



Greater Mekong Subregion Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security Program



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Sustainable
Agriculture & Food
Security Program

Consulting firm:



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What's New?

In 2017, Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) agriculture ministers expressed a joint vision of promoting the GMS as a leading supplier of safe, quality and climate-friendly agri-food products. Achieving this vision depends on overcoming multiple barriers along the agri-food value chains. Building on achievements of the GMS Core Agriculture Support Program (CASP) phases I (2006-2012) and II (2012-2019), the Asian Development Bank has prepared TA 9916-REG [GMS Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security Program](#) (SAFSP) to support implementation of the [Strategy for Promoting Safe and Environment-Friendly Agro-Based Value Chains in the GMS](#), endorsed by GMS agriculture ministers in 2017.

The first major activities of TA-9916 were carried out over spring and summer 2021, culminating in the successful Inception Workshop on 9 & 10 June and the 18th GMS WGA Annual Meeting, hosted by Thailand on 9 & 10 July with the theme “Towards Achieving Agri-food Safety and Quality Harmonization in the Greater Mekong Subregion in the context of COVID-19 and Climate Change”. A fruitful webinar was also held on the topic of GMS COVID-19 food security response and recovery on 1 September.

With this first edition of the SAFSP six-monthly newsletter, we are honored to keep you updated with the latest TA activities and developments in GMS agriculture cooperation.

Warm regards,

Recent Highlights from the GMS Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security Program (SAFSP)

Policy Support

[Mutual Recognition of Agri-food Standards crucial to expanding market access in the GMS](#)

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 addressing country-specific and regional bottlenecks on policies, capacity-gaps and investments in food safety and quality, according to Dr. Pham Quang Minh, Head of Food, Agriculture and Forestry Division, ASEAN Economic Community Department, ASEAN Secretariat. Multi-agency coordination and private sector involvement is important to achieve goals in the harmonization of agri-food standards on safety and quality, and a greater regional integration in the agri-food sector.



[Read more](#)

[Five Priority Areas of Support under TA 9916](#)

Support from [SAFSP/TA 9916](#) on Food Safety and Quality Harmonization will be focused on 5 priority areas: (1) policy coherence on food safety and quality through mutual recognition of standards in GMS countries; (2) institutional and technical capacities for mutual recognition of standards for safe and climate-friendly agri-food products; (3) digital technologies for enhanced traceability of safe and climate friendly agri-food products, and for accelerating harmonization of food safety and quality standards; (4) COVID-19 recovery efforts by supporting measures to improve direct access of producers to higher value markets; and (5) collaboration with development partners and the private sector.

[Read more](#)

[Modern GMS agri-food sectors need further works on traceability and digital technology.](#)



Keeping accurate and immutable records is the bedrock for creating transparency and trust in food products' origin, safety and quality. Record keeping in small & medium agribusinesses in the GMS is done mostly on paper, which is difficult to access across the supply chain. Reporting on a study on organic coffee at the 18th WGA Annual meeting, Dr Suporn from the National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA)

of Thailand, said that digital technology for e-traceability enabled chain actors to share data in a digital and standardized manner for the first time.

Meanwhile, Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) is in the process to develop the ASEAN Guidelines for the Utilization of Digital Technologies for ASEAN Food and Agricultural Sector. The development of the guidelines is part of the project “Enhancing Food Supply Chain Resilience and Food Security in ASEAN with Utilization of Digital Technologies” of ERIA with the ASEAN Secretariat. Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio, SEARCA Director, said “digital technologies and innovations are evident to support the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in transforming to a more resilient and sustainable agriculture and food system. However, the varying capacities among the ASEAN Member States (AMS) create a divide in the digital ecosystem.

[Read more](#)

[**Vietnam posted high lychee exports to China in 2021 season, effective traceability systems in-place a must**](#)

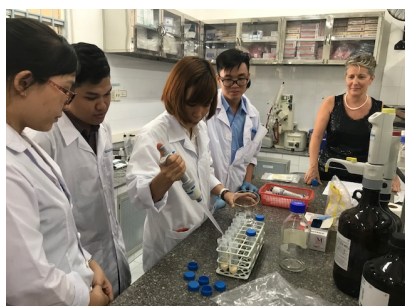
According to preliminary estimates from the Vietnam Trade Promotion Agency (Vietrade), in 2021 season, despite the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, Vietnam recorded a bumper crop of lychees, with total output of about 340,000 tons. The country exported about 50% of its output, of which 90% was destined for China. “We must comply with different quality standards of the buying countries such as China, US, Japan... The effective traceability systems in different forms must be in place”, noted Mr. Do Hoang Phuong, Director of Toan Cau JSC, one of most active Vietnamese exporters, during the GMS WGA Annual Meeting



on 10 July 2021. Vietnam is currently the third largest lychee producer after China and India.

