

Title Quality management in supply chain of cabbage in Lao PDR
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Citation Book of abstracts, APS2010 & SEAsia2010 & GMS2010, August 2-4, 2010, Radisson Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand
Keyword chain Supply; cabbage; quality

Abstract

Quality management in the supply chain of cabbage produced in Pakxong District, Champasak Province, Lao PDR, for domestic market (Vientiane City, about 700 km away) and for export (Thailand, 80-500 km away) were examined to determine good and faulty handling practices and devise improvements that could reduce postharvest losses and enhance quality and marketability of the produce. The survey used a structured and pre-tested questionnaire and covered 15 farmers, 5 collectors and 5 collector-wholesalers each for domestic and export supply chains. Ten domestic retailers were also interviewed. For both supply chains, farmers harvested the cabbages when full size but firm. The cabbages were trimmed of wrapper leaves and allowed to drain of water before packing in 20-kg plastic bags, a form of modified atmosphere packaging that could minimize excessive weight loss. However, transport practices were deficient. The cabbages were jam-packed in the cargo load of a tractor-driven cart used to transport from the farm to the collector's house and were not protected from exposure to the heat of the sun. As packaging container, plastic bags could not protect the produce from physical damage. The bags of produce, which were usually transported to Vientiane using public bus, were also prone to heating which could promote bacterial soft rot. On the other hand, in the export supply chains, trimming, sorting based on size, and packing in plastic bags before transport to and on arrival in Thailand were desirable practices. However, containerization is not practiced for cabbages transported from the farm to the wholesale market in Champasak near the Laos-Thai border where trading with Thai collector-wholesalers took place. In addition, the non-refrigerated transport conditions from Champasak to Pathom Thani Province in Thailand (about 500 km away) could result to heating within the plastic pack. Transport costs and losses were the main factors of the lower price offered to Lao farmers and collectors. In both domestic and export supply chains, short- or long-term storage to even out shipment and/or to wait for better market price is not practiced.