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THAILAND'S FOOD SAFETY PROJECT ON RESTAURANTS AND STREET VENDORS: THE "CLEAN FOOD GOOD TASTE" PROJECT

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Dr.Hataya Kongchuntuk, Ministry of Public Health,
Nonthaburi, Thailand

ABSTRACT

In Thailand, restaurants and street vendors can easily be found along the streets in not only the tourist areas but also in any community in Bangkok and all other provinces. One reason is that today more and more Thais do not cook at home anymore. Smaller families of only two or three and for some, fast-pace city life with less time to spare make cooking a task to avoid. By four or five in the evening, street vendors are ready at their stalls with varieties of already cooked foods to be chosen by customers on their way home. Thousands of tourists to Thailand each year also find this way of life intriguing. The food looks great, the taste is superb, and the price is cheap. The only question left is safety.

Since 1989, Department of Health of the Ministry of Public Health together with Tourism Authority of Thailand and Ministry of Interior who is responsible for all local governments in provinces around the country have joined hands in a project aiming at assuring the good sanitation of all restaurants and street vendors in Thailand. The "Clean Food Good Taste" Project directly benefits the people of Thailand while also reassures tourists that food in Thailand is safe as well as looks and tastes good. Until now, 5,377 restaurants (of 11,731 applied) and 3,045 vendors (of 6,843 applied) have passed the criteria and been awarded the Clean Food Good Taste logo to be displayed at their businesses. Thirty percents of the awardees is randomly chosen and assessed twice a year. If good sanitation is not found, the award and logo will be revoked.

The success of the Clean Food Good Taste Project is due to four great strategies used: partnerships and co-ownership, quality assurance, sustainability, and public awareness and involvement.

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1.1.1 Introduction

In Thailand, restaurants and street vendors can easily be found along the streets in not only the tourist areas but also in any community in Bangkok and all other provinces. One reason is that today more and more Thais do not cook at home anymore. Smaller families of only two or three and for some, fast-pace city life with less time to spare make cooking a task to avoid. By four or five in the evening, street vendors are ready at their stalls with varieties of already cooked foods to be chosen by customers on their way home. Thousands of tourists to Thailand each year also find this way of life intriguing. The food looks great, the taste is superb, and the price is cheap. The only question left is safety.

In order to protect consumers as well as promote good tourism in Thailand, a project aiming at assuring the good sanitation of all restaurants and street vendors in Thailand has been conducted since 1989. Department of Health of the Ministry of Public Health together with Tourism Authority of Thailand and Ministry of Interior who is responsible for all local governments in provinces around the country have joined hands in this project with supports from many other agencies and groups. The “Clean Food Good Taste” Project directly benefits the people of Thailand while also reassures tourists that food in Thailand is safe as well as looks and tastes good.

Goals

The project is designed to achieve three main goals:

1. To reduce the risk of foodborne diseases in restaurants, cafeterias and vendors;
2. To promote clean and good sanitary food service in tourist areas and also around the country;
3. To support and encourage local authorities in managing for safe food for consumers and tourists in their areas of jurisdiction.

Strategies

The success of the Clean Food Good Taste Project is due to four great strategies which have been applied at all levels: partnerships and co-ownership, quality assurance, sustainability, and public awareness and involvement.

1. Partnerships and co-ownership

Central: A committee comprising of various agencies was appointed with the Director of Food Sanitation Division, Department of Health being secretariat. The joint project was established together with the Tourism Authority of Thailand and the Ministry of Interior. The meetings agreed on the plan of the project and representatives from regional offices and local authorities were called in for briefing.

Regional: Seminars were conducted for involved agencies and bodies to participate, exchange views and provide suggestions based on their experiences. The action plan was then made. Regional offices co-ordinate the works of locals and also provide technical and financial support to local bodies.

Local: Restaurants, cafeterias and vendors are generally inspected and controlled by local authorities that are empowered by the Sanitation Act of 1992. Through this project, other partners are involved: the private sector and consumer groups. First, interested food establishments indicate their willingness to join in the project. Under this project, the inspection is conducted by a team consisting of local officers, local association of the food service or restaurants, and consumer groups. This means all stakeholders have been involved.

2. Quality assurance

Central: The Committee sets procedures for quality assurance and specified roles of each body. It also sets requirements and procedures for reports and evaluation.

