



Vietnam leads the way in developing a Code of Practice for the peppercorn industry in South East Asia

Addressing challenges in meeting Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) standards

The peppercorn industry in Vietnam and other South East Asian countries has faced challenges in meeting SPS standards on smallholder farms. Non-compliance with these standards threatens exports to high-value international markets due to food safety concerns. To address this issue, the **'Safer Spices: Boosting Food Safety and Market Access for the Peppercorn Value Chain in South East Asia'** project, funded by the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) and implemented by CABI in partnership with local institutions, developed a Code of Practice (CoP) and interpretation guides for peppercorn production in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

Leading the development of the CoP

Vietnam's Western Highlands Agriculture and Forestry Science Institute (WASI) took the lead in developing a CoP and a supporting interpretation guide, drawing from Vietnam's extensive experience as a major global producer and exporter of peppercorn. With support from an international CoP expert, this South-South collaboration began with an extensive desk study, interviews with key industry actors, and meetings with stakeholders across the three partner countries: Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. This resulted in a generic draft CoP, that aligned with Good Agricultural Practice standards, CODEX standards and key international buyer programmes.

Two key challenges identified by peppercorn farmers were lack of localized knowledge resources and issues with conflicting messaging. To address these, the project teams collaborated with stakeholders to create country-level interpretation guides that considered different growing conditions and practices. These were translated into local languages to increase accessibility. In 2022, WASI experts conducted training of trainers on the CoP for local partners in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, who then carried out national trainings with farmers and private companies.

Pilot tests were carried out on selected farms in each country to identify the need for adaptation to the CoP, considering the diverse farm management practices. To support the adoption of the CoP, a collaborative public-private sector approach was adopted, inspired by IFOAM – Organics International's Participatory Guarantee System (PGS). Using this "Grassroots Public Private Partnerships", or G-PPP approach, two groups of five farmer members were set up in Vietnam's Cu Kuin district (Dak Lak province) and Xuyen Moc district (Ba Ria-Vung Tau province). In Cambodia, one group of 30 farmers was set up in Memot (Tbong Khmum province), while one group of 19 farmers was set up in Pakse (Champasak province) in Laos. Various private companies, including Simexco Daklak Ltd and Viet Pepper Co Ltd in Vietnam, Sela Pepper Co Ltd in Cambodia and Etu Green Garden in Laos, were also involved in the project. Each group received technical training developed by WASI, and the feedback from the field was incorporated into revised interpretation guides.

Positive impacts on yield, income and pesticide reduction

The development and implementation of the CoP have yielded positive results, as evidenced by farmers and stakeholders involved in the project.

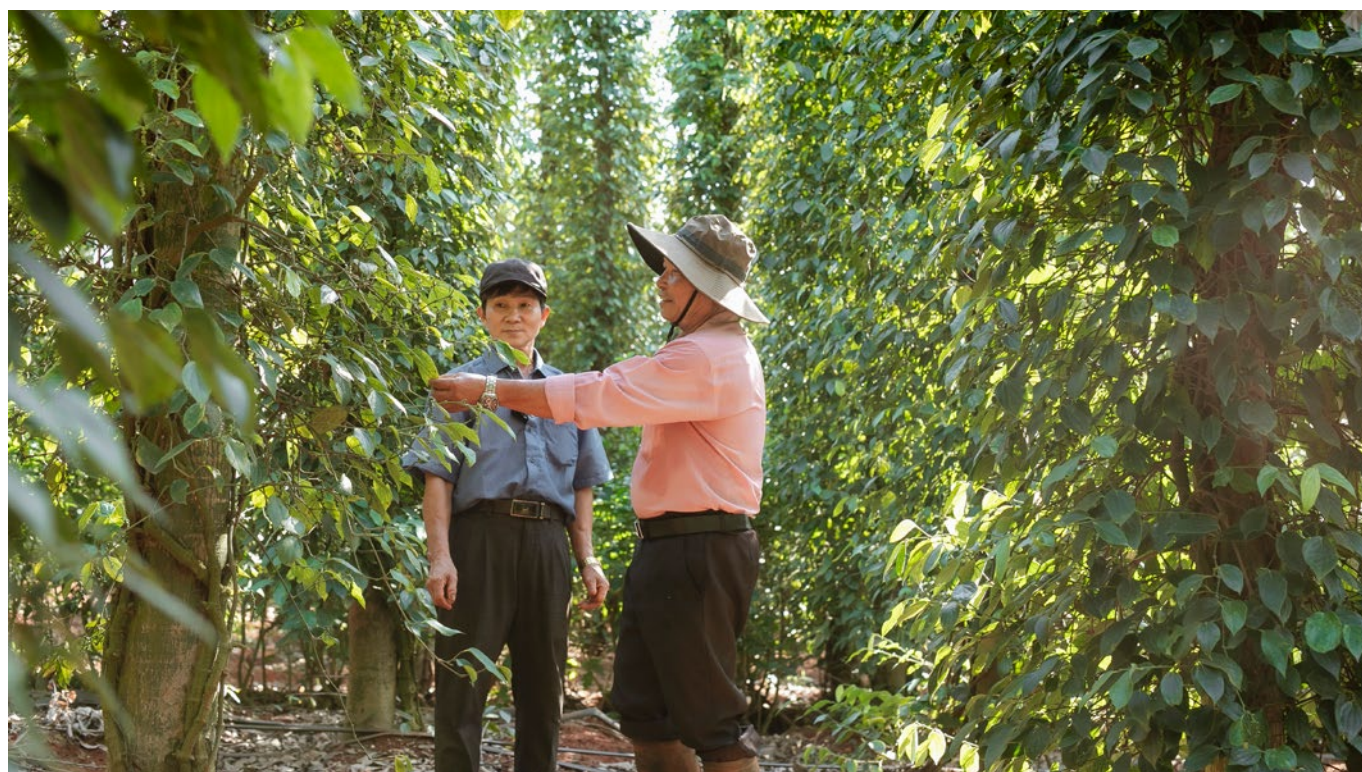
For example, Vietnamese farmers On Thanh Hoa and Nguyen Van Tien (below) highlighted the cost savings achieved through the adoption of good pesticide management practices, reducing pesticide use from 10 bottles per season to just two bottles, resulting in a 30% cost reduction.

While Suos Chhuon, a 60-year-old Cambodian farmer with 12 years' experience growing peppercorn, reported a 10% increase in yield and a 30% increase in income after adopting good pesticide management practices. *"The additional income will be utilized to expand the farm and plant more peppercorn trees,"* Chhuon stated.

Le Tjo Haoi Thuong, Director of Viet Pepper Co Ltd, emphasized the company's commitment to working with farmers to ensure the production of quality peppercorns through the adoption of the CoP and the sharing of knowledge and skills between the technical expertise of farmers, Viet Pepper Co Ltd, WASI and the Plant Protection Department.

Promoting food safety and market access across South East Asia

Vietnam's support in creating a CoP and interpretation guide has set a strong precedent for regional collaboration to address a common challenge. The country not only focused on improving its own peppercorn industry but also shared its expertise with Cambodia and Laos as they developed their country-specific guides. The collaborative approach facilitated by the **'Safer Spices: Boosting Food Safety and Market Access for the Peppercorn Value Chain in South East Asia'** project has laid the foundation for a safer, more sustainable and competitive peppercorn industry across South East Asia.



On Thanh Hoa (right) and Nguyen Van Tien (left) inspecting a pepper plant

Project partners

The project was funded by the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF). To deliver the project, CABI worked in partnership with:



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