was identified as an important juncture of future compliance with EU requirements. Thus, a guide on pesticides residues in honey as well as training sessions around this topic were developed.

1.24. The project continues to support a private food testing laboratory for compliance with ISO/IEC 17025. The laboratory was assisted in demonstrating their capability through proficiency testing. Several lots of equipment for micro-biology and chemical testing were procured.

1.25. 6 enterprises (cross-sector) are being coached for FSSC 22000 v6 implementation. The coaching includes gap assessment and the preparation of action plans as all enterprises already have HACCP systems in place.

1.26. Ten food safety experts were trained as ISO 22000 lead auditors and successfully passed IRCA/CQI approved course exams.

1.5 SYMST: Systematic Mechanism for Safer Trade (Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam) (December 2018 – October 2023 / Donor European Union)

1.27. The overall objective of the project is to improve food safety through better governance in Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam. The project aims to strengthen the regulatory framework for control of plant health and pesticides in the fruits and vegetable sector and other plant products through the application of norms and standards to improve market access.

1.28. On the Viet Nam and Lao Quality for Trade Platforms users can discover quality and food safety/SPS requirements for priority product market combinations under the project (such as, pomelo, dragon fruit, black pepper to the European Union as well as coffee to the European Union, Korea and Thailand for Viet Nam and exports of rice, chili, basil and coffee to the European Union for Lao People's Democratic Republic).

1.29. The Plant Protection Lab under DOA, Lao People's Democratic Republic was supported for compliance with ISO/IEC 17025:2017. Training on the requirements of ISO/IEC 17025:2017 and identification of documentation required for implementation of ISO/IEC 17025:2017 requirements was completed. Preparation of the national pesticides residue monitoring plan was also completed.

1.30. In Viet Nam training was completed for the National Plant Protection Department on regulatory needs of an import tolerance dossier. The training also included work done by various countries on the Codex MRLs.

1.31. Extensive training, support and coaching related to hygiene and food safety, including HACCP where relevant, was provided to farms, processors and exporters involved on model value chains developed under the project in both countries.

1.32. Training of inspectors and plant quarantine officers was completed. Training on EU online SPS certification platform, TRACES (Trade Control and Expert System) was completed.

1.33. Awareness events and awareness materials and well as manuals on food safety and SPS-related market access requirements and related compliance were completed.

1.34. The project ended on 16 October 2023.

1.6 Lao ARISE Plus Project (1 November 2018 – 31 December 2023 / Donor European Union)

1.35. A number of trainings supported Lao's Food and Drug Department (FDD) food inspectors to improve inspections carried out at the establishment in order to ensure compliance with GMP and GHP requirements and issue audit certificates. A train-the-trainer workshop took place between 3 to 7 July in Vientiane Capital for FDD food inspections to better understand the Thai food regulatory system in support of improving exports to Thailand. This workshop focused on the enforcement measures related to Thai regulations undertaken by food inspectors including the principles of auditing and managing an audit programme.

1.36. Activities were held to develop and qualify a team of Quality Champions under the project and attached to the Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI) with whom they implemented awareness events on quality and food safety.

1.37. A team of Quality Champions, FDD and DOA staff completed hands-on training on food safety and initiated food safety related support to seven enterprises.

1.7 Uzbekistan: Facilitating the Process of Accession to the WTO (February 2020 – October 2024 / Donor European Union)

1.38. Under this project, a series of trainings to reinforce pest risk analysis and integrated pest risk management capacities of Uzbekistan's Agency for Plant Protection and Quarantine were organized from June to August 2023. The latest training workshop on "Risk-based official controls" was held between 31 July and 4 August 2023. The forthcoming work on the development of risk-based management systems and risk-based controls, as well as the update of phytosanitary measures for import control requirements, is envisaged for the next reporting period.

1.39. Support to the Sanitary-Epidemiological Welfare and Public Health Committee is ongoing towards drafting the "Law on Food Safety and Quality". A review of legislative documents covering sanitary rules and food additives is also envisaged to start in the next reporting period.