Regional: Each year, regional offices and Department of Health will conduct random checks on 30 percents of the awardees around the country to be certain that good sanitary condition is regularly kept even after the logo has been awarded. So, consumers can be reassured that restaurants or vendors that display the Clean Food Good Taste logo always will serve safe food. Evaluation of the project is made yearly.

Local: Once the application to join the project is in, the inspection is conducted according to different criteria set by the Department of Health for restaurants, cafeterias or vendors. If the place does not pass the inspection, improvement must be made as recommended by the local officers. Ten samples are drawn, 5 from food, 3 from containers and utensils and 2 from food handlers' hands. Rapid test for *coliforms* is used for bacteriological criteria. To be awarded the Clean Food Good Taste logo 9 of 10 tests must be negative. The inspection is repeated every two months.

3. Sustainability

Central: The Committee sets up a training course for local authorities and food service personnel. Local authorities are authorized and encouraged to execute duties as empowered according to the Sanitation Act of 1992 in their areas of jurisdiction. Technical and financial supports are given to locals as well as appropriate approach to different areas are demonstrated for case studies. Research to support and improve the project is conducted.

Regional: Hold training sessions for local authorities, food service personnel, and consumer groups so that concept of good sanitary practices is well understood and then correctly and efficiently applied. Regional offices also encourage the formation of restaurants or vendors associations and support them in the management of quality among the members. Consumer groups are encouraged, informed, and educated to be able to protect the right of community and consumers. Technical and financial support are continuously provided for locals including support for research.

Local: Forming partnership among local authorities, restaurants and vendors association, and consumer groups in the area with continuous training and practices resulting in continuous, self sufficient and sustainable project.

4. Public awareness and involvement

Central: The Committee sets up plan for public campaign and co-ordinate all the works as planned.

Regional: Regional offices arrange for appropriate channels of media for public campaign to draw attention and create familiarity of the logo and the project among consumers all over the country. Consumers are informed that complaints can be made to regional offices or local authorities or public media. Telephone number, mailing address and e-mail address are widely distributed.

Local: Billboard is put up at the intersection of the main streets. Public media also helps in reporting the progress of the project and the names of establishment where award and logo have been revoked. Consumers in the area are aware of the logo and the meaning it carries and choose only the establishment with logo displayed. This social force strongly helps pushing the project forward.

Food sanitation standard for street foods

For the operation of street food vendors, 12 practices or standard of operation must be followed. For restaurants this goes up to 15, and for cafeteria 30. The following are food sanitation standard for street foods.

1. Food stall surface must be made from material that is easy to clean and must be in good condition so as to permit easy and adequate cleaning. All food preparation or cooking area must be elevated to at least 60 cm. above ground.
2. Cooked food must be covered or stored in clean containers to prevent contamination from insects or other pests.
3. Food additives used must be those that have been approved by authorized office such as FDA.
4. Drinking water must be clean and fit for human consumption. It must be kept or stored in clean and covered container with spout or draining valve.
5. Beverage must be stored in clean and covered container with spout or draining valve. Long handle ladle may be used.
6. Ice must be clean and fit for human consumption. It must be kept in clean and closed container that is elevated to at least 60 cm. above ground. Long handle ladle is to be used to draw the ice and nothing shall be cooled, or stored in this ice.
7. Wash utensils with dish-washing detergent and rinse well under running water or twice in two water basins. This operation must also be elevated to at least 60 cm. above ground.
8. Spoons, forks, chopsticks must be stored in open containers with good circulation with the handles up. This container must also be elevated to at least 60 cm. above ground.
9. Food waste and trash must be collected and removed.
10. Food handlers must wear clean cloth and the shirt must have sleeves. The cook must wear an apron and also a hat or hair net.
11. Always use clean utensil to pick up or serve food.
12. Any wound or cut on food handler's hand must be covered and protected with water-proof covering to prevent transmission of disease.

1.1.2 A success story

Until now, 5,377 restaurants (of 11,731 who applied) and 3,045 vendors (of 6,843 who applied) have passed the criteria and been awarded the Clean Food Good Taste logo to be displayed at their businesses. The success of the Clean Food Good Taste Project is due to four great strategies used: partnerships and co-ownership, quality assurance, sustainability, and public awareness and involvement.

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