

## ■ Strengthening organic certification for greater market access ■

To promote organic certification, which is required for exports of organic agrifood products from developing Asian countries to developed markets, the APO in collaboration with the Sri Lankan Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Productivity Promotion conducted a training course on Organic Product Certification and Auditing in Negombo, Sri Lanka, 18–23 June 2012. The course included a one-day public seminar on 18 June attended by more than 70 delegates from 12 countries; the five subsequent days of training had 23 participants from 10 APO member countries and two resource persons from Germany and PR China who attended both. Minister of Agriculture Mahinda Yapa Abeywardane inaugurated the program, and Dr. D.B.T. Wijeratne, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of Sri Lanka, gave the keynote speech.

The course covered key concepts in organic certification and inspection; International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) certification standard requirements; Common Objectives and Requirements of Organic Standards; Asian Regional Standard requirements; national organic standards and regulations; and organic inspection, certification, and integrity. The more than 100 different standards to certify organic products reflect the growth and diversity of the organic sector but also act as increasing trade barriers, concluded the participants. Differing government regulations further complicate compliance with standards and regulations.

Acknowledging challenges in promoting organic exports by developing Asian countries to advanced markets, resource person and IFOAM representative to Asia Zejiang Zhou of PR China emphasized that, “The products must be in compliance with different standards to be exported to different countries or regions, which is costly in both time and money.” Resource person

Gerald A. Herrmann, Director, Organic Services GmbH, Germany, noted, “In Asian organic farming the focus is still on exporting produce. Domestic markets as well as South-South trade to the region or neighboring countries should also be brought into focus, which is in many ways more economical and, with the available means and levels of technology and expertise, easier to implement.” Course participants traveled to Maho to practice organic inspection at a certified organic farm and to view the operations of the certified cashew-processing factory of Lanka Organic (Pvt.) Ltd.



*German expert Herrmann (L) explaining the organic certification inspection protocol.*

Attendees appreciated the program and local arrangements. Tehsin S. Bhambal of Pakistan stated, “Our concepts regarding organic certification, which were quite vague, cleared as we obtained a better understanding through the course.” They also offered suggestions. Indonesian participant Dr. Agung Prawoto commented, “There is a need to include more case studies based on Asian conditions.” “We should keep in contact to update one another on developments in organic standards and regulations in our countries,” recommended Supakij Sornprajak of Thailand. 🌱