1.40. In response to a request by Uzbekistan's State Committee of Veterinary and Livestock Development, relevant chapters of the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH)'s latest revised version of the Terrestrial Animal Health Codes are being translated into the Uzbek language towards improved implementation of standards for animal health and welfare, targeting completion in November 2023. Forthcoming work will, inter alia, cover animal traceability and preparation of a national residue monitoring plan.

1.8 Pakistan: Growth for rural advancement and sustainable progress (GRASP) (June 2019 - December 2024 / Donor European Union)

1.41. ITC has been providing technical assistance to government agencies related to food safety, plant protection and animal health in Sindh and Balochistan provinces in Pakistan to improve their technical functions, equipment and capacities. These include the food authorities in both the provinces, agriculture extension departments, livestock departments, plant protection departments, and animal health institutes.

1.42. In this context, ITC has equipped the food authorities with fully functional mobile van laboratories, trained staff on various technical topics including on the WTO SPS Agreement, provided recommendations to improve their regulatory and institutional frameworks and contributed to the development of an animal health information system among other activities.

1.43. Currently, ITC is providing additional support to these institutions to procure further equipment for their testing laboratories (including testing kits and consumables), arrange training materials and manuals for their master trainers, prepare and participate in precision testing, obtain ISO 17025 accreditation, develop software solutions for effective enforcement of food safety regimes, train inspectors on sampling, handling and conducting risk-based assessments, as well as train animal health staff on technical topics such as surveillance system operations, vaccine production, artificial insemination etc.

1.44. On the private sector side, ITC has developed step-by-step guides for SMEs (of mango, dates, onion, tomato, banana, grapes, dairy and meat) to implement quality management systems and obtain food safety certifications. Going forward, ITC will be providing coaching and handholding services to selected SMEs to take them through the implementation process (including audits) and enable them to successfully receive certifications such as Global GAP, HACCP, ISO 22000, BRCGS among others. ITC has also been working with academia to review their course offerings related to SPS and providing them with updated courses and materials to improve their curriculums.

1.9 EU-EAC Market Access Upgrade Programme (MARKUP II) (1 August 2023 – 31 July 2027 / Donor European Union)

1.45. The second phase of the EU-EAC Market Access Upgrade Programme (MARKUP II) was launched at a ceremony held in Arusha on 3 October 2023. MARKUP II is regional initiative funded by the European Union (EU) to unlock the full potential of agribusinesses within the EAC region; implemented by ITC working in partnership with the EU regional Delegation, the EAC secretariat and the governments of six EAC member states.

1.46. MARK UP II aims to promote economic growth in the East African Community (EAC) through private sector development and export promotion. It seeks to enhance sustainable and inclusive intra-African trade, pan-African trade, and trade with the European Union. MARKUP II will address trade barriers, value addition, compliance, trade facilitation, investment, technology transfer, and institutional support.

1.47. MARKUP II builds on the achievements of its predecessor, MARKUP I, streamlining procedures, supporting enterprises, and facilitating international trade. The sectors of intervention are: avocado, cocoa, coffee, essential oils, French beans, gum Arabic, horticulture, leather, packaging, spices and tea. MARKUP II will strengthen EAC's small businesses in close partnership with the East African Business Council, EAC Partner States, business support organizations, and local institutions.

1.48. One specific component of MARK UP II aims at strengthening quality compliance and standards.

1.10 The Philippines: Bangsamoro Agri-Enterprise Programme (BAEP) (12 September 2023 – 11 September 2026 / Donor European Union)

1.49. Part of a bigger programme (Farmers – Fisherfolks' Advancement and Integration to Resilient Value Chains in BARMM) led by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and co-implemented with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in the Philippines - which aims at improving local agricultural/sea-aqua product production in quality, diversity, consolidation and its response to the needs of the market. ITC will specifically focus on implementing food safety systems and increasing the investment readiness of selected enterprises.

1.50. The Action is anchored on a partnership between IOM, FAO and ITC that maximizes the strengths of each partner, especially in terms of field presence and existing community partnerships, technical expertise and international value chain linkages respectively.

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