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for Environment  
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**Marketing products based on ecosystem-based adaptation  
(EbA) approaches for selected  
forest and farm producer organisations**

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The objective of this study was to develop marketing plans for selected EbA-based forest and farm products in order to engage members of forest and farm producer organisation (FFPO) with relevant markets for Participatory Guarantee System (PGS)-certified products with EbA quality claims for at least five value chains in Northern Viet Nam. The research team would like to express its sincere gratitude to the IIED team, the FFF management board and the VNFU central committee. Special thanks are extended to the facilitators in the five provinces of the research area, the cooperative directors and the heads of cooperative groups who supported the research team in collecting data to gain a comprehensive perspective on capacities, needs and adaptation solutions through local production models.

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## Contents

Acknowledgements .....	2
List of boxes, figures and tables.....	9
Abbreviations .....	10
1 Introduction.....	11
1.1 Background and objectives.....	11
1.2 Scope of study.....	12
1.3 Structure of the report.....	13
1.4 Research methodology.....	14
1.4.1 Qualitative research .....	14
1.4.2 Quantitative research.....	14
1.4.3 Sampling method for in-depth and online interviews.....	15
1.5 Research limitations.....	16
2 Analysing the data: key findings and marketing insights.....	17
2.1 Analysing the key informant interviews (KIIs) .....	17
2.2 Analysing the consumer survey data .....	19
2.2.1 Personal information .....	19
2.2.2 Shopping habits .....	21
2.2.3 Awareness of collective labels/PGS and EbA .....	24
2.2.4 Feedback on selected forest and farm products.....	27
2.2.5 Opinions on quality and pricing .....	28
2.2.6 Opinions on online shopping.....	30
2.2.7 Suggestions and feedback.....	31
3 Theoretical basis for EbA-based forest and farm products marketing plans.....	32
3.1 Characteristics of EbA-based forest and farm products.....	32
3.2 Developing a marketing plan .....	33
3.3 Analysing the current situation and marketing opportunities .....	34
3.4 Defining a marketing strategy and marketing objectives.....	39
3.5 Developing a marketing programme.....	42
3.6 Marketing-effort management and tracking .....	42
4 Marketing plan for honey products .....	43
4.1 Current situation and marketing opportunities.....	43

4.2 Analysis of the honey market .....	46
4.3 Analysis of market competitors .....	46
4.4 Defining marketing strategies and goals.....	48
4.4.1 Product offering.....	48
4.4.2 Market presence, brand recognition and pricing .....	49
4.4.3 Distribution channels.....	49
4.4.4 Consumer base.....	49
4.4.5 Marketing and advertising.....	50
4.5 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats .....	50
4.6 Target markets and product positioning.....	52
4.7 Developing marketing strategies.....	53
4.7.1 Consumer-focused strategy .....	53
4.7.2 Pricing strategy .....	53
4.7.3 Distribution strategy .....	53
4.7.4 Communication strategy.....	54
4.8 Developing a marketing programme.....	54
4.8.1 Building a brand .....	54
4.8.2 Social media marketing .....	55
4.8 Monitoring and evaluation.....	55
4.10 Marketing budget.....	56
5 Marketing plan for Gynostemma pentaphyllum tea products .....	57
5.1 Current situation analysis and marketing opportunities.....	57
5.2 Analysis of the Gynostemma pentaphyllum tea market .....	60
5.2.1 High product quality .....	60
5.2.2 Potential markets .....	60
5.2.3 Sustainable raw material development .....	60
5.2.4 Local government support.....	61
5.3 Analysis of market competitors .....	61
5.4 Defining marketing strategies and goals.....	62
5.4.1 Product offering.....	62
5.4.2 Market presence, brand recognition and pricing .....	62
5.4.3 Distribution channels.....	63
5.4.4 Consumer base.....	63
5.4.5 Marketing and advertising.....	63

