BFDA and ADB Conducted Awareness Workshop on SPS Requirements to Strengthen Bhutan's Agri-food Trade



Paro, 21 November 2026 – The Bhutan Food and Drug Authority (BFDA), in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), successfully conducted a three-day Awareness Workshop on *Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Requirements for Agri-food Trade* from 18 to 20th November 2026 at Tashi Namgay Resort, Paro.

The workshop brought together around 40 participants representing private sector organizations, agri-food producers, processors, importers and exporters, State-Owned Enterprises, relevant government agencies, members of the SPS Technical Working Group, and officials managing the SPS National Enquiry Point within BFDA. The event provided an important platform to strengthen stakeholders' understanding of SPS requirements, promote dialogue between regulators and businesses, and identify practical ways to improve Bhutan's readiness for safe and competitive agri-food trade.

In her opening remarks, the Director of BFDA highlighted that producing safe, nutritious, high-quality and organically grown agricultural products does not automatically guarantee acceptance in international markets. Products must also meet the applicable food safety, animal health and plant health requirements of importing countries. She emphasized that SPS compliance must begin at the farm and be maintained throughout the supply chain, from production and processing to storage, transportation and delivery to consumers.

The Director further underscored the growing importance of SPS compliance as Bhutan advances its negotiations to accede to the World Trade Organization (WTO). She noted that preparedness for WTO membership requires coordinated efforts by government institutions, businesses, producers and other stakeholders. She encouraged participants to view SPS

compliance not merely as a regulatory obligation or cost of doing business, but as an investment in product quality, business competitiveness, consumer confidence and access to higher-value markets.

Delivering the keynote presentation, the ADB Project Team Lead, Ms. Hanna Bucher, Senior Public Sector Specialist (Trade and Industry), highlighted ADB's commitment to strengthening Bhutan's institutional and technical capacity to implement effective SPS measures and facilitate safe agri-food trade. Through the Trade Expansion and Diversification (TREAD) programme, ADB is supporting key SPS-related reforms within BFDA, including the development of a Codex-aligned, risk-based Food Import Control System, preparation of a National Food Safety Emergency Response Plan, and strengthening of the SPS National Enquiry Point through the development of an enquiry management system and capacity-building activities for officials responding to SPS enquiries. She also underscored the importance of raising awareness among producers and other stakeholders to improve understanding of SPS requirements and compliance responsibilities. In addition, the presentation highlighted regional support under the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) programme to strengthen national SPS and technical barriers to trade (TBT) systems, including improvements in testing and certification infrastructure, laboratory accreditation, harmonization of standards and more efficient risk-based regulatory controls. These initiatives are expected to contribute to stronger institutional systems, enhanced technical capabilities and improved capacity to meet international SPS requirements.

Over the three days, the workshop covered five thematic areas: understanding the WTO and the SPS Agreement; international SPS standards developed under the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH); practical implementation of SPS requirements in Bhutan; export readiness and international market access; and traceability and supply-chain assurance.

Technical sessions examined Good Agricultural Practices, plant pest surveillance and management, food safety inspection and laboratory testing, pesticide and veterinary drug residues, and import and export procedures. Participants also learned about the role of Bhutan's SPS National Enquiry Point and SPS Information Portal in improving access to SPS-related information and helping businesses understand regulatory requirements. The sessions highlighted the importance of science-based and risk-based measures, appropriate documentation, inspection and certification, and effective coordination among institutions.

The programme also incorporated practical group exercises, plenary discussions and experience-sharing sessions. These enabled participants to consider hypothetical SPS-related trade scenarios, discuss challenges encountered in meeting importing-country requirements, and explore practical approaches to improving export readiness. Presentations on commodity prioritization, market access, product traceability and livestock product quality further connected regulatory requirements with the operational realities of agri-food businesses.

A key message emerging from the workshop was that **SPS compliance is a shared responsibility and must be integrated throughout the agri-food value chain**. Government agencies have an important role in establishing effective regulatory, inspection, testing and certification systems, while businesses and producers must apply good practices and demonstrate that their products meet relevant requirements.

BFDA reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening Bhutan's national SPS system, improving access to SPS information, and working closely with relevant agencies, development partners and the private sector. The workshop is expected to contribute to stronger stakeholder coordination, improved understanding of SPS obligations, and more informed action to address existing capacity and compliance gaps.

Through this collaborative initiative, BFDA and ADB aim to support Bhutan's efforts to safeguard human, animal and plant health while building confidence in Bhutanese agri-food products and facilitating their access to regional and international markets.

~~~
~~~