

Ensuring Food Safety In Malaysia through Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standard (SPS) Measures

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization and trade liberalization has opened up market access for food around the world. However, one of the concerns is on how do importing countries protect their people from risks of diseases, chemical hazard and contamination derived from food that indirectly come together with the open trading doors. As a member of the WTO (World Trade Organisation), Malaysia practiced the principles of free trade system. WTO rules stipulate that it is an offense if products imported from other countries are restricted without any valid basis pertaining to sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) reasons (WTO, 2015). SPS measures are the steps taken to ensure that a country's consumers are being supplied with food that is safe to eat. This is not only specific to food safety. The measures also apply to plant and animal health and safety. In order to ensure that imported products are of good quality and safe for consumption by consumers, sanitary conditions have been specified and should be strictly adhered to.

Food Quality, Safety and Standard Scheme in Selected Countries

According to Renard (1999a, 1999b) food quality, safety and standard scheme are construed value composed of environmental conservation, food safety, hygiene and sanitation, human and animal welfare and hazard management. The quality compliance will provide a platform to a firm to enter the niche and privileged market segment. Extensive actions and measures on food quality and standards have been taken by developed countries primarily to protect their consumers' interests. The North America has its own set of requirements on food safety scheme under the Federal Department of Agriculture, United State of America. The European Union (EU) has established its own set of standard requirements, for instance the European Retail Good Agricultural Practices (EUREP-GAP) and Safe Quality Food. In Asia, although Japan is an affluent and lucrative market to be explored, nevertheless it is the most stringent market to enter. According to a consumer study by Food Issue Monitor, 70% of Japanese consumers are concerned about their food safety and rated it as the most important issue, even more important than price. They are ready to pay extra cost for guaranteed quality and safe products. In addition, only 8% of them are concerned on the possibility of a price hike due to the food safety compliance. Due to the many quality and safety standards across countries, Zuurbier and Trienekens (2008) highlighted that the Codex Alimentarius Standard was formed by the Food Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), which aimed to harmonize food standard at the international level.

Principles of SPS

Government has the right to impose sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures when they are considered necessary to protect human, animal and plant health. However, under the SPS Agreement, it removes the rights of countries to unjustifiably restrict access to domestic markets. It calls on members to harmonize sanitary and phytosanitary measures on a global basis by adopting internationally accepted standards, guidelines and recommendations. The underlying objective of this agreement is to avoid some countries from using food safety and quarantine requirements as strategic tools to protect their domestic agricultural industries from import competition. Thus, the SPS Agreement identifies the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) as the international organization responsible for the phytosanitary standard setting and harmonization of measures affecting trade (Wan Normah and Yong, 2004). The International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) on the other hand, is an international agreement on plant health to which 182 contracting parties currently adhere to, including Malaysia. It aims to protect cultivated and wild plants by preventing the introduction and spread of pests (IPPC, 2016).

Food safety measurement in Malaysia

Phytosanitary certification is used to attest that consignments of plants meet phytosanitary import requirements and is undertaken by a National Plant Protection Organization (NPPO). A phytosanitary certificate for export or for re-export can be issued only by a public officer who is technically qualified and duly authorized by an NPPO (ISPM 12, 2001). A phytosanitary certificate for export is usually issued by the NPPO of the country where the plants, plant products or regulated articles were grown or processed. Phytosanitary certificates are issued to indicate that consignments of plants, plant products or other regulated articles meet specified phytosanitary import requirements and are in conformity with the certifying statement of the appropriate model certificate. In Malaysia, this falls under the purview of the Plant Quarantine Services of the Malaysian Department of Agriculture (DOA). When the Malaysia Quarantine and Inspection Services or MAQIS, was established in 2013, the phytosanitary certificate for export and re-export was handed over to this new agency. Besides issuing the certificate, the agency is also responsible for implementing the International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPMs) established under the IPPC.

Several certification schemes have been implemented to comply with international standards. For example the ISPM No. 7 (Export Certification Scheme), ISPM No. 14 (The Use of Integrated Measures in a Systems Approach for Pest Risk Management) and ISPM No. 15 (Guidelines for Regulating Wood Packaging Material in International Trade). The implementation of these schemes has greatly reduced red tapes with the cessation of end point inspection and treatment supervision by the Plant Quarantine Officers (Wan Normah and Yong, 2004). The issuance of phytosanitary certificates is done based on auditing system of the certified farms or packing houses or treatment providers. This has significantly reduced the overall exportation cost, besides assisting towards a more efficient exportation handling.