5.5 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats .....	64
5.6 Target market and product positioning .....	66
5.7 Developing marketing strategies.....	66
5.7.1 Consumer-focused strategy .....	66
5.7.2 Pricing strategy .....	67
5.7.3 Distribution strategy .....	67
5.7.4 Communication strategy.....	67
5.8 Developing a marketing programme.....	68
5.8.1 Building a brand .....	68
5.8.2 Social media marketing .....	69
5.9 Monitoring and evaluation.....	69
5.10 Marketing budget.....	69
6 Marketing plan for bamboo shoot products .....	70
6.1 Current situation analysis and marketing opportunities.....	70
6.2 Analysis of the bamboo shoot market.....	72
6.2.1 Bamboo shoot market dynamics.....	72
6.2.2 Limited supply: a significant market challenge.....	73
6.2.3 Developing new products and expanding market potential.....	73
6.2.4 Market trends for bamboo shoots .....	74
6.3 Analysis of market competitors .....	75
6.4 Defining marketing strategies and goals.....	76
6.4.1 Product offering.....	76
6.4.2 Market presence, brand recognition and pricing .....	77
6.4.3 Distribution channels.....	77
6.4.4 Consumer base.....	78
6.4.5 Marketing and advertising.....	78
6.5 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats .....	78
6.6 Target market and product positioning .....	81
6.7 Developing marketing strategies.....	83
6.7.1 Pricing strategy.....	83
6.7.2 Distribution strategy .....	84
6.7.3 Communications strategy .....	84
6.8 Developing a marketing programme.....	84
6.8.1 Implementation.....	84

6.8.2 Building a brand .....	84
6.8.3 Digital marketing.....	85
6.8.4 Partnerships and consumer engagement.....	85
6.9 Monitoring and evaluation.....	85
6.10 Marketing budget.....	85
6.11 Potential of EbA/sustainability labelling .....	86
7 Marketing plan for red pomelo products.....	87
7.1 Current situation analysis and marketing opportunities.....	87
7.2 Analysis of the red pomelo market .....	88
7.2.1 Product market links.....	89
7.2.2 Current and potential markets.....	90
7.2.3 Southern market potential.....	90
7.3 Analysis of market competitors .....	91
7.4 Defining marketing strategies and objectives .....	91
7.4.1 Product offering.....	92
7.4.2 Market presence, brand recognition and pricing .....	92
7.4.3 Distribution channels.....	93
7.4.4 Consumer base.....	93
7.4.5 Marketing and advertising.....	93
7.5 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats .....	93
7.6 Target market and product positioning .....	95
7.7 Developing marketing strategies.....	97
7.7.1 Consumer-focused strategy .....	97
7.7.2 Pricing strategy .....	98
7.7.3 Distribution strategy .....	98
7.7.4 Communication strategy.....	98
7.8 Developing a marketing programme.....	98
7.8.1 Implementation.....	98
7.8.2 Digital marketing.....	99
7.8.3 Partnerships and collaborations .....	100
7.8.4 Product sampling and promotions .....	100
7.8.5 Community engagement.....	100
7.8.6 Consumer feedback and engagement .....	101
7.9 Monitoring and evaluation.....	101

7.10 Marketing budget.....	101
8 Marketing plan for safe vegetable products .....	102
8.1 Current situation and marketing opportunities.....	102
8.1.1 Organisational structure.....	102
8.1.2 Production.....	103
8.1.3 Harvesting and post-harvesting .....	104
8.2 Analysis of the safe vegetables market.....	104
8.3 Analysis of market competitors .....	106
8.4 Defining marketing strategies and objectives .....	107
8.4.1 Product offering.....	107
8.4.2 Market presence, brand recognition and pricing .....	107
8.4.3 Distribution channels.....	108
8.4.4 Consumer base.....	108
8.4.5 Marketing and advertising.....	109
8.5 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats .....	109
8.6 Target markets and product positioning.....	112
8.7 Developing marketing strategies.....	113
8.7.1 Consumer-focused strategy .....	113
8.7.2 Pricing strategy .....	114
8.7.3 Distribution strategy .....	114
8.7.4 Communication strategy.....	114
8.8 Developing a marketing programme.....	114
8.9 Monitoring and evaluation.....	116
8.10 Marketing budget.....	116
9 Conclusions.....	117
9.1 Research findings.....	117
9.2 Validity and reliability.....	118
9.3 Suggestions for further research .....	118
References.....	119
Appendix 1. In-depth interview questions .....	120
What are EbA-based forest and farm products? .....	120
I. Questions for researchers, trainers and managers .....	120

