

Crop Health Management

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Food safety has become a major challenge for many countries in the past years. The safety issues exist in every process of the food chain, such as: from production, manufacturing, processing, packing, transporting, distributing, receiving, holding, or importing foods. Typically, government oversees agricultural production as a whole and this include containers, chemical additives, pesticide production, and business regulation. Considering the very basic human need - food which is essential and safety, which should always be a top priority. Food safety is closely related to people's lives and health and economic development and social harmony.

In an effort to ensure food safety, the Council of Agriculture (COA) organized a team 'Crop Health Management', and the sole purpose of the team is to address crop safety. It is organized with 11 units to tackle 30 staple crops which are the most common daily food items; and several pesticide residual test failed crops. The team effort involves promotion of strategies and policies, the conduct of research of related subjects, establishment of standards for specific crop farming, assistance to farmers to conduct proper farming and monitoring food sources. The vision is to develop Taiwan's agriculture as a "non-toxic agricultural island".

Crop Health Management's goal is to compensate the traditional agriculture. Traditional agriculture is interested in high yield production, shortcuts might be taken when pursuing for high yields. For example: using excessive pesticides or chemical additives. Crop Health Management team emphasizes on:

- farming with proper mechanisms which enables production
- food safety
- community and environment safety

One of the efforts is to develop technical guidance of pest and disease control and medication safety for vegetables and fruits. The general approach is to leverage research results, develop a set of standards for a specific crop and deploy the defined standards. On top of the standards, a set of incentives were also developed to encourage farmers to use these defined standards for their crops. Start from seedlings, prepping of farming fields, planting, watering, pest controls, disease controls, cultivating, to harvesting; guidelines and standards are provided to first educate farmers on the concept, then to help them to actually carry out what needs to be performed. Most of the time, the results are predictable; for the not so successful cases, analyses are conducted further to understand required adjustments. For instance, growing cherry tomatoes in the greenhouse, where all aspects of farming are under the standard operation and proper controls, farmers have been very satisfied with the results. Cherry tomatoes are safe with high quality. They have been very popular in every sales venue: auction markets, wholesalers, retailers, internet, supermarkets, traditional markets, even the street vendors want to be in on this profit generating produce.

To improve food safety everything must start from the core farming activities. To educate farmers with actual results is the most effective tool to enable willingness and commitment. Few other subjects need to be addressed to enhance food safety:

- The acceleration of technical upgrades in farming community
- The technology integration with international standards

Remarks: The selected 30 crops are: rice, short-term leaf vegetables, kidney beans, yard-long beans, Lima beans, pea, pea sprouts, cucumbers, scallions, green bamboo shoots, water bamboos, cherry tomatoes, cantaloupes, strawberries, grapes, mangoes, wax apples, jujubes, papayas, pomelos, pineapples, guavas, sugar apples, Atemoya (pineapple-like sugar apples), lychees, round kumquat, potatoes, sweet potatoes, teas and florist's daisies.

(Data Source: Council of Agriculture)

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