

Bhutan Food and Drug Authority Conducted Study Visit to Thailand to Strengthen SPS Capacity

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A delegation of officials from the Bhutan Food and Drug Authority (BFDA) successfully completed a four-day study visit to Thailand from 21–24 April 2026, aimed at strengthening Bhutan’s institutional capacity to implement Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures in line with international standards. The visit was conducted under the “Accelerate Bhutan’s Job Transformation through Renewable Natural Resources Value Chain Project,” funded by the World Bank.

The study visit was undertaken at a critical juncture for Bhutan, following the designation of BFDA as the National SPS Enquiry Point in December 2024. This designation marked a significant milestone in Bhutan’s ongoing efforts toward accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). As part of this transition, strengthening SPS transparency mechanisms, including notification procedures and enquiry handling, has become essential to facilitate safe and predictable agri-food trade.

The primary objective of the visit was to address existing capacity gaps within BFDA, particularly in understanding and implementing WTO-SPS requirements. Given the relatively recent establishment of Bhutan’s SPS Enquiry Point, there was a need to learn from an experienced and internationally recognized institution. Thailand’s National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards (ACFS), known for its robust SPS





systems and strong global engagement, was identified as an ideal learning partner.

The study visit provided participants with both conceptual knowledge and practical exposure to SPS systems. Sessions highlighted Thailand's SPS framework, focusing on notification procedures, enquiry handling, and the importance of transparency and stakeholder coordination in meeting WTO obligations. Participants were introduced to digital tools such as electronic certification systems and the WTO's ePing platform, underscoring the role of technology in enhancing efficiency and facilitating trade. Field visits to airport inspection and quarantine facilities offered first-hand insights into import and export controls, food safety inspections, and plant health procedures, reinforcing the practical application of regulatory measures. The programme's balanced design equipped Bhutanese officials with skills directly relevant to their context, including end-to-end experience in SPS notifications, strengthened stakeholder engagement, and exposure to

structured consultation platforms.

The knowledge and experience gained from the study visit has provided a clear roadmap for institutional reforms, including the development of standard operating procedures, establishment of coordination mechanisms, and enhancement of information dissemination systems. In the short term, BFDA is expected to focus on strengthening core transparency functions, improving responsiveness to SPS notifications and enquiries, and building awareness among stakeholders. Medium-term efforts will likely involve the enhancement of a national SPS information portal, introduction of early warning systems, and increased participation in WTO SPS Committee activities. In the long term, the adoption of a fully integrated e-SPS system and alignment with international standards will be critical to ensuring Bhutan's compliance with global trade requirements and enhancing its export potential.

In conclusion, the study visit to Thailand provided a comprehensive and practical learning experience for BFDA officials, offering valuable insights into internationally recognized SPS practices and systems. By drawing on Thailand's experience, Bhutan is well-positioned to strengthen its SPS framework, improve regulatory efficiency, and support safe and transparent trade in agricultural and food products.