II. Questions for businesses .....	121
III. Questions for producers and FFPOs .....	121
IV. Questions for support units.....	122
V. Questions for consumers.....	123
Appendix 2. Consumer survey .....	125
I. Personal information .....	125
II. Shopping habits.....	125
III. Awareness of collective labels/PGS and EbA .....	125
IV. Feedback on selected forest and farm products .....	126
V. Opinions on quality and price .....	128
VI. Opinions on online shopping.....	128
VII. Suggestions and feedback .....	128
Appendix 3. List of interviewees .....	129

## List of boxes, figures and tables

Box 1. Guide to buying red pomelos .....	99
Figure 1. Consumer survey data: gender, education, occupation and place of residence .....	20
Figure 2. Consumer survey data: age, household income, spending and interest in FFPs.....	20
Figure 3. Consumer survey data: forest and farm products purchasing habits.....	22
Figure 4. Consumer survey data: where consumers purchase FFPs.....	22
Figure 5. Consumer survey data: how frequently consumers purchase FFPs .....	23
Figure 6. Consumer survey data: product label usage habits .....	24
Figure 7. Consumer survey data: top product criteria for using FFPs.....	26
Figure 8. Consumer survey data: satisfaction with PGS organic products .....	26
Figure 9. Consumer survey data: awareness of selected FFPs in this study .....	27
Figure 10. Consumer survey data: satisfaction level with selected FFPs.....	27
Figure 11. Consumer survey data: likeliness to recommend selected FFPs to others.....	27
Figure 12. Consumer survey data: top priorities when purchasing selected FFPs products ....	29
Figure 13. Consumer survey data: price assessment of selected FFPs.....	30
Figure 14. Consumer survey data: benefits of buying FFPs online.....	30
Figure 15. The 4 Cs: product, price, promotion and place .....	37
Figure 16. The process of positioning FFPs in the market.....	40
Table 1. The five EbA-based forest and farm products selected for this study.....	12
Table 2. Description of interviewees by type .....	15
Table 3. Characteristics of 4P marketing.....	36
Table 4. SWOT analysis of Tinh Phat Cooperative .....	50
Table 5. SWOT analysis of Tan Lac Son Cooperative.....	64
Table 6. SWOT Analysis of Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative .....	78
Table 7. Target markets for Tan Xuan Bamboo shoots.....	81
Table 8. SWOT analysis of Tan Dong Cooperative.....	94
Table 9. Target markets for Tan Dong cooperative.....	95
Table 10. SWOT analysis of Tu Nhien Safe Vegetable Cooperative .....	109

## Abbreviations

CSA	Community-supported agriculture programmes
EbA	Ecosystem-based adaptation
EU	European Union
FFF	Forest and Farm Facility
FFPs	Forest and farm products
FFPOs	Forest and farm producer organisations
GACP	Good Agricultural and Collection Practices for Medicinal Plants
GAP	Good Agricultural Practices
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
IPM	Integrated pest management
KII	Key informant interview
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
NTFPs	Non-timber forest products
OCOP	Vietnam's One Commune, One Product programme
PGS	Participatory Guarantee System
SEO	Search engine optimisation
SWOT	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
TCVN	Vietnamese National Standards
VietGAP	Vietnamese Good Agricultural Practices
VNFU	Vietnam Farmer's Union
VOAA	Vietnam Organic Agriculture Association

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background and objectives

Climate change is having severe impacts on Vietnam's agriculture and forestry sectors. According to the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) report from the General Monetary and Multisectoral Macrodynamics for the Ecological Shift (GEMMES) Vietnam project, phenomena such as rising temperatures, prolonged droughts, unusual storms, and saltwater intrusion are reducing crop yields, threatening food security and causing significant damage to agroforestry communities, particularly in the northern mountainous regions (AFD 2021).

