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A. COUNTRY OVERVIEW

Lao PDR is a small and landlocked country with a territory covering 236,800 square Km and the population about 5,2 million (2000) with an annual growth rate of 2,4%. The population comprise a large number of diverse ethnic groups, commonly divided into three broad categories: Lao Loum, Lao Theung and Lao Soung.

The estimated per capita income is about US\$ 370 in 1996 ranks Lao PDR as one of the world's twelve poorest countries. The structure of production and employment is dominated by subsistence agriculture, which accounts for about 65% of GDP and it is estimated that 85% of the population rely on farming practices.

The agricultural production is prominently natural and semi natural characteristics. The predominant crop is rice, which is a staple foodstuff for the Lao people of all ethnic groups and takes up 95% of all production and 85% of the cultivated area. Other foods locally produced include: coffee, maize, tubers, peanut, root crops and a wide range of fruits and vegetables. In 2000, the average of the rice production in the whole country is 2,1 million tons with the estimated consumption around 400 kg of paddy per person. Other agricultural production is in the amount of 1,268 million tons

Animal husbandry in Lao PDR has regularly growth in the level of 4,4 each year. In 2000-2001 there were 1,122 million buffaloes, 1,157 million cattle, 1,206 million pigs, 13,137 million poultry, over than 27 thousand horses and 119 thousand goats/sheep. the capabilities of animal and fish production accounted in the amount of 200,639 tons (animal product 116,540 T and fish product 73, 135T) and given an consumption average of 30 kg per person per year.

The industrial sector is small, contributing about 14% of GDP, and consists mainly of local raw materials, particularly food, meat, fruits, vegetables and consumer goods industries serving largely the Vientiane area. Based on the annual statistic in 2000, Food plants in Lao PDR, mostly in big towns, are in a number about 749 ranged from medium to small size.

There is little production of manufactured food in the Lao PDR, hence the trend towards increased consumption of imported, and often highly processed food. In 2000-2001 the import-export provision companies have been in the number of 25 companies. Since 1996-2001, the food imports have been gradually increased in the amount of 56,390 tons and a value of over 30 million US\$. In 2000, agricultural products have been imported in a number of 3,871 tons and in a value of 763,440 US\$.

From 1998-2000 the export of food product that are formally documented through FDD are in number of 600 000 to over 1,400,000 US\$. In 2000, Exported agricultural products were in a number of 211,932 tons and in value of 142,492 US\$.

B. REGULATORY ISSUES

Food safety have been controlled by using some legislative documents:

- Provision on the control of Imported-Exported foods No 035/FDA
- Provision on quality control of domestically food products No 048/FDA
- Provision on quality control of domestically circulated foodstuff No 105/FDA
- Food registration No 1600/FDA
- Instruction to the regulation No 035/FDA – Food stuff non conform to the standard
- Instruction to the regulation No 048/FDA – Food colors and their limitation.
- Instruction No 027/FDA to the regulation No 105/FDA part III 5.2- Food labeling
- Food Inspection Manual
- Decree on Universal Salt Idolization No 42/PM
- regulation for application of HACCP in food factories 3706/MOH
- Decree on livestock management in Lao PDR No 85/PMO

- Regulation on livestock management in Lao PDR No 0004/MAF
- Implementation of regulation on livestock management in Lao PDR No 0005/MAF
- Regulation on Management and application and application of pesticide in Lao PDR No 0886/MAF

Food law has been drafted and in the period of consideration in Ministry of Health. Based on Codex Alimentarius Commission guideline, good manufacturing practices and some necessary food standards of Lao have been established such as Standard for drinking water, Ice cream, tomato sauce, iodization salt, Mineral water and ice...For other food products which food standards of Laos are not available, we use Codex standards as reference documents for inspection purposes.

