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Food Safety and Environmental Requirements
in Export Markets -
Friend or Foe
for Producers of Fruit and Vegetables in
Asian Developing Countries?



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Foreword

This book draws on recent UNCTAD research to analyse the new breed of food-safety and environmental requirements for horticultural exports in key markets. It assesses their impact on producers in six developing countries in Asia and outlines some pro-active adjustment strategies that could help maximize the benefits resulting from the new requirements while also minimizing the adjustment costs.

The production and export of fresh fruit and vegetables from developing countries offers a number of opportunities for economic and social development gains. The volume of global fresh fruit and vegetables trade has grown more than that of any other major category of agricultural products, and many developing countries are striving to expand their market shares. However, this is far from easy, because of the perishable nature of the produce and the capital- and skills-intensive nature of production. What is more, new requirements for accessing the global supply chains of large retailers often entail a transition to high-precision production methods.

When these requirements take local conditions and capacities into account, compliance with them can offer benefits, such as better management of agro-chemicals, enhanced occupational health and better food quality at the national level. But the new requirements also pose critical challenges for production and quality management and are particularly challenging for small farmers in developing countries, who often lack the skills and financial resources necessary to meet stringent standards and regulations.

The book uses case studies from Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam to explore such questions as: to what extent can small farmers profit from enhanced export opportunities, and how can their exports contribute to pro-poor development strategies? What should developing-country Governments do to support smallholder participation in global horticultural trade, and how can the donor community play a supportive role?

The book also addresses the relationship between regulatory and voluntary requirements in key horticultural markets, including the “transnationalization” of voluntary standards. It investigates the role played by private-sector standards in implementing regulatory requirements in export markets, and the use of public funds in meeting private supply-chain safety and quality requirements.

Ensuring that the new requirements do not prevent the poorest countries and smallest producers from successfully participating in international horticultural trade will require concerted action on the part of governments, businesses, standard-setting organizations and producers. It is therefore urgent to build a constructive dialogue among all affected stakeholders for the exchange of information and national experiences. This book is a timely contribution towards that goal.



Supachai Panitchpakdi
Secretary-General of UNCTAD

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