In the framework of SAFSP, the TA will help to facilitate trade within the GMS sub-region, with a specific emphasis on supporting less developed GMS members to access the huge export market in China.

[**ADB encourages GMS countries to propose investment projects to capitalize on the implementation of SAFSP**](#)



As a TA program, SAFSP itself will not satisfy the vast needs of some GMS countries for infrastructure and facilities. The ADB therefore recommends each GMS Agriculture ministry to capitalize on this TA, together with other efforts, to come up with investment projects. Mr. Jiangfeng Zhang, Director, Environment, Natural Resource & Agriculture Division, Southeast Asia Department, ADB, said that we needed the joint efforts of many other TAs and investment projects, and

participation of other development partners to achieve the vision of the GMS agriculture sector. As an example, a recent investment project at country level is the Agricultural Value Chain Competitiveness and Safety Enhancement Project, recently approved by ADB with Cambodian Government, which provides both technical assistance and procurement of lab facilities. SAFSP is expected to contribute to the development of a pipeline of investment projects for ADB and the private sector of at least \$600 million on safe, climate-friendly agri-food value chains.

[**Singapore shares experience and wants to cooperate with GMS countries on urban farming and novel foods**](#)

Singapore is an ASEAN country with a very small land area, of which just 1% is dedicated to agriculture production. The country only can produce enough food to meet 10% of its demand. To

reduce production side pressures, reduce impacts on climate change, and achieve food security, the country is developing urban farming and novel foods. From cell-based steaks to algae shakes, novel foods could even replace meat. First, however, these sustainable proteins must be deemed safe for consumption. “No food safety, no food security”, said Professor William Chen of Nanyang Technology University during the 18th GMS WGA Annual Meeting on 9 July 2021. As agricultural land makes way for urban and industrial development, could this be one potential solution for food production in the GMS too?



Capacity Building

Young people are encouraged to more actively engage in GMS agri-food value chains



The ageing agricultural labor force in most of GMS countries is causing significant obstacles for the development of agro production activities, not only in productivity but also in innovation. Developing or applying knowledge-based and innovative aspects such as climate smart agriculture, digitalization, block chain technologies and other innovations is crucial for the sector to become more sustainable and competitive. Youth in the region is the

generation to continue to work in this essential field, and they play a pivotal role in transforming agri-food systems.

ADB, for the first time, incorporates support on youth engagement in the SAFSP to help GMS member countries to mitigate this challenge. Youth representatives in our Inception Workshop expressed the need to train young farmers in green technologies and entrepreneurial skills. In this TA, young people will benefit from capacity-building activities, awareness-raising activities and policy discussion. Training in agricultural entrepreneurship, leadership and financial management will be the main focus. [A survey was conducted across the GMS from July to August to identify their interests and capacity needs.](#) A competition for youth in GMS agriculture will be launched in September.

Demonstrations

SAFSP and GMS countries reach agreement in principle for first 6 demonstration sites



Demonstrations or pilot farms were implemented in large scale in the GMS during the CASP program and will continue to form important part in the SAFSP. At least 12 demos will be set up across the sub-region. The demos will offer important learning opportunities for the target groups, especially the farmers, and practical results will provide feedback for policy making process. The TA has been in

deep discussions and has now reached agreement with the GMS agriculture ministries on the first 6 demos to be set up from now to the end of 2021, taking into account the ongoing impact of the pandemic. Dr. Srinivasan Ancha, Principal Climate Change Specialist at ADB, said that the TA would try to support cross-visits for learning to ensure that the pilot results will be shared with all

the members, as they are regionally focused. The TA and the countries will continue to conduct assessments to prepare proposals for these demos.

Responding to Covid-19 Pandemic

[ADB brief highlights agro processing as one of 5 key sectors for boosting Post-Pandemic Recovery in Southeast Asia](#)



Support to tourism, agro-processing, garment, electronics and digital trade is essential for sustainable economic recovery in Southeast Asia. According to the ADB brief, challenges that hindered growth in agro-processing even before the pandemic include inconsistent supply of raw materials and low level of automation and technological adoption. COVID-19 has exacerbated these challenges.

