

Siem Reap Policy Forum Summary for Agricultural Ministers

The Siem Reap Policy Forum is a follow up event in response to the region-wide call to action for safe and environment-friendly agriculture products, initiated during the multi-sector “Policy Forum: Unified Regional Approaches to Food Safety and Market Access” and the ADB special session on “Public-Private Partnerships on Food Safety Systems” at the World Food Safety Conference on 31 May and 1 June 2017 in Bangkok, Thailand.

This Siem Reap Policy Forum presents some practical recommendations for the implementation of the GMS SEAP Strategy and Siem Reap Action Plan for 2018–2022. The Forum is a joint activity of the WGA and the Food Industry Asia (FIA).

The outcomes of the Forum were strongly aligned with those of the GMS Strategy and Action Plan. The Siem Riep Policy Forum reiterated the importance of collectively improving food safety control systems in the GMS. An overarching goal of food safety control systems is to build trust among consumers and suppliers on the basis of effective risk mitigation. To build trust, it is essential that food safety control systems are robust, enforced and visible. Food safety is a multi-sectoral concern requiring inputs from various interlinked components. These include: effective regulatory systems—ideally integrated and harmonized systems, especially in the GMS context; efficient and reliable traceability the length of value chains; and fit for purpose laboratory food testing to support risk management and outbreak responses; and, risk communication that builds recognition of the systems efficacy and trust among consumers and suppliers. Of course, food safety control systems must be accessible to all stakeholders, both physically and economically.

Some specific points are recommendations are summarized as follows:

1. The Forum commenced discussion with a description of trends in consumption and consumer preferences in GMS: it highlighted a growing demand for safe agro-based products, but at the same time indicated the need of consumers of **quality assurance systems** that could be trusted in their food consumption decisions. The combined role of government and private sector is essential to reassure food products in the market are safe.
2. A parallel GMS initiative on tourism shared the important of agritourism for the development of income for farmers and export revenue for the country. The GMS number of tourist arrivals is already close to 60 million per year and growing. There is a great opportunity to identify GMS as food destination and **agritourism** as a prominent activity that would serve the dual purpose of promoting food from GMS and profitable non-farm activities and income for farmers.
3. Value chain case studies on livestock identify the opportunity of large livestock trade within GMS and challenge of transboundary diseases and zoonoses. The recommendation is to establish **disease control zones** at the border of GMS countries.
4. Case studies on fruit and vegetables trade within GMS and ASEAN indicated the challenge of market access. Only few horticultural products are formally traded within the region and the recommendation is to ensure **market access** consistent with the compliance of food safety requirements.
5. The scientific community and private sector have also indicated great opportunity for innovation that could reduce losses in the supply chain, optimize use of natural resources (particularly water), and reduce the environmental damage (for example use of plastic instead of renewable material for packaging). The recommendation is to pursue common approaches and standards that target **innovation for reducing waste in the supply chain**.
6. The issues of food safety are complex and cut across different sectors and agencies. The private sector has considerable experience in these issues across different countries. The public sector should request the help of the private sector in a number of dimensions. Some specific **examples of help that the private sector is ready to provide the public sector** is as follows:

- a. Share best practices around the world.
 - b. Help to implement regulations.
 - c. Provide resources for government officials to visit other countries and learn about different systems of quality assurance and food safety.
 - d. Help in risk assessment.
 - e. Practical advice on proposed regulations and consultations about unintended consequences of proposed regulation to get feedback.
 - f. Help implementing training programs.
 - g. Help in piloting regulations.
 - h. Help in assessing cost implications of proposed regulations.
 - i. Capacity building in food safety of government officials.
7. Support **Sustainable Rice Platform** intended to introduce sustainable practices in rice production to minimize the waste of water, maintain soil fertility, and assure safety in plant protection and soil management.
 8. PGS has **proven** to be effective in generating sustainable and profitable supply of SEAP and is primed for scaling at the GMS level. Propose coordinate between GMS countries on **recognition of the PGS approach and establish complementary GMS PGS labelling**.
 9. Reliable and efficient traceability of product is an essential component of effective food safety control systems. Propose **GMS coordinated pilots of GS1 barcode-based traceability systems** and standards with select higher-value products in cross-border scenarios can demonstrate that the system works and its value to suppliers, consumers and government. The sharing of pilot data between countries and businesses can develop specific policy recommendations and a model appropriate for scaling across agricultural products in the GMS.
 10. Building trust in food safety control systems requires systems be robust, enforced and visible; reliable laboratory food testing is essential to achieve this. Propose **intensive laboratory food testing training of trainer program(s) on technical skills for select individuals from the GMS countries in coordination with FIA (Waters Corporation)**. In addition, develop collective laboratory capacity building and capacity sharing (facilitation of sample movement between countries) between the GMS countries.
 11. Transparent food safety regulation is essential to build trust in food safety control systems among consumers and suppliers, and to move towards mutual recognition and the enhancement of trade in food products. Propose **assessment of food safety regulatory systems among the GMS countries, with the objective of establishing integrated, harmonized systems and mutual recognition of equivalence**.
 12. To build trust, it is paramount that the effectiveness of food safety control systems is reliably reported to stakeholders. Propose **establishing joint risk communication initiatives among the GMS countries** that draw on the technical skills and approaches to risk communication established by the FIA and its members and incorporating wider stakeholders—including SMEs, civil society and researchers.