From ‘Rau an toan’ to a proliferation of standards: where are we at in Vietnam with addressing food safety through standards?

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Research questions

- What is the capacity of food safety standards to actually improve food safety situation in general?

- How to articulate mandatory and voluntary standards as a strategy to improve food safety?
Contents and methodology

- Describing the evolution of food safety standards for vegetables in Vietnam
- Understanding its main features
- Implications and recommendations

A multidisciplinary analysis:
- Combination of the analysis of the regulatory and standard documents and actual practices (law and economics)
Trajectories of standards on vegetables

- **RAT – FS conditions**: 2012
- **MARD sectorial standard**: 2008
- **PGS**: 2006, 2008
- **VietGAP BasicGAP**: 2008
- **National standards (MOST)**: 2015, 2017

- **VietGAP**: 2008
- **First legislative text on FS (Food Hygiene & safety Ordinance)**: 2003
- **Food safety (FS) law**: 2010
- **Certification of FS conditions made mandatory (for vegetables)**: 2012
Heterogeneity and proliferation of standards

- Different contents:
  - Technical specifications and management models

- Different forms:
  - Law, regulations, technical standards

- Uncertainty on the normativity:
  - Mandatory/voluntary
FS standards on vegetables

- Most of the standards are public or public-led and nation-wide
  - Public support programs at national and local levels

- Public standards are not benchmarked with international standards
  - PGS Organic (private) recognized by IFOAM

- All standards are business to consumers (B2C)
  - Consumer awareness
Labelling inconsistency

- No common label/logo and protection of the denomination for each standard
  - → Confusion and risk of fraud

- Origin as a proxy to guarantee food safety
  - → Proliferation of labelling strategies
Examples of FS certificate/label

Example of VietGAP certificate

Example of vegetable label (BasicGAP)

« PGS standard » doesn’t exist

Obsolete regulation

Rau an toan
TRAJECTORIES OF FOOD SAFETY STANDARDS ON VEGETABLES
Evolution towards more technical rules

• More technical rules in the mandatory regulations
  • Establishment of Vietnamese technical regulations on maximum limits of heavy metals, microbiological…
  • Inclusion of requirements on conditions of production besides product specifications

• More comprehensive technical specifications in the voluntary standards
  • Ex. of organic agriculture
Evolution towards more controls

- Rau an toan since 2007: Certification of products + certification of conditions of production
- Evolution towards different modes of control:

<table>
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<th>Forms of controls</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<td>Autocontrol/internal control, record keeping</td>
<td>Most standards</td>
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<td>Autoevaluation of conformity</td>
<td>Safe vegetables</td>
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<td>Control by local authorities</td>
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<td>Third-party certification</td>
<td>VietGAP, Safe vegetables</td>
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<td>Participatory guarantee systems</td>
<td>PGS Organic</td>
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Evolution towards more territorial approaches

- Combination of territorial development and FS management in local policies:
  - Certification trademark Bavi Milk = combination with mandatory standard
  - Certification trademark Moc Chau Safe vegetables = combination with voluntary standard (VietGAP, RAT)

Geographical planning (local)  Food safety regulations

Safe production zone; markets…
But at the same time

- Exclusion of smallholder operators
  - Exemption of certification of FS conditions for smallholders (Decree 38/2012/ND-CP)
  - Exclusion from safe food chains

- Differentiation of producers outside of the planned safe production zone.
IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Implications for consumers

- Confusion on what is safe on the markets:
  - Too many logos, standards and different quality management procedures with different levels of implementation

- Trust issue
  - Public and private controls and certification processes
  - Frauds
Implication for producers

- Increased cost and risk considerations: changes in practices and increased burden in quality management

- Increased potential for value addition with increased standard-based demand but for who?
  - Capacity of different types of producers to benefit from local policies establishing safe food chains and access high-end value chains?
  - Exclusion of smallholders from the safe production chains (exemption)
Implications for policy makers

- Not enough public resources to control all operators.
- Voluntary standards as a way to build the control system?
- Starting with controlling what is easier
  - Operators who are registered as users of specific standards and located in specific areas

- But only as a work in progress (issue of ensuring access to safe food for all)
Recommendations

- The Government should engage private sector in elaborating clear and practical rules (law, regulations, technical standards)

- The Government should be more consistent in labelling standards
  - Create national logos for the different standards (VietGAP, organic)
Thank you for your attention!