

1. Tea Brands Need Boost to Expand Exports

In the first half of 2013, Vietnam's tea export turnover increased by 3.3 percent over the same period in 2013 to reach US\$94mn, despite export volume slipping by 0.4 percent. Although the void was filled by a six percent rise in export prices, export prices for Vietnamese tea remained low, at just 40-50 percent of the value enjoyed by many other countries. This was attributed to Vietnam's failure to establish a well-recognised brand for 'made-in-Vietnam' tea products.

About 90 percent of Vietnamese tea was exported in the form of raw materials and only 10 percent left the country as a finished product. The industry still faces many blockages in its bid to raise the quality of products. From the end of 2012, several batches of tea exported to Europe were returned due to pesticide content exceeding permitted levels.

Currently, large tea plantation fields were becoming old and stunted, failing to meet the demand for high-quality products. There were more than 300 tea processing plants in the country, but only five percent of them had their own fields producing raw materials. Among the efforts to enhance the quality of tea products, the Plantation Protection Department of the Vietnam Tea Association asked localities to keep a close watch on the use of pesticides to ensure exported products meet importers' standards.

Also tea processing companies should work with farmers to create supply chains and offer farming techniques to meet the international standards of groups such as the Rainforest Alliance¹ (RA) Certificate or Vietnamese Good Agricultural Practices² (VietGAP).

(<http://vietnamnews.vn/economy/243047/tea-brands-need-quality-boost-to-expand-exports.html>)



2. Move to Standardise National Qualifications

Vietnam is considering building a national qualifications framework that will standardise workers' qualifications by 2014. If approved, the framework will provide a boost to Vietnamese workers and improve learner-mobility between countries in the region ahead of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Community schedule, which is to begin in 2015. The proposed framework would likely divide the system into two major strands – higher education and technical and vocational training – with clearer definitions for different levels. Currently, Vietnam has about 2.2 million undergraduate students and about 4 million in vocational and technical schools or other skill-based programmes.



The lack of a national framework has made it difficult for students to move across the system and limits progress in quality assurance and teacher training. It also limits the connection between education and the labor market. The perception that vocational and technical training is 'low-level' has created a rush towards academic qualifications. This has caused a race for university degrees rather than for specific skills appropriate for the labour market.

Nationwide exams held in July have reported that approximately 400,000 high school students failed to gain entry to universities and 250,000 could not enter academic colleges and a survey conducted by

the General Statistic Office and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has shown that three out of ten 15-29 year olds are 'too educated' for their job and cannot reach their potential within a company.

Most frameworks used internationally cover both formal and informal qualifications and working experience. It took Thailand 10 years to build its national qualifications framework, which categorises programmes, graduates and learning outcomes from Level 1 (associate degree) to level 6 (doctorate).

Countries within the ASEAN community are also planning to build a common reference framework possibly by 2018, to compare the qualifications of workers and students across 10 nations. And they are also planning to build a common reference framework possibly by 2018, to compare the qualifications of workers and students across 10 nations.

The national qualifications framework must help people understand what the qualifications are and professional trajectory. A system that can ensure the relevance of qualifications for employers and protect learners should be the target. It is expected that the proposal for developing the framework would be submitted for government approval in the second quarter of 2014.

<http://vietnamnews.vn/society/243547/move-to-standardise-national-qualifications.html>

3. Rapid Method to Measure Carbon Footprints

Researchers have developed new softwares that can rapidly calculate the carbon footprints of thousands of products simultaneously, a process that up to now has been time consuming and expensive. The methodology should help companies to accurately label products, and to design ways to reduce their environmental impacts.

This is the result of a collaborative project between the World Resources Institute's Lenfest Centre for Sustainable Energy and PepsiCo, Inc. Its original aim was to evaluate and help standardise PepsiCo's calculations of the amount of carbon dioxide emitted when a product is made, packaged, distributed and disposed of. Started in 2007, it resulted in the first US carbon footprint label certified by an impartial third party, for Tropicana orange juice. PepsiCo has been pilot-testing the methodology for other uses since 2011.



