

NEWS DIGEST

ASEAN Guidelines to Enhance Food Safety in Supply Chains

In April 2021, the Prepared Foodstuffs Product Working Group (PFPWG) under the ASEAN Consultative Committee on Standards and Quality (ACCSQ) published the [ASEAN General Guideline on Food Contact Materials](#) and [ASEAN Guidelines for Good Manufacturing Practice for Food Contact Materials](#) for industry stakeholders. Protecting food products against contamination during storage and transportation is critical to guarantee its safety for consumption. Among others, the new guidelines serve to increase the use of safe food packaging and to improve traceability and quality assurance.

Increasing Consumer Awareness on Food Standards in the CLMV

The application of standards on food safety and sustainability requires corresponding consumer awareness and demand. In cooperation with the Mekong Institute, GIZ published [a study](#) and [practical guidelines](#) for campaigns that aim at increasing the understanding of logos and labels in the CLMV countries. The publications were formally endorsed at the Meeting of the ASEAN Sectoral Working Group on Corps (ASWGC) in July 2021. They complement food safety materials and manuals developed with stakeholders in Myanmar and Viet Nam last year.

BUYERS BEWARE

Efforts on consumer protection and food safety have advanced since the publication of our [PROTECT Pulse on the same topic last year](#).

In ASEAN, these include initiatives to promote standards for both safety and sustainability, and to make sure that consumers are better educated about the risks of misleading claims by businesses.

Catch up on a selection of news in this edition on **Food Safety 2.0**.

Happy reading!

Cambodian Businesses Stepping Up on Countering Malnutrition

The SUN Business Network Cambodia (SBN) was launched in July 2021 to bring together private businesses in the food sector to accelerate the progress in eliminating malnutrition by 2030. Established by the government with support from the World Food Programme (WFP), the network highlights the role of Cambodian businesses in improving the nutritional content of food products available to consumers. In the same spirit, the Viet Nam government during the second National Dialogue on Viet Nam Food System in July 2021 emphasized the need for coordination among actors in the food system to tackle challenges related to unsafe food.

Consumers Beware of Fake Halal Food

Earlier this year, the Southern Philippines Development Authority warned consumers of fake halal food as some businesses were found to have illegally printed the #halal emblem on food packaging. In a similar vein, non-certified meat was illegally imported and sold as halal beef in Malaysia. Dishonest labels and unclear ingredients violate the right to informed choice by consumers, and endanger their health and safety due to the questionable quality and nutrition of the food product. In response to this, the Malaysian Muslim Consumers Association criticized the lack of transparency and progress of the meat scandal investigation.

TFA-Free Label Ban on Food Products in the Philippines

The Department of Health (DOH) in the Philippines issued an administrative order to prohibit, among others, the labeling of food products as “trans-fatty acid (TFA)-free”. This is intended to prevent consumers from assuming that certain food products are healthy when, in fact, they have high amounts of fats, sugar, salt, or calories. By 2023, DOH aims to reduce TFA intake by eliminating food supplies of industrially-produced TFA that are commonly found in pre-packaged goods. Businesses in the food sector are required to properly disclose the nutritional content of their food products to not mislead consumers.

Indonesian Consumers' Demand Towards Correct Labelling

An online petition urges the Food and Drug Monitoring Agency (BPOM) to issue a label to show the chemical compound “Bisphenol A” in plastic water gallons, which may cause potential health risks. On the other hand, BPOM has given the green light for Nestle products in Indonesia that they are safe to consume in moderation, after facing pressure from consumers and the Indonesia Consumers Organization (YLKI) to conduct an investigation into the controversy over their unhealthy food portfolio. The authority also stressed that in the interest of consumers, producers need to include nutrition fact tables, information on daily nutrition and voluntary “healthier choice” logos on food products.

New Regulatory Authority in Brunei Darussalam for Food Safety

The Brunei Darussalam Food Authority (BDFA) was set up as a new regulatory authority to oversee food safety and quality. BDFA is responsible to ensure that food products are safe, clean and of good quality. Trainings for stakeholders in the food supply chain will be conducted, notably to minimize the risk of food contamination and increase public awareness about food standards and labeling. As a single point of contact for food-related matters in the country, BDFA is also mandated to regulate food imports/exports.

Singapore Approved Lab-Grown Meat as Consumer Demand Increases

Singapore has given regulatory approval for a U.S. start-up, Eat Just, for the sale of lab-grown chicken meat as the demand for meat alternatives surges due to consumer concerns about their health and the environment. The Singapore Food Agency (SFA) conducted manufacturing control and safety testing of the product and concluded that it is safe for consumption. A new research center called “Future Ready Food Safety Hub” was launched at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in April 2021 to support local and overseas agri-food companies by assessing food safety risks in emerging novel foods.

Consumer Awareness Forum on Food Safety Established in Lao PDR

The Mekong Institute, together with the Food and Drug Department (FDD) of the Ministry of Health of Lao PDR, launched the PROSAFE Forum on “Know Your Food Law” in March 2021 to raise consumer awareness about food safety policies and standards. Foodborne illnesses are widespread due to limited awareness and information about food safety risks. The forum is designed to build public-private collaboration, for instance by engaging Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) for more inclusive food safety policy implementation.

