

# Postharvest research education and extension in Thailand: capacity building in postharvest technology at the university level

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## Abstract

Postharvest losses in product quality and quantity are a major problem that limits domestic and export-import trade of many agricultural crops. The problem is more serious in less developed countries in The Asia Pacific Region including Thailand. The losses also limit the productivity and competitiveness of developing countries in the global market. On the other hand demand for quality and safe agricultural produce is increasing due to increased population, improved standards of living as a result of high economic growth, and better education which increases consumer's awareness of food quality and safety. The problem of postharvest losses and the need to ensure an increased and enduring supply of quality and safe agricultural produce are better addressed by developing a strong and solid human resource who can ably design, innovate, implement, and manage technological and non-technological interventions. A regional approach to human resource development (HRD) in postharvest technology is imperative in this era of market globalization. In Thailand, the postharvest technology course was established in Kasetsart University and Chiang Mai University for more than 30 years ago. After that this course has been expanded to many universities. The content of postharvest subjects and the curriculum depends on the policy of each university. The development of postgraduate education and research in close collaboration with industry is considered as an effective and optimum measure to address the various constraints and challenges in an interpreted manner. During 2000-2005, The Postgraduate Education Research Program in Postharvest Technology was implemented through a university consortium, with Chiang Mai University (CMU) as a leader and Kasetsart University (KU), Khon Kaen University (KKU) and King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT) as members. Ultimately, a Postharvest

Technology Center was created and supported by the university consortium members. The program aimed to produce postgraduate students, high quality and coordinated research, effective collaboration with industry, and transfer of postharvest technologies. During 2006-2009, the program was expanded with new members of Maejo University, Naresuan University, Prince of Songkla University, Suranaree University of Technology and Ubon Ratchathani University, emphasizing on increasing of Ph.D. students, more apparent research focus, and formation of postharvest technology research groups among academic/research staff of participation universities, in order to tackle the present and future national postharvest technology problems. The program name was changed to be “Postharvest Technology Innovation Center” (PHTIC), finally. Besides, the PHTIC also transfers postharvest technology to many sectors including growers, exporters and other private sectors.