A life-cycle-analysis database was used – a tool used to assess the environmental impact of a product – that covered 1,137 PepsiCo products. The team then developed three new techniques that work together, enabling them to calculate thousands of footprints within minutes, with minimal user input. The key component was a model that generates estimated emission factors for materials, eliminating manual mapping of a product's ingredients and packaging materials. The software complies with guidelines sponsored by the nonprofit World Resources Institute, which provides standards against which carbon footprints can be audited.

Up until now, life-cycle-analysis has mostly been performed one product at a time. This imposes large requirements for personnel, expertise, and time, and few companies have enough employees with specialized expertise. Although there have been efforts to overcome this bottleneck by reverting to aggregate data and calculations, but they usually miss out on the microscopic level of detail that a proper analysis requires.

The International Standards Organisation (ISO) recently developed a Technical Specification, ISO/TS 14067:2013, which specifies principles, requirements and guidelines for the quantification and communication of the carbon footprint of products, including both goods and services, based on GHG emissions and removals over the life cycle of a product.

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/09/120913151132.htm>

4. New EU Directive on Mobile Phone Chargers Sidestepped

A new EU directive aimed at harmonising mobile phone chargers has been voted by the European Union as part of a radio equipment directive. Accordingly, a single charger will have to be compatible with all mobile phones to give people relief from drawers full of separate chargers, while phone-makers are still allowed to continue supplying different connector cables with their phones.

The connector loophole means that iPhone and Android users will continue to have separate cables when charging their smartphones. Smartphone and tablet chargers typically come in two parts: one part



that plugs into the wall and a separate cable that connects the charger to the phone. While the EU directive applies to the plug part, it does not apply to the connector cable. The communication director

for Digital Europe said that, when talking about harmonization of the charger, they are only talking about the bit that goes into the wall.

According to the European Parliament, the directive lays down harmonised rules for placing radio equipment, including cellular telephones, car-door openers and modems, on the market. The rules aim to keep pace with the growing number and variety of radio equipment devices and ensure that they do not interfere with each other while respecting essential health and safety requirements.

But the move could also create headaches for manufacturers, as the rule could be enforced as early as 2017. And critics warned that the single charger rule would lead to red tape for business and could trigger higher charges for consumers. The directive will still have to be formally approved by the Council of Europe, made up of ministers from across the EU. Member states will have two years to put the rules into their national laws and manufacturers will have an additional year to comply.

<http://www.independent.ie/business/technology/new-eu-directive-on-mobile-phone-chargers-sidestepped-by-manufacturers-30090567.html>

5. Condoms Fail to Meet Safety Standards

A study recently released by the British company Crown Agents revealed that more than a quarter of the 170 million condoms sold each year in Vietnam are of substandard quality, in a workshop organised by General Office for Population Family Planning in co-operation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Hai Phong, Vietnam.

During the workshop, Deputy Minister of Health Nguyen Viet Tien shared that using low-quality condoms would cause serious consequences such as an increase in unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections such as HIV.

It is of the responsibilities of national and sub-national authorities in the provision of quality male condoms. One survey showed that 170 million condoms were imported and distributed via wholesalers and retailers primarily in Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City, where no quality control mechanisms are in place. And 26 percent failed to meet international standards as well as the technical requirements of World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNFPA.

Technical Director of Crown Agents said at the workshop that a maximum of five percent of substandard condoms was common for international tests. It was serious to identify such a high level of failure. Representatives at the event suggested that the Health Ministry publish a circular on national standards of contraceptive devices, including condoms, to ensure protection and safety for all.

<http://vietnamnews.vn/society/253157/condoms-in-viet-nam-fail-to-meet-safety-standards.html>



International Conference: *The Benefits of Standards*

Many organisations from the private and public sector make significant use of standards and participate in standards development: most of them realise that standards bring substantial benefits. But there are other organisations that make just a marginal use of standards or that do not use them at all. They perceive the use of standards as a burden, are not aware of tangible benefits that standards can bring to their activities and don't consider participating in standards development.