Forest and farm producer organisations (FFPOs), which play a critical role in the conservation and production of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) such as bamboo shoots, medicinal herbs and honey, are facing many challenges in maintaining operations due to climate change and habitat loss. The dependence of FFPOs on forest ecosystems to produce these goods means they must quickly adapt to the challenges posed by climate change.

Using EbA-based production approaches is one of the sustainable solutions to address these negative impacts. By protecting and restoring natural ecosystems, EbA enhances the resilience of vulnerable communities such as FFPOs, while contributing to natural resource conservation and the maintenance of sustainable livelihoods. To maximise effectiveness, marketing planning based on ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) approaches is essential.

The Scaling Up Community-led EbA in Biodiverse Forest Landscapes in Viet Nam project is being implemented by IIED and VNFU with support from the Global EbA Fund. The project is being carried out in five geographic areas: Bac Kan, Thai Nguyen, Son La, Hoa Binh and Yen Bai provinces in the Northern Midlands and Mountainous Region of Vietnam (referred to as the study area). The overall objective of the project is to scale up EbA approaches by addressing key existing barriers in knowledge exchange, market access and finance.

One component of the project involves stakeholder engagement and analysis, including the participation of key stakeholders, the legal framework, value chain opportunities, market demand, and the opportunities and accessibility of adopting collective biocultural heritage

labels (shared labels) or Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) labels. The overarching goal of this consulting report is to develop a marketing plan and evaluate the potential for PGS labelling for EbA-based forest and farm products (EbA-based forest and farm products) for at least five FFPOs in at least five value chains. To achieve this goal, the authors undertook the following tasks:

- Identifying target markets determining unique selling points
- Conducting a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis related to marketing PGS-certified products with EbA quality claims
- Setting marketing objectives for FFPOs
- Outlining potential promotion/marketing strategies (product, price, place and promotion strategies), and
- Developing an implementation plan for the marketing strategy.

The execution of this plan will help FFPOs expand their presence in the domestic market and gradually approach export markets by attracting new consumers in the private sector for the selected EbA-based forest and farm products and improving relationships with existing ones.

## 1.2 Scope of study

The study focused on marketing planning for five products in five selected value chains in the five provinces where FFPOs have received prior support through the Forest and Farm Facility programme (FFF), the programme the Global EbA Fund project aims to build on. Due to budget and time constraints, five EbA-based forest and farm products and FFPOs (selected from five cooperatives funded by the FFF) were randomly selected after consultation with experts from the FFF, Vietnam Farmers' Union (VNFU), institutes and schools. The five EbA-based forest and farm products and five FFPOs are described in Table 1.

**Table 1. The five EbA-based forest and farm products selected for this study**

Products	FFPOs	Locations
Thinh Phat honey	Thinh Phat Cooperative	Yen Binh district, Yen Bai province
Tan Lac Son <i>Gynostemma pentaphyllum</i> tea	Tan Lac Son Cooperative	Man Duc commune, Tan Lac district, Hoa Binh province

Tan Xuan bamboo shoots	Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative	Tan Xuan commune, Van Ho district, Son La province
Tan Dong red pomelo	Tan Dong Organic Pomelo Cultivation and Agricultural Services Cooperative	Dong Lai commune, Tan Lac district, Hoa Binh province
Natural safe vegetables of all kinds	Tu Nhien Natural Safe Vegetable Cooperative	Dong Sang commune, Moc Chau district, Son La province

### 1.3 Structure of the report

The introduction in Section 1 presents the background, objectives and scope of the study, followed by the research methodology used and the limitation of the research. Section 2 then details the analysis of empirical data collected for this study from key informant interviews (KIIs) and an online consumer survey. Section 3 describes the theoretical basis for marketing EbA-based forest and farm products, focusing on the components of a marketing plan. It evaluates marketing theories and considers the marketing direction for the selected EbA-based forest and farm products.

