

Managerial skills for agribusiness SME entrepreneurs

The requirements of agribusiness are demanding in terms of technical knowledge of farm production, postharvest handling of products, marketing strategies, and time allocation. However, these issues can be addressed if entrepreneurs are equipped with essential management tools and entrepreneurial skills to make them more efficient, productive, and competitive. This was the reasoning for the APO's training course on Improving the Managerial Skills of Entrepreneurs in Agribusiness SMEs held in Sri Lanka, 3–10 August. The Sri Lankan Ministry of Agricultural Development and Agrarian Services implemented the course.

Twenty-three participants from the public and private sectors, government, and academia acquired key skills and methods in nine modules: Entrepreneurship and management of agribusiness; Business operations and management; Human resources management and personal entrepreneurship; Marketing of products in domestic and export markets; Enhancing market access; Finance-based decision making; Tools and techniques for productivity and quality improvement; Food safety management for agrifood products; and Food traceability throughout the food chain. The three resource speakers tutored the participants in the processes and methods of performance improvement activities. In addition, to provide hands-on training opportunities, each module featured a practical group exercise. A half-day field visit to a pineapple farm and an agrifood product retail outlet allowed participants to meet local agribusiness entrepreneurs and observe how the skills they learned in the classroom are applied in the real world.

Course feedback was positive, with Chief Resource Person Yong Kok Seng, Managing Director, QMC Resource Centre Sdn. Bhd., Malaysia, commenting that, "Participants enjoyed the course because of their active participation in the numerous group exercises and sharing. Although they appeared anxious as the



Group design of a food safety management plan

course approached the written examination on the last day, it obviously motivated them to concentrate on the training."

Yong, who coordinated the course and conducted the exam, attributed the success to course design and preparation via close communication between the speakers and the APO Secretariat. "The content of each module, group work activities, and pre- and postcourse examinations were developed and streamlined in continuous discussions among resource speakers," explained APO Agriculture Program Officer Dr. Muhammad Saeed. It was also announced that the training modules covered in the course would be published as a manual. The APO believes that this new training manual will assist increasing numbers of agribusiness entrepreneurs to equip themselves with the modern managerial knowledge, tools, and methodologies. 