One key aspect of the mission of National Standards Bodies (NSB) is to dialogue with organisations from all stakeholder groups, to engage them in standardisation and to assist them in getting the most from both participating in standards development and in using standards. Being able to demonstrate and communicate the tangible benefits that standards bring to organisations – and, more in general, to citizens and society – is therefore essential.

An international conference entitled “The Benefits of Standards – Demonstrating and Communicating the Value of Standards to Industry, Government and Society” organised by ISO – the International Standards Organisation, in partnership with SPRING – the NSB of Singapore took place at the Goodwood Park hotel of Singapore on April 03-04, 2014.

The conference was organised as an interactive event, focusing on two key topics: how to demonstrate the value of standards and how best to communicate the value of standards. The conference website and presentations as well as the outcomes of the event can be accessed at URLs: <http://www.iso.org/sites/2014-EBS-Conference-Singapore/index.html> and <http://www.iso.org/sites/2014-EBS-Conference-Singapore/outcome.html>.

6. Vietnam to Apply Quality Management System

In an effort to reform the public administrative system, the Vietnamese government has decided to apply the Quality Management System standard to administrative agencies in order to improve the quality of these offices. This was stipulated in item 6, Article 7 of the Decree No.178/2007/ND-CP³, in which “Ministries and Ministers shall direct the realisation of regulations on autonomy and accountability in the management and use of payrolls, administrative management funds, applicable to administrative agencies and on autonomy and accountability in the performance of tasks, organization of apparatuses, payroll and finance, applicable to state-run non-business units; to apply the quality control system in accordance with the standard TCVN ISO 9001: 2000 to ministries’ activities.”



Over the past few years, thanks to the modernisation process, the functional quality of administrative offices and entities have been considerably improved. The application of the quality control system according to the standard TCVN ISO 9001:2008⁴, as well as the application of information technology (IT) in the operations of administrative agencies, has yielded positive results in recent years. Up to March 2011, 1453 administrative agencies both at the central and local levels were granted ISO standard compliance certificates.

The application of IT in services provided for citizens and enterprises has helped to enhance confidence and cultivate the habits of using services provided by administrative agencies amongst the society. The results attained will be the basis for consideration of expanding IT application in the coming time, especially the web-based online services and the services provided at single window for dealing with works pertaining to administrative procedures.

Most recently, the Prime Minister has signed the Decision No.19/2014/QĐ-TTg dated March 05, 2014 on the application of the national standard TCVN ISO 9001:2008 into the operation of State administrative offices, organisations. Accordingly, offices at ministerial and subordinate levels, provincial peoples’ committees and subordinate offices are the main implementing objects of this Decision. It is hoped that the quality of public administrative service will be improved when the standard is widely applied so that the goal of administrative reforms can be achieved in the near future.

Endnotes

- 1 The Rainforest Alliance is an international nonprofit organisation that works to conserve biodiversity and ensure sustainable livelihoods. It uses the power of markets to arrest the major drivers of deforestation and environmental destruction: timber extraction, agricultural expansion, cattle ranching and tourism. They work to ensure millions of acres of working forests, farms, ranchlands and hotel properties are managed according to rigorous sustainability standards.
- 2 VietGAP is a government decree laying out the principles for sustainable and safe agricultural production supported by certification and auditing systems. For more information, refer to the Decree No. 59/2012/TT-BNNPTNT dated on November 09, 2012.
- 3 Decree No.178/2007/ND-CP defines the functions, tasks and organizational structures of Ministries and Ministerial-level agencies.
- 4 The national standard TCVN ISO 9001:2008 – Quality management systems: Requirements is a standard adopted from the international standard ISO 9001: 2008. It specifies requirements for a quality management system where an organization (i) needs to demonstrate its ability to consistently provide product that meets customer and applicable statutory and regulatory requirements, and (ii) aims to enhance customer satisfaction through the effective application of the system, including processes for continual improvement of the system and the assurance of conformity to customer and applicable statutory and regulatory requirements.