Sections 5–8 then outline proposed marketing plans for the five selected EbA-based forest and farm products produced by FFPOs, based on the empirical data analysed in Section 2: honey products, *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea products, bamboo shoot products, red pomelo products and safe vegetable products. Each section begins with an analysis of the FFPOs current situation and marketing opportunities, providing direction on to make the proposed marketing plan as effective as possible. The researcher has worked with FFPOs for many years and has first-hand information about the current situation of FFPOs and internal action. These sections will also include the results of the survey related to consumer purchasing preferences, identify target consumer markets, and suggest the best channels for marketing.

Finally, Section 9 presents the conclusions, a summary of the research findings and recommendations for further research.

## **1.4 Research methodology**

To gather information for this report, the research team used a combination of qualitative, quantitative and case-study methodologies.

### **1.4.1 Qualitative research**

The study utilised purposive sampling to select participants for in-depth key informant interviews (KIIs). This sampling method was chosen to ensure that the sample included key stakeholders with specific knowledge and experience relevant to EbA-labelled and PGS-certified products. In-depth interviews, conducted in person or by phone, targeted various groups such as researchers, managers, trainers, producers (farmers, cooperatives, FFPOs), businesses, support organisations and consumers. Interview questions are detailed in Appendix 1 and focused on key topics including:

- Awareness of the EbA approach in agricultural and forestry production
- Evaluation of quality standards and their role in promoting trust and market value, such as Vietnam's One Commune, One Product programme (OCOP), Vietnamese Good Agricultural Practices programme (VietGAP), organic PGS certification and Good Agricultural and Collection Practices for Medicinal Plants (GACP)
- Barriers to research, production and consumption of EbA-based products
- Market potential and development opportunities for EbA-based products, and
- Consumer awareness of EbA-based products and suitable marketing strategies.

These interviews provided valuable insights into perceptions, experiences, challenges and opportunities in applying EbA approaches to forest and farm production and consumption. In addition to direct interviews, secondary data were collected and analysed from sources such as industry reports, statistics from the General Statistics Office, and academic studies on forest and farm products. This helped identify market trends, competition and growth opportunities in the EbA-based product sector.

### **1.4.2 Quantitative research**

A structured survey, using a stratified random sampling approach, was conducted in parallel with in-depth interviews. This approach was intended to capture diverse consumer perspectives from various regions, thereby reducing sample bias. The survey included both multiple-choice and open-ended questions to collect data on consumer perceptions, shopping behaviour, and consumption patterns concerning EbA-based forest and farm products. The sample included consumers from the target provinces in the study and nearby areas (detailed

in Appendix 2), and the survey covered topics such as shopping habits, awareness of collective/PGS and EbA labels, product quality and price evaluations, and opinions on online shopping. Surveys were distributed via email, the messaging app Zalo, and at retail outlets. Data analysis was conducted using statistical tools such as Excel to examine frequencies, percentages and correlations, providing a comprehensive understanding of consumer needs and expectations that would inform marketing strategies for EbA-labelled products.

