

MONTHLY MONITOR

Food Safety during COVID-19

Approaching the seven-month mark of the pandemic, a lot of questions have been raised by consumers in relation to food safety. Among the most prominent is whether it is possible to contract the virus from food. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) responded by releasing this [policy brief](#), stating that no specific evidence points to a transmission to humans by domestic food-producing animals. In order to reduce the likelihood of contamination and risks of food-borne illnesses, however, it is essential to continuously observe proper hygiene as well safe preparation and handling practices. Similar advice was issued by the Singapore Food Agency (SFA) in [response](#) to reports of the virus being found on frozen food and packaging in China. The SFA will continue to monitor developments and take measures to maintain a high level of food safety in the country.

Growing Appetite for Online Food in ASEAN

COVID-19 has led to greater demand for online food deliveries as more consumers shop for groceries and meals online. Around the ASEAN region, e-commerce platforms and start-ups vie for the attention of consumers by creating ecosystems that integrate various services and products. From transport to health advice, food orders and digital payments – [the rise of super-apps](#), such as Gojek and Grab, can hardly be ignored. But while the apps hold potential for consumer convenience, do they also deliver on food safety? According to a new policy paper on [“Promoting Food Safety in Indonesia’s Online Food Delivery Services”](#) by GIZ and the Centre for Indonesian Policy Studies (CIPS), regulatory gaps persist with respect to quality control. There are also limited alternatives to... **(cont'd)**

BUYERS BEWARE

Food is essential for our well-being as consumers.

Along the value chain “from farm to fork”, stakeholders need to work together and ensure that the food is safe and nutritious for consumption. Recently, consumers are also paying more attention to sustainable products or environmentally-friendly packaging, and they have become conscious of reducing food waste.

This second edition of our newsletter is serving up some “food for thought” on these subjects – and inviting discussions about food in the context of consumer protection in ASEAN.

Happy reading!

(cont'd) ...plastic-free yet safe food packaging, especially for deliveries. It is therefore all the more important that the delivery platforms themselves take precautionary measures, such as providing protective gear to their drivers or offering contactless payments. The latter, however, comes with its own risks for consumer privacy.

Misleading Claims about Formula Milk in Cambodia

The Department of Consumer Protection, Competition and Fraud Repression (CCF) of the Cambodian Ministry of Commerce investigated its first major case in August, recalling the Nutrilatt milk powder from the market and advocating for a civil settlement for harmed consumers. When tested, the iron content in the infant formula milk was found to be below international standards and inconsistent with the information provided by the company. This triggered public discussions about how the newly established National Committee on Consumer Protection (NCCP) should act against aggressive marketing practices, false claims and labelling violations in the future.

Trade Disputes May Cost Meat Consumers in the Philippines

On 6 October 2020, the Philippine Association of Meat Processors Inc. (PAMPI) requested the government to end international trade disputes to secure the access to and affordability of imported meat products. The Department of Agriculture had temporarily imposed bans on poultry shipments due to concerns of contamination from the coronavirus. Although this embargo has been lifted and requirements for strict sanitation measures put in place, pork supplies are now said to be withheld by trading partners, such as Brazil. There are fears of higher production costs to be passed on to consumers, which is illegal according to the Price Act.

Putting a Stop to Letting Food Go to Waste

Coinciding with the International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste, the Jakarta Post and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) organized a webinar titled "Reducing food loss and waste during COVID-19". Given that 300 kg of food is wasted per person annually in Indonesia, this issue stands in stark contrast to the high prevalence of undernourishment and malnutrition in the country. Limited food accessibility and affordability during the COVID-19 crisis aggravate stunting problems. Community-based and business-led efforts are needed to promote sustainable solutions for food production and consumption.

Ethical Consumers and Palm Oil

On 15 August 2020, the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil Production (RSPO) held an online conference, discussing the willingness of consumers to switch to more sustainable products, and how this requires producers and retailers to apply ecolabels for easy identification. Moreover, social media holds potential for educating and engaging consumers. At present, Malaysia and Indonesia are among the world's largest palm oil producers. However, plantations are draining peatlands and have had devastating effects on the environment, wildlife and climate.

New Ecolabel for Sustainable Rice

In September 2020, a new ecolabel for sustainable rice was launched as a cooperation between the multi-stakeholder Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP), the UN Environment Program (UNEP) and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI). Rice is one of the most important staple foods in Asia. The voluntary assurance scheme is based on international good practices and will be overseen by Global G.A.P. from Germany. With the label, consumers can do their fair share in reducing environmental impacts associated with rice farming and production.

