

TRADE LIBERALISATION

THAILAND GETS READY TO SPREAD ITS VETERINARY EXPERTISE IN ASEAN REGION



DR ACHARIYA SAILASUTA, president of the Thai Veterinary Medical Association, says the Kingdom's position as a major food exporter could explain the superior quality of its veterinarians.

High quality of personnel would give them a clear advantage in the area

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Thailand has great potential to export veterinarians to cash in on Asean trade liberalisation, Dr Achariya Sailasuta, president of the Thai Veterinary Medical Association under Royal Patronage (TVMA), said in an exclusive interview with *The Nation*.

"Thailand is the strongest country in producing quality veterinar-

ians compared with other countries in Asean," she said.

Achariya, who is also secretary-general of the Federation of the Asian Veterinary Associations, said Thailand's position as major food exporter could explain the superior quality of its veterinarians, who are in charge of the entire food-production chain.

She gave the example of Charoen Pokphand, which has a strong business foothold in raising animals for food in China.

The group recruited hundreds of veterinarians from Thailand to work in its farms and processing plants in China to prevent animal diseases and maintain food safety and quality control.

Many Thai veterinarians work abroad, including in North America and Europe, in laboratories and research and development, as well as at international agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation and World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

"Veterinarians are not only animal doctors but also creators of food production. They are involved actively in all processes of the food

chain from farm to table, including farming, slaughter, food packaging, and catering, especially in food-safety issues," she said.

Opportunities will increase as the Asean Economic Community comes into full effect in 2015, not only in the region but as a springboard to other countries with which Asean has free-trade agreements, she said.

"The most important thing is that we have to develop our competitiveness by offering world-class quality."

She said six major Thai universities were producing graduates in veterinary medicine, namely Chulalongkorn, Kasetsart, Mahidol, Khon Kaen University, Chiang Mai University, and Mahanakorn University of Technology. They produce about 500 graduates in the field per year. About 10 per cent of newly graduated veterinarians go to work abroad.

"There are currently more than 6,000 veterinarians in Thailand. About 60 per cent of them have opened animal clinics, while the other 40 per cent are involved in livestock and food-animal businesses," said Achariya.

Achariya said many Thai veterinarians were developing their skills

with modern techniques. They have branched into specific and niche areas of animal care and treatment.

Achariya said Thailand had been accepted by consumers around the world in the area of food safety, and the supporting fundamental was that the country has strong veterinary personnel, who have taken a key role in the dramatic growth of its food industry.

"Thailand is also a centre for veterinary care in the region. The country is at the forefront in special areas of animal care and treatment," Achariya said.

She said the government had the vision of trying to promote Thailand as the "Kitchen of the World". To reach that vision, it needed to provide strategic support to veterinarians, especially providing world-class education and facilities such as laboratories and R&D.

TVMA will host "Thai Vet Day 2011" from August 4 and 7 at Impact Hall 7, Muang Thong Thani.

The event is being held to celebrate the 100th anniversary of veterinary education in Thailand, which will be reached next year.