At present, the workshop and development of a National Food Safety Program have been conducted with related ministries to initiate the process for determining the framework, strategies and action plans of NFSP,

C. FOOD CONTROL INFRASTRUCTURE

Food and Drug Administration Commission (FDA) which was established in June 1991, comprising with 9 member representative from 7 ministries and permanent bureau has been located in FDD which carry out all activities of the commission. This commission is chaired by Minister of Ministry of Health and is responsible for manage, control the quality of variety of Food and Drug that are imported and domestically produced in order to protect the population rights, without the hazards ensuring the health of consumers.

Various food control efforts at domestic, export and import levels are undertaken by FDD in cooperation with FOOD and Drug, provincial Sub-division (provisional Health services).

Quality assurance in food analysis is an essential component of food control that is an important tool for ensuring food quality and safety. In Lao PDR, there are three main laboratories located in Vientiane which are responsible to analyze food samples collected by food inspectors.

- Food and Drug Quality Center, Ministry of Health has been carried out a physical, chemical and microbiological analysis of food samples. This is the main laboratory to issue certificate of analysis for food processors and conduct quality assessment for the FDD.
- Food and Drug Analysis Center of Vientiane Municipality also operates a food analysis especially microbiological analysis.
- Laboratory of Livestock and Fishery Department have been carried out of animal parasites and diseases and certify a sanitary of meat products.

However, the food analysis capabilities of staff are limited and the modern and appropriate equipment is still inadequate. In addition, fresh chemicals, reagents, and standard method of analysis are unavailable. These affect to quality assurance system that has not been widely adopted by the countries in the region.

D. RISK MANAGEMENT

In recent years, new food-borne pathogens have emerged and some have spread worldwide. Many pathogens are being spread to and by an increasing variety of foods. Health statistics indicate that food borne disease are the major cause of morbidity. Diarrhoea diseases, frequently associated with food borne agents, are one of the leading causes of mortality, particularly among children.

Regarding to the report of Hygiene and Prevention Department, outbreak of cholera/severe diarrhea in 1998, 1999, 2000 was reported for illness in the number of 6110 cases, 10120 cases and 12440 cases respectively and was reported for death in the number of 109 cases, 453 cases and 520 cases respectively. Also in 2000 dysentery disease was reported for 803 cases and 04 death. Beside, in 1999 – 2001 the record of food and beverage analysis at Food and Drug Quality Control Center indicate to be found E.Coli, Salmonella and Vibrio Cholera in a several number.

All of the above mentioned problems have been represented a significant and continuing threat to the health and welfare of Lao population. The incidence of food transmitted diseases continues to increase, and we now have to contend with an expanded number of possible food borne diseases.

For food importation, mostly all sanitary and phytosanitary certificate from exporter countries have been adopted by complying with the National standard and codex alimentarius especially microbiological and chemical contaminants and the use of food additive, preservative. Also, the manufacturer's analytical data are often accepted because of the limited capacity to analyze food in the country.

For food exportation, the organisation for delivering certificates of food analysis and quality assurance certificate are responsible by Food and Drug Department and Food and Drug Quality Control Center, Ministry of Health. And the releasing sanitary and phytosanitary of agricultural and animal production are responsible by an Agriculture Department and Livestock and Fisheries Department, Ministry of Agriculture. Food quality have to analyze, comply to the requirement of the importation countries.

The control of domestic food product is multidisciplinary activity which requires the involvement and cooperation of all concerned. Food quality is the responsible of Food and Drug Department of Ministry of Health. Therefore, the issue of release certificates of quality and analysis for domestic foods product is related to some sectors such as Department of Industry. Department of Agriculture, Department of Livestock and Fishery Laboratories...

At present, Lao has drafted different sanitary measures such as a good manufacturing practice (GMP), and the introducing HACCP- based systems to ensure the hygiene parameters chosen as representative of an acceptable level of microbiological safety are met on a continuous basis. These measures are currently introduced to food factories in controlling food production that could be measuring levels of the preventive system offers more control than end-product testing.

E. CAPACITY BUILDING

In 1993-1994, FAO provided technical assistance to assist on capacity building related to food quality and safety measures. Technical assistance provided includes assessments of existing national food control program; assistance in establishing food legislation, food inspection and quality assurance training, training on good manufacturing practices and the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) system; food import and export inspection and certification system, food analysis, and laboratory management and quality assurance system. Since then, Food control measure have been implemented.