For animals, the Department of Veterinary Services (DVS) has a checklist and several trained inspectors for the inspection of abattoirs outside the country. To ensure that farming activities in the country is carried out according to the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrobased Industry, DVS has implemented various schemes for monitoring and control program in the field. Among others which has been implemented and promoted are Good Animal Husbandry Practices (GAHP), accredited and certified all qualified farms with Good Farm Practices Scheme (SALT), and monitoring the use of illicit drugs through

urine sampling of livestock, as well as sampling of animal feed and drinking water. Sampling was carried out regularly which requires the participation of all farms.

MyGAP (Malaysia Good Agricultural Practices)

MyGAP was launched by the Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry in 2013. This scheme is a comprehensive certification system for agriculture commodities; crops, livestock and aquaculture. This scheme is a rebranding of the earlier scheme introduced by the government in 2002. The earlier schemes were introduced according to specific agricultural commodities known as Malaysian Farm Accreditation Scheme (SALM) for crops, SALT for livestock and for aquaculture, SPALM. The Ministry of Agriculture and Agro Based Industry introduced one new standard logo to be used as a national logo for Good Agricultural Practices, named as MyGAP as an approach to integrate and rebrand the standard. However, the process of acquiring of MyGAP certification scheme is subject to the commodity and relevant agencies; DOA for non-industrial crops, DVS for livestock, and Department of Fisheries for aquaculture industry. This rebranding of the three quality schemes was in conjunction of the government's Economic Transformation Program to steer the local agriculture towards liberalization and to become more competitive in the global market.

Certification for Livestock Industry

The scheme for animal farm practices is for animal production with the aim to produce quality livestock products that is fit to be for consumption by humans. The food safety and quality program conducted by DVS focuses on a farm-to-table approach mainly to eliminate or reduce food-borne hazards. It is a holistic approach focusing on the control of food-related risks which involves control of every step in the chain, from raw material to food consumption. With regards to this approach, DVS conducted certification programs, inspections and accreditation system as well as implementation of legislation to support the Malaysia food safety and quality management system. SALT was introduced by DVS in 2003 based on Good Animal Husbandry Practices (GAHP). The criteria for the certification of SALT are based on animal health management, bio-security, good infrastructure and prudent use of antibiotics, vaccines and drugs for animals. This scheme covers all types of livestock such as beef cattle, dairy cattle, broiler chicken, layer chicken, breeder chicken, deer, goat, sheep and pig. The objective of SALT is to ensure the production of safe and wholesome food from farms practicing GAHP, operated in a sustainable and environmentally friendly condition and yield produce that are of good quality and safe for consumption. The SALT recognition is in the form of certificate and logo. The SALT logo is a mark of quality given to livestock farms awarded under the Veterinary Inspection and Accreditation. The GAHP for livestock farm is complementary of the Veterinary Health Mark Accreditation Scheme.

One of the main reasons farm applies this scheme is because it is a prerequisite requirement for export purposes. To support and facilitate farms to participate in this scheme, DVS provide consultancy services on the aspect of the code of conduct of good practices, advisory services for farm development, improvement of the farm, preparing of the manual program and annual surveillance and audit.

CONCLUSION

SPS measures and agreements or standards have been used as important tools to bring positive outcomes and steer the imports and exports of agricultural products in Malaysia.

Malaysian farms have greatly improved under the programs developed for the production of safe and phytosanitary compliant produce, making these accredited farms able to compete with other products in the global market. It also means there is a wider access to new markets and that more doors are open to Malaysia to trade. Countries cannot unjustifiably deny the country's request to trade as before because any phytosanitary measures imposed need to be based on scientific principles. More importantly, the SPS measures taken are for the main purpose of ensuring food safety to the country's population. The government has taken the necessary steps by implementing and regulating the above SPS measures. Nevertheless, food safety should be a responsibility shared by everyone involved in the food industry supply chain from production to consumption, including the growers, processors, regulators, distributors, exporters, retailers, as well as the final consumers.

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