

Session 1 General Discussion

Chair Ando: I would like to speak in Japanese if I may, but I will continue on with English, in this session, I would like to summarize these three presentations briefly.

According to Dr. Linkham's presentation, food security has highest priority in Lao PDR, but as the infrastructure, such as roads and bridges, are constructed across the border, across the Mekong River, and also the international free trade agreement has been concluded, so marketing chances are tremendously increasing now and so it is a good chance for market-oriented agricultural production, especially targeting the neighboring countries, China and Thailand.

So the Lao government has to not only achieve food security but also achieve, how to say, food security and also promote the market-oriented production to get more money at the same time, simultaneously. I'm afraid that it is not so easy to achieve these two things at the same time, but anyway, in Laos, they have to challenge it.

On the other hand, China and Japan are in a different situation from Laos, according to Shu-sensei and Dr. Sakurai's presentations. They emphasize more food safety rather than food security, but there is a little bit difference between China and Japan because China still has several constraints for domestic food supply. That's why Dr. Zhou cannot help, pointed out GM technology or transgenic production technology, which is one of the big issues or important issues to discuss.

So secondly, the technologies for processing or distribution of agricultural products is a common topic both in China and Japan, and Dr. Sakurai mentioned these marketing, so-called marketing technology, in detail, for example, packaging, cutting, and temperature control technology to keep freshness, to keep quality, or to keep safety. In addition, the technology for food inspection is mentioned. I think these kinds of marketing technologies are more advanced in Japan than in other countries, Asian countries, so we can share these technologies or systems to get more merit from each other. Here is another important issue to discuss, I think.

So according to this, my understanding, I would like to discuss two topics. The first topic is concerning GM or transgenic technology. Maybe I think GM technology has remarkably high productivity but it is maybe I think very necessary to achieve, how to say, achieve the food security. But as in Japan, Japanese consumers are very nervous and very suspicious about this technology, so I would like to ask someone or get some opinions or ideas about this matter. Is there any opinions or comments? No, it's a very big issue to discuss. But anyway, in the case of China, Shu-sensei mentioned about the GM technology.

Now in Laos, they are suffering from food security. How about in the Lao government? What do you think about GM technology in Laos? Could you give some comment or opinion from your country's side, Dr. Linkham?

Dr. Douangsavanh: Let me speak in English. Thank you, Chair. I think we consider GMO technology as high technology. At the same time, the government also tries to emphasize to get support for the people to have food security in the rural areas. And if you're talking about GMO, this one could fit to the commercialization of agriculture.

So as I mentioned, my topic is focused on two main points: food security and commercialization of agriculture. Why, I would like to explain to you a little bit why the government tries to actually, it could be emphasized in a different time period, but seeing the Asian members, Asian member community, we need to learn, that's why the government now is together with keeping food security of the people, especially in the rural areas, the government tries to emphasize also at the same time with the commercialization of agriculture. That means there are two things that we have to do together in parallel.

So GMO technology is also very important that we need to achieve. Soon, in the year 2015, we will access to after, in that time, if we don't learn, if we don't think about GMO, we cannot join and follow with the Asian community. Even we can, at the back side of them, but not so far behind. This one is the aim of the government.

Chair Ando: Okay. Maybe I'm afraid it's a very big issue to discuss. Are there any questions or...

Dr. Varanyanond: In the case of Thailand, actually I think GM food is still, we can say that we follow the Codex, so if they have GM, we have to label. So this means that even research we still have not got the financial support to research GM. I think that if we come up to AEC (ASEAN Economic Communities) in 2015 we have to discuss what we are going to be in this community. But right now Thailand is still not, it just has to be labeled on the packaging.

Chair Ando: Thank you very much. I have to move on to the second topic. The next topic I would like to discuss is marketing technology as Dr. Sakurai and Shu-sensei mentioned. When we try to promote international trade or increase imports or exports, maybe it is necessary that the standardization or extension of these marketing technologies, as Dr. Sakurai has mentioned, at the international level as well as the domestic level. So I'd like to discuss what are the constraints for the introduction of these technologies into foreign countries, or what can we share of these different levels of technology? Are there any opinions or comments or suggestions? You can speak in Japanese. Dr. Sakurai, in the last part of your presentation, you mentioned these technologies are very difficult to be introduced or extended, but are there any ideas or any comments in order to promote to international trade?

Dr. Sakurai: It's difficult to answer but if possible some Japanese food manufacturers are making factories in China or Southeast Asian countries and they are usually introducing Japanese technologies to each country's new factories. So one proposal is that experience of Japanese food manufacturers who are conducting foreign investment, these companies which experienced foreign investment, maybe have lots of experience, both good or bad experiences. My proposal is if possible we try to collect information about the experience of international food manufacturers and share the information. That's one very simple proposal. But I thought about it.