### 1.4.3 Sampling method for in-depth and online interviews

The interviews and surveys were conducted both in person and online (via Google Forms) from April to September 2024, resulting in 87 responses (37 in-depth interviews with target groups and 50 online consumer survey responses via Google Forms). Participants for the in-depth interviews were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on individuals and organisations with substantial expertise or interest in EbA practices and PGS-certified products. For example, researchers and managers with experience in agriculture, forestry and climate change were selected for their insights into EbA application and the role of research in promoting sustainable production. Business representatives were chosen based on their involvement in input supply or the purchase of FFPs, providing insights into quality standards, distribution challenges and policy support needs. Producers were selected from cooperatives or organisations implementing EbA practices to discuss application challenges and support needs. For online surveys targeting consumers, stratified random sampling ensured that a wide range of demographics was represented, reducing bias and improving the validity of market insights (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Description of interviewees by type**

<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>No. interviewees</b>
Researchers, managers and trainers	Interviews with experts in the fields of agriculture, forestry, environmental protection and climate change to gather insights into the EbA approach and the role of research in promoting production and consumption in this direction.	10
Businesses	Interviews with businesses involved in providing inputs or purchasing FFPs to assess quality standards, distribution channels and market-access challenges, as well as policy support.	8

Producers (farmers, cooperatives, FFPOs)	Interviews with representatives from production units to understand how they apply the EbA approach, the challenges they face, and their needs for technical and financial support.	7
Support organisations	Interviews with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), financial institutions and government agencies to explore their roles in supporting the implementation and development of EbA-based products.	5
Consumers	Interviews with consumers of EbA-based products to assess their awareness of EbA and quality standards (OCOP, GAP, organic PGS, GACP), as well as factors influencing purchasing decisions.	57 (including KIIs and 50 online surveys)
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>87</b>

### 1.5 Research limitations

Limitations are important to establish when conducting a study, as the study may contain elements that are beyond the control of the research team. The marketing plan being developed for a particular FFPO only operates in a particular FFF province, so this particular marketing plan may not be applicable to similar FFPOs outside the FFF's area of operation.

Foreign producers EbA-based forest and farm products are also less likely to play an important role as competitors for the market share of the selected FFPOs compared to domestic manufacturers of similar FFPOs. This means that the study is geographically limited to the market area of the selected FFPOs. Demographically, there are no limitations related to age or gender. Many people with different lifestyles and ages consume FFPOs and there is no specific demographic group to focus on. This study was on a relatively small scale, macro marketing was excluded from the study, and the focus was entirely on micro marketing aspects.

## **2 Analysing the data: key findings and marketing insights**

### **2.1 Analysing the key informant interviews (KIIs)**

The in-depth interviews with researchers, trainers and managers revealed that awareness of EbA approaches in agricultural and forestry production is relatively high, with many understanding the role of EbA in soil, water and biodiversity protection.

However, there are still barriers related to detailed knowledge and practical application, especially in communities unfamiliar with sustainable farming models. The role of research, training and management is considered crucial in promoting EbA, but the lack of practical models at the local level hinders its replication.

Other obstacles include difficulties in market access, finance and a lack of awareness about the long-term economic value of EbA. To overcome these challenges, marketing plans need to focus on helping FFPOs to educate consumers and create content that provides guidance on sustainable benefits, and finding ways to access financial support. The economic, social and environmental benefits of the EbA approach should be emphasised in marketing messages to increase the attractiveness of the products. The market for EbA-based FFPs has great potential, especially with the growing trend of sustainable consumption and international certifications such as OCOP, VietGAP and PGS. However, a comprehensive marketing strategy is required, including communications, partnerships with certification organisations, and the development of diverse distribution channels, as well as integration with ecotourism to scale up and ensure sustainability.

The KIIs with business entities (input providers and product retailers) provide an overview for marketing planning for EbA-based forest and farm products. Most businesses are not familiar with the EbA concept, although they have participated in certification programmes such as OCOP and organic PGS. However, they recognise the benefits of EbA, such as better product quality and the ability to attract consumers due to environmental protection factors. The market for EbA-based forest and farm products is seen as having great potential, especially as consumers prioritise environmentally friendly products. Nonetheless, businesses face many barriers in communicating with consumers about EbA, due to a lack of knowledge on the part of both businesses and consumers.

