

International trade for enhancing food security and foreign exchange earnings

International trade in agrifood products has expanded quickly, fueled by growing consumer demand and technological developments in marketing and processing. Such trade is important for importers to ensure national food security, while exporters view it as a source of foreign exchange. This trend poses major challenges and opportunities for the Asia-Pacific region, especially developing countries. Understanding those challenges and opportunities is critical to benefit fully from global trade, especially among policymakers and marketing executives of agribusiness and food companies. They must be familiar with the relationship between agriculture and international trade, international regulatory frameworks and policies affecting trade flows, trade agreements, tariff and nontariff barriers, and the quality and safety standards of importers.

To enhance understanding of current trends, emerging issues, and opportunities in international trade in agrifood products and create awareness of how agribusinesses/enterprises from member countries can benefit the most from international trade, the APO in collaboration with NPOs of participating members organized an e-learning course on International Trade in Agricultural and Food Products. The course was offered through videoconferencing (VC) using the World Bank's Global Development Learning Network (GDLN) platform in Tokyo and GDLN/other VC centers in participating countries in three independent sessions conducted 6–8 September (Cambodia, Philippines, Vietnam), 13–15 September (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka), and 4–6 October 2011 (ROC, Indonesia, IR Iran, Malaysia, Thailand). A total of 248 participants attended.

The course combined live VC sessions with lectures and presentations of case studies by experts, country presentations by participants, and Q&A sessions; offline sessions consisted of group exercises and individual assignments.

Experts from the UN-ESCAP, OECD, USA, Malaysia, Japan, and India delivered VC lectures on: global trends in the international trade of agrifood products; World Trade Organization implications in international trade of agrifood products; roles of multilateral, bilateral, and free trade agreements as well as private standards in facilitating international trade in agrifood products; tariff and nontariff barriers to trade in agrifood products; US Food and Drug Administration regulations governing the exportation of food products to the USA; import regulations on agrifood products in EU countries; agrifood product import regulations in Japan: plant and animal health regulations; fair trade practices; and developing an export promotion strategy for agricultural and processed food products.

The participants provided overviews of the trade performance of their countries, highlighting the impact of the current financial crisis and price volatility on the demand for food exports. They also formulated export promotion strategies and action plans for agrifood products, which were shared via VC. 