

Food safety and quality for enhanced market access

Rapid economic growth in Asia and the Pacific and world trade liberalization affect the food sector in the region. There are tremendous opportunities for trade in high-value food products due to increased demand for diet diversification and greater convenience in food preparation. The development of the food industry is closely associated with a country's entry into international trade. Food exports have increased significantly in APO member countries. To achieve reliable food exporter status, a country must produce foods that are both sought after and acceptable to consumers elsewhere. Compliance with statutory requirements is an essential prerequisite for food exporting, which is a highly regulated sector. The rejection of food shipments by importing countries can result in unnecessary business costs, transaction times, resource waste, and lost revenue for the exporting companies.

A three-day study meeting on Enhancing Market Access for SMEs in the Food Sector was organized by the APO in Singapore, 20–22 March, to update food companies on different import regulations, examine market access issues and potential solutions, and encourage business collaborations in the food sector. Thirty-nine participants from 14 member countries, including four from the host country, attended. They included senior officials from national agencies and regulatory bodies dealing with food import and export, senior executives responsible for market development, and representatives of associations or chambers of commerce and private companies.

Deputy Chief Executive Officer and Director Dr. Chew Siang Thai, Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority, Singapore, made a keynote presentation on “Facilitation of food import and export to enhance market access.” Compliance Specialist Chitra Anandra, FDA Registrar Corp., USA, explained “Market entry considerations for processed food products into the US and EU.” Executive Director Hiroaki Hamano, International Life Sciences Institute, Japan, introduced foods



Participants in Q&A session

with specified health uses in a presentation on “Nutrition and health claims in Japan.” Director Dr. David Cheng, Bureau of Food Safety, Department of Health, Republic of China, spoke on “Emerging changes to the regulations for the inspection of food imports to Taiwan.” Dr. Ahn Seung Ho, Soongsil University School of Business Administration, Republic of Korea, described “Current market trends in Korean food markets and opportunities for foreign food exporters.” Deputy Director (Life Science) Dr. Lionel Lau, Nanyang Polytechnic, Singapore, served as chief facilitator.

The study meeting reaffirmed the need for food exporters to recognize changes in consumer and retail demand, while emphasizing food safety and quality. The participants recommended the harmonization of food regulations into a global standard and for exporters from APO member countries to become better informed of importers' regulations. The government and private sector must work together to achieve these aims. 