Travel restrictions and closed borders shifted demand for food and beverage products to domestic markets, disrupted supply chains, and increased food protectionism policies. Fortunately, some of these measures were only short-term and were removed after a few months. Governments now need to enhance the efficiency and transparency of supply chains by harmonizing standards for food products as well as investing in reliable information and communications technology infrastructure. There is also a need to strengthen the industry's added value by expanding the food product range and sales channels, including digital platforms.

Click [here](#) to read the ADB Brief "[Supporting Post-COVID-19 Economic Recovery in Southeast Asia](#)"

[Covid-19 Food Security Response and Recovery for GMS Agriculture Regional Workshop](#)

Findings of the TA 9916 survey of COVID-19 risks and responses, and their implications for GMS agri-food value chains, were presented at the workshop on 1 September 2021. Dr. David Roland-Holst from Berkley University highlighted in the keynote presentation that the COVID-19 impacts revealed the need for:

- Extensive and inclusive policy dialogue
- Harmonized standards
- Trade facilitation, and
- Market integration



The workshop was attended by representatives from GMS agriculture ministries, ADB, other development partners as well as business community and agriculture researchers. IFAD has incorporated COVID-19 response activities into their Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia projects. [FAO has developed some big data tools to assist the impact of COVID-19 on agri-food value chains.](#) [Policy briefs have also been developed to assist with COVID-19 responses.](#)

Representatives from Viet Nam's MARD Working Group 970 shared their innovative response to the disruption of agriculture value chains in Viet Nam's southern provinces. The response features the use of [digital multimedia](#) changes to connect retailers, agribusiness and farmers. Agribusinesses from Thailand and Cambodia discussed how they implemented practical

measures to ensure their agri-food value chains continue to function.

Mr. Stewart Pittaway, SAFSP Team Leader, said the TA 9916 will assist the GMS agriculture ministries with their COVID-19 recovery actions. This support will be informed by the TA 9916 GMS COVID-19 Response and Actions Knowledge Product (to be available soon on <https://www.gmswga.org/>).

Other News in the Sub-region

[Chinese businesses signed USD 1.5 billion deal to purchase agricultural products from Laos, bananas now its biggest earner](#)

The nine agricultural products China will purchase from Laos include beans, cassava flour, frozen beef, cashews, mangos, durian, soybeans, bananas, and sugar. President of AIDC company, Mr. Pheutsapa Phoummasack, says the export value of USD 1.5 billion would be over five years, from 2021 to 2025. Pre-shipment inspection and certification services are provided by China Certification & Inspection Company (CCIC) in Cambodia, which also covers Laos market, enabling the fresh products to quickly put in the supermarkets in Shanghai or Beijing.

Banana is now Laos' most valuable agricultural export, with a turnover of US\$227.4 million in 2020. The largest export markets are China and Thailand. An increasing number of Chinese businesses have been investing in Laos banana plantations. HAGL, one of largest Vietnamese agribusinesses, also has 1,000 hectares in Attapeu province. Beyond Laos, in the GMS, Vietnam and Cambodia are other major banana suppliers to China.



[Read more](#)

Events, Meetings and Webinars

- MEKONG INSTITUTE | Online Modular Training on Market Access Through E-Commerce Promotion for Women Led SME | Online | September 13-24, 2021
- MEKONG INSTITUTE | Food Safety Forum in Vietnam | Online | 6 October 2021
- ASEAN | Inaugural Conference: Farming Technology: Empowering ASEAN Youth Entrepreneurs in Shaping the Agriculture Sector | Online | 4 November 2021
- GMS SAFSP | Regional Workshop on Food-Water-Energy Nexus (Webinar) | Online | December 2021 – TBC
- GMS SAFSP | Livestock Value Chain Traceability Workshop | TB

Recent Publications, Knowledge Products and Reports

- [Strategy for Promoting Safe and Environment-Friendly Agro-Based Value Chains in the Greater Mekong Subregion & Siem Reap Action Plan 2018-2022](#)
- [SAFSP Inception Report \(Summary\)](#)
- [Record of Discussion from the 18th GMS WGA Annual Meeting, 7&8 July 2021](#)



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ADB Project Website



GMS WGA Website

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