

Harmonized Standards and Digital Traceability as Regional Public Goods: Pathways to Safer, Greener Trade in ASEAN

Vichelle Roaring-Arunsuwannakorn

Food Safety and Quality Specialist, Greater Mekong Subregion Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security Program

ABSTRACT:

ASEAN agrifood systems face increasing pressures from both regional and global markets. Import requirements such as China's General Administration of Customs (GACC) protocols, the European Union Deforestation Regulation (2025), and the United States Food and Drug Administration traceability rule (2026) are raising the bar for compliance. These changes highlight the urgent need for regional solutions. Standards and traceability can be understood as regional public goods: they reduce compliance costs, create trust across borders, and safeguard consumer confidence, while also advancing climate-smart agriculture, One Health resilience, and inclusive participation of women and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).

The Greater Mekong Subregion has tested promising digital tools, including QR and GS1 codes for durian exports, cattle identification systems for cross-border trade, and e-certification pilots. However, these remain fragmented and siloed. Opportunities now exist to scale interoperable systems across ASEAN, leveraging the ASEAN Single Window for electronic sanitary and phytosanitary (e-SPS) certificates, regional guidelines on good agricultural practices and organics, and frameworks under the ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA) 3.0.

Practical pathways include establishing a regional SPS risk alert system, developing shared QR code protocols, piloting mutual recognition of organics or GAP certification, and creating SPS digital cloud hubs linking ministries and regulators. By institutionalizing such innovations, ASEAN can enhance food safety, expand market access, and reinforce its position as a trusted supplier of safe, sustainable, and climate-friendly products.

KEYWORDS:

traceability, regional public goods, SPS systems, ASEAN, GMS