Peppercorn is a key agricultural crop accounting for 20% of Vietnam's gross domestic product and is a rising industry in Laos and Cambodia. However, non-compliance with Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards (SPS) at the smallholder farmer level is threatening exports to high-value international markets due to concerns over food safety. CABI and its partners aim to tackle these SPS issues and improve the quality and traceability in the production, post-harvest, processing, and peppercorn trade by identifying, developing and disseminating good agricultural and hygiene practices (GAP and GHP) that focus on peppercorn production in villages. By improving standards within these areas, the project will inevitably secure market access and enhance the peppercorn value chain.

The problem

Vietnam is one of the world's main exporters of peppercorn – selling its produce to 109 countries including the USA and Europe. However, for smallholder
farmers, selling their peppercorn produce is difficult because they cannot meet expected food safety and hygiene standards set by international markets.

Analysis of SPS issues in exported peppercorn suggests that all the main food safety and hygiene related non-compliances, for example, high maximum residue levels, bacterial and physical contamination, result from either poor decisions or handling practices in farms.

Most of the village level activities of production, harvesting, drying and initial storage were identified as the point of breakdown in SPS control. These non-compliances can be corrected with improved practical capacity development of farmers and by creating a conducive environment to encourage them to adopt better practices.

Improving food safety for exports is also expected to have a positive spill-over effect on domestic public health as it will be free from pesticide residues, mycotoxins and other hygiene issues.

What we are doing

The project aims to combat SPS issues related to food safety and improve the quality and traceability in the production, post-harvest, processing, and peppercorn trade. As a result, this should increase financial returns, and enhance productivity, safety and market access for smallholder pepper growers and processors by improving compliance with international food safety requirements in high-value markets such as the EU, USA and Japan.

In turn, the project aims to restore the confidence of the food manufacturing industry in peppercorn sourced from the Southeast Asia region. The competitiveness and sustainability of the regional peppercorn industry will increase and will provide a consistent supply of high-quality, safe peppercorn from small-scale value-chains driven by farmers.

In order to implement change, a Code of Practice (CoP) will be designed around Codex and GAP standards to address the identified SPS issues with village-level peppercorn production. An implementation model for the CoP will be developed based on the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) to the production of safe produce by building social cohesion, peer-to-peer learning and awareness of responsibility towards the community.

Results so far

The project is expected to provide a regionally harmonized CoP based on Codex standards, and existing national GAP and GHP for adoption by farm-level pepper producers, collectors and input providers in peppercorn supply chains in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Other expected results include:

- An electronic web resource, “Knowledge hub”, will contain a range of resources such as factsheets, practical implementation guides (e.g. farmer manual, etc.), posters, chat-bot style helpline, knowledge exchange platform, and data collection etc.
- Stakeholder workshops with farmers, collectors, local government officials and lead firms to solicit stakeholder input on the updated CoP, supporting material and management framework
- A pilot of the PGS model to implement the CoP in all three countries, with at least three pepper producing farmer groups.
- Strategies for a wider roll-out of the CoP including seminars and regional workshops to raise awareness and increase uptake

Donors

The Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF)

Partners

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (Cambodia), General Directorate of Agriculture (Cambodia), Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (Laos),
Department of Agriculture (Vietnam), Western Highlands Agriculture and Forestry Science Institute (Vietnam)

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