

FIA POSITION PAPER

Product Registration Processes and Requirements in ASEAN

Key Positions

- FIA supports the adoption of a risk-based approach in the food safety assessment of products, by differentiating the control measures for food according to the risk profiles.
- FIA supports a reduction or simplification in product registration processes for low-risk food products, and place the emphasis on industry's food safety practices and compliance through post-marketing surveillance.

1. Introduction

This paper sets out the position of Food Industry Asia (FIA) on product registration for food products upon a review of the processes and requirements in ASEAN countries.

The process of pre-market product registration is to ensure the safety of food product through the assessment of documentations, such as certifications, declarations, and test results. In the ASEAN region, most countries require food products to be registered prior to sale, except for Malaysia and Singapore where products of lower risk do not need to go through product registration and only high-risk products like seafood and meat require approval of the source. In these countries, a rigorous post-market surveillance is conducted to ensure the safety of products in the market.

2. Challenges

The implementation and enforcement of food safety control measures that are fragmented and inconsistent have often resulted in inefficiency and give rise to trade barriers. In a survey that was carried out under the ASEAN Food and Beverage Alliance (AFBA) with industry members in 2018, the requirements and challenges for product registration were examined, along with related matters such as product laboratory analysis, custom clearance, the availability and accessibility of relevant information.

Product Registration

The process of product registration is challenging, especially in countries like Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand. The challenges that are commonly highlighted by industry members include the burdensome documentations and detailed information on product and ingredient which could be proprietary information. These result in a long lead time for products to complete the process of product registration, from submission to approval. The process is often longer than expected due to the difficulties that companies face in meeting the requirements and inefficiency of online registration portals.

Product Laboratory Analysis

Product laboratory analysis is often required as part of the documents to be submitted for product registration and customs clearance. Industry members highlighted the lack of recognition towards laboratory test reports that are issued by overseas testing facilities. There may also be differences in the testing methods that are being administered and at times, industry members are faced with the request from government officers for additional parameters to be tested, even though these are not normally required. In addition, the lack of regulatory guidance and accessibility to such information furthered the uncertainty and inconsistency for companies to comply with the testing requirements.

Availability of Information

The availability of information is closely related to the ease of carrying out product registration. It is agreed that more can be done to keep businesses informed on the necessary information. The lack of information that is available online, ad hoc changes in regulations and unclear standards or procedures are the top challenges that slows down the process of product registration. Beyond that, the accessibility of information is also challenging as companies still depend on physical meetings with government officers to gather information and this points to the need to enhance information accessibility on public domains such as government portals to increase efficiency.

Customs Clearance

The process on custom clearance is taken into consideration along with the intent to address challenges around product registration as this affects the importation of food products. Based on the feedback from companies, inspection at the border comes with much uncertainty due to the inconsistent procedures that are practised by customs officers and the burdensome documentations to be submitted.

3. FIA's Position

FIA supports the necessity of safeguarding food safety with control measures that are according to the inherent risk in food. In other words, the assessment for food that bears low risk or food with well-established safety profile should be differentiated from high-risk food. The adoption of a risk-based approach, coupled with post-market surveillance improve a product's speed to market and at the same time, uphold food safety principles and regulatory effectiveness.

4. Recommendations

FIA supports the adoption of a risk-based framework, where the degree of food safety assessment measures is dependent on the risk category of a particular food product, whether produced domestically or in other countries. Along with that, FIA welcomes the practices in Malaysia, Singapore and recently, Vietnam that do not enforce product registration for low-risk food and place emphasis on industry's food safety practices through post-marketing surveillance. The practices in these countries could serve as references for other ASEAN countries.

While working towards the long term goal of removing or simplifying product registration, FIA also wishes to address specific challenges that are faced by companies and to set out short term goals to be achieved.

To ease the process of document submission, FIA calls for flexibility in the acceptance of documents and enhancement of online submission capacities.

Similarly, FIA also supports a risk-based approach towards the selection of laboratory test parameters to be conducted such that the relevant and required test parameters are tested, according to the product types. Additionally, the adherence towards international best practices and standards facilitates the recognition of testing methods and test reports that are issued by overseas testing facilities.

To overcome the uncertainties in the inspection process at the border, FIA supports a streamlined communication process between government agencies to encourage an alignment in the inspection procedures.

Lastly, FIA wishes to highlight the difficulty in obtaining information to facilitate the process of product registration. The steps in making available updated English translated regulations, along with the provisions of communication channels to keep industry members abreast on regulatory developments would further enhance the efficiency of intra-ASEAN trade.