

Annex: Media Commentaries on the New Delhi Conference

India, 3 Others To Study Export Standards In Developed World

Amiti Sen
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New Delhi, March 24: With food safety standards becoming a major impediment to exports to the developed world, research institutes from India, Australia, Thailand and the US have decided to carry out detailed case studies of export standards for a number of product lines of interest from developing countries.

The research institutes to conduct the studies comprise the Research & Information System (RIS) For Non-aligned And Developing Countries of India, International Food Policy Research Institute of the US, the Australian National University and University of Melbourne of Australia, and the University of Thammasat, Thailand.

The institutes got together in October last year to launch a comparative study of international food safety regulations and processed food exports from India and Thailand. The study is being sponsored by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research.

A workshop on 'International Food Safety Regulations and Processed Food Exports' will be organized by the RIS in New Delhi this week to discuss the developments in the research work.

Speaking to FE, Rajesh Mehta from the RIS said that many exporters from the developing world, including India, were not aware of many of the safety regulations prevailing in other countries and thus faced obstructions in exports. There was a need to raise their levels of awareness, he added.

The joint study aims to examine the policy, institutional and technical problems faced by processed food exporters in India and other developing countries, and to identify appropriate policy measures to address them while recognising the legitimate concerns in importing countries about safety and quality.

The core of the study is a comparative study of the export-oriented processed food industries in India and other countries, including detailed case studies of the food-supply chain of their processed fish, canned fruit and meat industries.

Processed food exports are a major component of the agricultural exports from Thailand and India. Thailand is second only to Brazil among developing countries in terms of the total value of processed food exports.

Developed Nations Likely To Tighten Food Safety Norms To Block Imports: Experts

Amiti Sen
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New Delhi, March 30: Even when the processed-food export has emerged as a new source of export growth for a number of developing countries, exporters face hurdles in the form of increasingly stringent food safety, standards imposed by the importing developed countries.

Experts from Thailand, Australia and India, who participated at a recent workshop on 'International Food Safety Regulations And Processed Food Exports' in New Delhi, pointed out that as traditional trade barriers such as tariff and quantitative restrictions (QRs) continue to be lowered, protectionist interests by developed countries are likely to make increasing use of food safety regulations to block trade. The workshop was organised by the Research and Information System (RIS) For Non-aligned And Other Developing Countries.

According to a paper presented by Prema-Chandra Athukorala from the Australian National University and Sisira Jayasuriya from University of Melbourne, though the sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement and the World Trade Organisation's dispute settlement mechanism are in place to ensure that food safety standards are not abused or misused for protection aims, developing countries are not in a position to make use of these procedures constrained by their limited capacity to access and absorb best practice technology.

The paper pointed out that there was evidence of some instances where standards prohibited trade altogether. Citing an example, it said that a European Union regulation required that dairy products should be manufactured from milk produced by cows kept on farms and milked mechanically. This regulation virtually precluded imports from many developing countries where milk production was by and large a small scale activity.

The EU recently invoked this regulation to ban import of camel cheese from Mauritania, causing losses to a small enterprise which developed the product at a considerable low cost.

Another interesting example is an Australian quarantine regulation requiring chicken meat imports from Thailand to be heated at 70 Celsius for 143 minutes to avoid the possibility of carrying a certain disease. This has effectively closed the Australian market for Thai chicken exporter as the required heat treatment almost transforms chicken into paper! The US, too, is at par with the EU in the areas of restricting food imports under the guise of food safety standards. Rajesh Mehta and J George from RIS point out in their paper that as per the US importation rules, the country could stop importation of poultry

and poultry meat products from other countries on various grounds favourable to the US. The US can suspend the eligibility of another country if it feels that an emerging sanitary measure is to be implemented to address a hazard. If another country does not provide satisfactory documentation of equivalent sanitary measures or if the US finds that exporting country is not implementing a public health sanitary measure in the manner determined to be equivalent, it can permanently make the country eligible for exports.

The RIS paper said that in the near future, standards may become more stringent. Legislation on nitrate levels in Denmark and the growing trends towards organic production and their increasing cost on housing would further bring in new issues in the shape of SPS measures, it said. In Germany, animal welfare is becoming an important issue and there is a move towards limiting the bird density broilers and banning small cages. In France, new manure disposal regulations and the traditional method of producing animals slowly and at low density will be an important animal welfare issue for future, the paper said.

In countries like Spain, Hungary and Poland, too, similar issues are emerging and might take the shape of SPS measure against developing countries like India, the paper warned.

Experts said that developing countries should see the implementation of SPS standards as an integral part of the process of establishing a dynamic business environment in the domestic economy.

Dr Athukorala and Dr Jayasuriya observed that it was not accidental that some developing countries had performed much better than others in penetrating developed country food markets, despite all the inadequacies in the world trading system. Other countries should try to learn from the experiences of these relatively more successful developing countries, the paper added.