However, all staff of Food and Drug Department responsible for food control activities have been trained as pharmacists which the course does; not provide training in food science, food quality assessment, or food control. Also Food and Drug Quality Center have been almost staffed by pharmacists with limited experience in food analysis. Consequently, It has been necessary to provide staff with supplementary short-term training in food safety, food control and food analysis courses.

Since 1994, WHO has provided technical consultant to organized food safety course and workshop on Good and Manufactured Practice and on Application of HACCP system in controlling the safety of food industry for inspectors and producers. Besides, training course of food inspection on Sanitation Standard Operation Procedures (SSOP) was currently conducted for inspectors in the whole country. In addition, training course in overseas on food sanitation (supported by JICA, 6 pers/y) and on Basic Hygiene Practices for food handlers (supported by ASEAN-SCFST, 5 pers/y) has been provided for food control and food analyst.

At present, WHO has also assisted FDD to strengthen capacity to participate in multi-sectoral approach to food safety and food law development, to prepare food hygiene regulations, recall regulations and codes of practice, to enable on participation in codex process and to develop and disseminate food safety guidance documents for industry sectors.

However, to strengthen on food safety control and improve the knowledge and skill of coming inspectors since 1999 food safety curriculum have been inserted to Medical Science University and college of Health and Technology.

F. COMMUNICATION AND PARTICIPATION

Food and Drug Administration Commission has regularly leaded for communicating food safety regulations to stakeholders to exchange of information and opinions concerning risk. However, the participation of concerned agencies are still limited. In particular, food producers do not understand the relationship between food sanitation measures and the quality of the final product. Besides, Consumers generally do not appreciate the health implications of food safety and personal hygiene because of insufficient information on the rights with regards to safe food.

Since 1995, Lao PDR has been a membership of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and Codex Contact points is carried out by the Director general of Food and Drug Department which is responsible to all activities of Codex. Besides, the National Codex Committee was established and approved by the chairman of FDA commission. this technical committee was consisted by 09 members from related ministries such as Organization of Science technology and Environment, Min. of Trade, Min. of Agriculture and For4estry, Min. of Industry and Handicraft, FDD, FDQCC. this committee is responsible for the implications of various standardization of food and food control issues of the international agencies and the region.

Since 1998, food regulator and inspectors has been trained on food safety and food control which supported by ICD/DSEAMEO which has also provided technical support and material study to build capacity on food safety and food control course.

G. CURRENT FOOD SAFETY ISSUES

- A result of the insufficient trained manpower on enforcement of legislation that are the man constraint to develop food control capacity which can contribute to increase incidence of food-borne diseases.

- Lack of food scientists, researchers, technologists on performance surveillance and monitoring of food contaminants to control the incidence of pathogens in the food supply and also for getting the information and data of food contaminants and food borne diseases.

- Guidelines on good agricultural practices, good handling practices and good manufacturing practices have not been effectively introduced to farmers and food factories to minimize microbial and chemical hazards.

- The capacity of food quality control are very limited. Fresh chemicals, reagents and the modern equipment appropriate to standard method of analysis, are not available which could not accepted by the region.

- The consumer's awareness of food safety is very limited that contribute to the poor communication and participation.

H. FUTUR PLANS

- To develop food law which shall be approved by the year 2003. Beside, existing regulation and standards need to revise.

- To establish Food Safety Program and developing National Food Safety Policy.

- To strengthen the capacities of man power to implement a the application of GMP, SSOP, HACCP in food premises and GAP in farm production by providing adequate and efficacy training to food producer and inspectors.

- To upgrade and develop the capacity of quality control by providing appropriate laboratory equipment and improving the analysts skills.

-To improve food safety promotion and education for consumers through mass media.

-To actively participate in all matter connected with food safety issue at National level, International level and among ASEAN countries.

-To seek technical assistance from International agencies/organization with regards to develop food control capacity.