

## Thai Dutch Partnership on safe fruit and vegetable supply chains

### *Thai Dutch Partnership on Food Safety*

Pesticide residues of plant origin from Thailand continue to be reported from individual EU Member states and through the EU Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed in Thailand. A pesticide control and food safety system is in place but is limited to economically important commodities and to monitoring of a small number of pesticides. These limitations provide insufficient assurance of compliance to EC regulation 178/2002 Art. 11.

This situation hampers export goals of the Thai government ('kitchen of the world policy') and private companies. Early 2006 an EU mission report (FVO / DG SANCO) 'in order to evaluate control systems for pesticide residues in foodstuffs of plant origin intended for export to the EU' has been published with recommendations. Thailand is expected to take actions and revise their control systems on a number of critical issues, according to the FVO report.

Violations of pesticide residue regulations are generally caused by improper use of pesticides. Underlying issues are lack of knowledge amongst farmers about application of these substances and unawareness of alternatives in disease control. Inappropriate inspection, monitoring and control by national inspection services aggravates the situation. In order to adequately respond to these challenges the Thai Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives has requested for assistance of the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV).

Through the Agricultural Counsellor of the Royal Dutch Embassy in Thailand the joint expertise of Wageningen University and Research Centre (Wageningen UR) and the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (VWA) have been made available within the framework of the international research and development programme of Wageningen UR and LNV

This partnership between the Thai Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MoAC) and the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV) was started in May 2006.

### *Purpose and relevance for LNV*

The partnership should result in an improved dialogue and exchange of information between organizations responsible for food safety control in Thailand. By the end of the project capacities should have been developed with the Thai DoA on efficient and reliable monitoring of food safety in fresh fruit and vegetable supply chains. A second objective of this project is to initiate and facilitate the benchmarking process of the Thai Gap quality label to the EUREPGAP standard. Eventually this project will contribute to sustained growth of export of safe and high quality vegetables and fruits from Thailand and an improved food safety situation at the domestic market in Thailand. The benefits for the Dutch Ministry of LNV and the EU to strengthen the Sanitary and Phytosanitary system in Thailand are obvious. Among others, reasons are improved market access for Thai producers and exporters; safeguarding consumers' interests in Thailand and the EU through better product safety and quality and enhanced trade opportunities for (Dutch) exporters.

### *Activities*

In May 2006 a mixed Thai Dutch team of experts was composed with expertise in the fields of food safety systems, risk assessments, certification, training and legislation. VWA and the Wageningen UR institutes LEI, RIKILT, PRI and Wageningen International joined forces at the Dutch side. In Thailand the Department of Agriculture, the Agricultural Regulatory Office, Department of Agricultural Extension and Central Laboratory for Agricultural Commodities participated. The following preparatory activities were executed:

- Joint evaluation and study of traceability systems as well as the Thai system of Good Agricultural Practices in various settings;
- Residue violations at EU market collected and analysed;
- Fact finding mission on food safety risks;
- Communication with private partners started.



### *Capacity building for improved food safety*

A workshop organized in January 2007 resulted in consensus between Thai Government bodies that never convened before on how to address the issue of pesticide residues. Representatives of the Thai Food and Drug Administration (Ministry of Public Health) discussed at length with the competent authority under the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives on how to develop the legal framework to support a public body. This public organization should be properly mandated to respond swiftly and adequately enforce the private sector to take up their responsibilities in controlling the use of pesticides in fruits and vegetables (see box). Additionally, representatives of the private sector, such as farmer producers' and exporters' organizations and manufacturers very much welcomed the opportunity to address food safety and related issues and expressed their support.

Results of workshop and activities 2007 agreed upon by participants:

**Regulatory and legal framework** to be developed which allows risk based monitoring and timely and effective enforcement, supported by:

- workshop on regulatory impact assessment of revised policies;
- development of a university curriculum for food safety management;
- study visit/short training on management and enforcement of food safety control in the Netherlands.

**For effective monitoring and enforcement** a risk based monitoring plan will be developed. Supporting activities are:

- Data analysis of present data to set up risk based priorities of crops and pesticides;
- Setting up monitoring plan and improving sampling procedures;
- Training on multi-residue method of analysis, risk assessment, pesticide residues analysis and data evaluation.

**Improvement of cooperation and coordination** by DOAE with support from farmers associations, private sector, DOA, ACFS, private certification bodies and accreditation body. Proposed activities are:

- Improvement of learning approach and materials.
- Association of individual farmers (grouping, clustering)
- Encourage cooperation amongst farmers, internal control
- Third party control

### *Thai GAP and EUREP GAP*

Thailand will pursue recognition by the EUREPGAP organization (or Global Food Safety Initiative, GFSI) to ensure that the Thai GAP is equivalent with and provides the same assurances as the EUREPGAP certificate. Wageningen UR is requested to provide guidance on the transition path towards an EUREPGAP compliant system in Thailand. Indeed it is realized that the Thai GAP system still has to be strengthened in the coming period and to become more advanced before it is comparable with EUREPGAP.

#### **Activities 2007:**

- To form a National Working Group (implementation and periodical revision of the (future) benchmarked national standards) from representatives of Thai horticulture;
- Visit by Thai delegation to EUREPGAP secretariat for coordination of procedures and to exchange experiences on development of internationally recognized standards and benchmarking against EUREPGAP;
- To prepare and facilitate technical review of standards with Thai government representatives.

In 2007 negotiations with EUREPGAP will be started on recognition and a Thai specific interpretation of certain guidelines. It is also understood that the largest challenge for the future is how to effectively reach and upscale the Thai GAP system to vast numbers of growers in Thailand.

### *Dissemination of lesson learned*

Meanwhile an internal website has been constructed for efficient exchange of information between Thai and Dutch team members. The experience of this partnership project will also be analysed and described as a case study with lessons learned. These experiences can be applicable in other transitional economies in Asia. A seminar will be organized at the Fruit Logistica Asia, September 2007, Bangkok.

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