Chair Ando: Thank you very much. Okay, please. Let me know your name.

Dr. Holmer: I'm Robert Holmer, AVRDC - The World Vegetable Center. A question to Dr. Sakurai. When we talk about vegetable consumption in Southeast Asia, usually people don't eat enough vegetables as recommended, so we usually use the example of Japan which has one of the highest per capita consumption of vegetables, but I was very saddened by your data that showed that vegetable consumption in Japan has decreased from 110 kilograms a year now to 88 kilograms. Could you give any reasons why Japanese people are now consuming less vegetables than ten, 15 years ago?

Dr. Sakurai: The reason why the consumption level of vegetables decreased in Japan, okay. I can answer some point, to some extent, not totally. One answer is that when you eat vegetables maybe you usually cooked vegetables by salted boiling, but nowadays, especially younger Japanese people prefer fresh vegetables, eating vegetables by salad, but if you eat only fresh vegetables, the amount of vegetables is not so big. That's one reason. The younger generation prefers fresh vegetables. So instead, cooked vegetable consumption is decreasing. That's one answer.

And another answer is that, this answer might be the same answer, but the younger generation, their ability about cooking is much decreased. The ability of cooking is losing nowadays in Japan. That's another answer.

Chair Ando: Thank you very much. Dr. Koyama.

Dr. Koyama: I'd like to speak in Japanese. My comment is related to the Chair's question as well as Sakurai-

san's comment just now. It seems that in Asia, to make further investment and in order to promote trade, a standard must be established. This process is essential. The speaker from Thailand said something about Codex. We need an Asian version of Codex. That is one point to consider. We are still weak in Asia on this matter.

There are many common factors in Asia in terms of agriculture, and also the culinary or the food culture is common as well. So Japan and other Asian countries should take the initiative to establish a common standard in Asia. The EU has created a significant common market based on their standards and they are very successful. Therefore, Asia should proceed to that stage as well.

And I believe that this will be discussed during the following sessions of the symposium, but I believe that this is an important direction for discussions in this session too. Thank you.

Chair Ando: Well, it seems that you have jumped to a conclusion and maybe you have lessened my task as the moderator.

Dr. Shoji: Actually tomorrow I will be talking about some of our experience in food allergen analysis in Thailand. And along with our activities we thought that the standardization problem is very important. And actually, our company is working on the food allergen regulation in a global conference. And in that situation we face that the European standard is now being worked on and also the United States is trying to make their own regulations in the United States. But there is no Asian standard. And because of that, we try to work with a Thai partner that is to introduce a Japanese food standard into Thailand because Japan imports lots of food products from Asian countries so that we have some influence for the standardization of products because they, I mean the Asian countries, they make their standard as a Japanese standard. And then in that sense, Japan has some influence on the quality of the food which is imported to Japan.

Like in the case of food allergens, Japanese food allergen regulation is very strict so that for instance Thai products now, they adopt their quality to the Japanese standard so that when they export to Japan they checked the food allergen in Thailand. So that means the technology, food technology of the Japanese standard, is now moving to Thailand.

So I think by using the Japanese buying power, I think that kind of thing will help to give the influence on the Asian standard. That is my opinion.

Chair Ando: Thank you very much for your good proposal. The time is limited. Shu-sensei, Japan and China have various issues, but in terms of standardization, seen from the Chinese perspective, do you have any opinion? We would appreciate hearing them.

Dr. Zhou: Thank you very much for the question. I agree completely with what you have said on the part of China. As Koyama-sensei and Masahiro-san just mentioned in their comments that the food culture is different, well, there's commonality and in terms of food ingredients there are similarities. Therefore, in China, in China per se we have to also standardize, otherwise it will not be viable. That is one direction that we have to pursue.

Now the trade vis-à-vis Japan is declining but major companies that were not related to agriculture in the past are now going into agriculture in a big way. For example, an electric manufacturer, a company based in Nanjing, they have several thousand hectares for agriculture, establishing farms and adopting methods like consumer electronics. This is looking toward the domestic market still, but in the area of commercialization, industry technologies are introduced, inclusive of distribution as well. And I believe that Japanese standards are offering good reference. In order to secure safety between China and Japan it would be good if a system similar to Europe could be introduced between China and Japan as well. They have introduced a system in Europe, and a GAP system standard has been established.

So similar practices, standards, could be formally introduced with Japan starting with trade and to promote exchange for such a standard. Quality as well as safety must be maintained in distribution. That is also called for. In China as well there is significant demand. So I believe that it will provide significant opportunities for Japanese companies as well.

Chair Ando: Now I have to close this session. I have no ability to summarize briefly, but I hope this discussion gives us good issues to discuss tomorrow in the General Discussion. Thank you very much for your attention. And please give them a big hand. Thank you so much.