Achieving sustainable certification for FFPs is also a challenge due to the complexity and time-consuming nature of the process, particularly for small businesses. Businesses emphasise

the importance of certifications such as OCOP, GAP and PGS in building consumer trust, but there is also a need for transparency and post-certification monitoring. Factors driving participation in sustainable value chains include product quality, consumer trust and economic benefits. However, state policy support remains limited, especially in terms of financial and technological support, and raw material development. Distribution channels are currently diverse but need further optimisation, with supermarkets and clean food stores considered the most suitable for EbA-based forest and farm products. Finally, building an EbA label is seen as essential to enhancing consumer trust and ensuring transparency in sustainable product production and consumption.

The interviews with FFPOs revealed that knowledge of EbA approaches among production units is uneven, with some already applying sustainable practices, but many still unclear about EbA. The units agreed that production using EbA approaches brings economic, social and environmental benefits, but they face many barriers such as a lack of knowledge, capital and technology. Quality certifications such as OCOP, VietGAP and PGS help raise product credibility, but maintaining certification remains a challenge. There is demand to scale up EbA production, but it requires technological and financial support. Additionally, consumers are concerned about health but do not clearly distinguish between conventional and EbA-based products, requiring stronger marketing strategies. The development of a product label for EbA-based forest and farm products is also seen as necessary to increase product value and raise consumer awareness. Strategic marketing proposals include raising awareness through training, building a comprehensive marketing strategy, supporting certification and labelling, and enhancing financial and technical support for production units.

In-depth interviews with support units indicate that developing a marketing plan for EbA-based forest and farm products faces many barriers and opportunities. Awareness of EbA remains limited, both from producers and support units, despite indirect support through programmes such as FFF.

To advance, communication campaigns, training, and workshops are needed to improve understanding of EbA. Market connections and technical advice are also key factors, but current financial barriers and local government involvement pose challenges. Another major challenge is the difficulty in accessing finance and specific support policies, requiring flexible solutions that combine financial support and technical advice. Additionally, certifications such as OCOP, GAP, and organic PGS bring significant value, but certification costs remain

burdensome for many production units. To raise consumer awareness of EbA products, promotional campaigns and ecological branding will play a key role. In summary, the marketing strategy needs to focus on increasing awareness, technical support, improving financial access and market connections, and promoting products to enhance the value and distinctiveness of EbA products.

The consumer interviews show that awareness of EbA approaches is still low and often confused with other labels such as OCOP, VietGAP and organic PGS. Consumers frequently use sustainable products for safety and clear traceability, but there is no specific attention given to EbA-based forest and farm products.

Major barriers include high prices, lack of detailed product information, unattractive packaging, and lack of trust in sustainable labels. However, most consumers highly appreciate the quality and safety of EbA products, trusting the reputation of certified producers. The main information channels for accessing products are the internet, social media and recommendations from friends and acquaintances. To optimise the marketing plan, communication about EbA-based forest and farm products should be strengthened, clearly distinguishing EbA-labelled products from other labels, providing transparent information on product origins, setting competitive prices, and expanding sales channels to increase product availability.

## **2.2 Analysing the consumer survey data**

All questions were optional in the survey. A total of 50 respondents answered online via Google Forms and the survey results are summarised below (the full list of questions can be found in Appendix 2).

### **2.2.1 Personal information**

The survey results provide valuable insights into the demographics, spending behaviours and interest of consumers regarding EbA-based forest and farm products. Figure 1 shows key demographic findings, which include that:

- A significant proportion of respondents are women (82%), with the majority holding secondary education or higher (66%), and primarily working as office workers, lecturers, or state employees (74%). This demographic indicates that the decision-makers for purchasing FFPs are likely educated women in stable occupations.
- Geographically, over half of the respondents (51%) reside in Hanoi, followed by Hoa Binh (10%) and other neighbouring provinces such as Bac Ninh and Hung Yen. This

distribution suggests that the marketing strategy should prioritise urban areas such as Hanoi where consumer demand is higher.

**Figure 1. Consumer survey data: gender, education, occupation and place of residence**

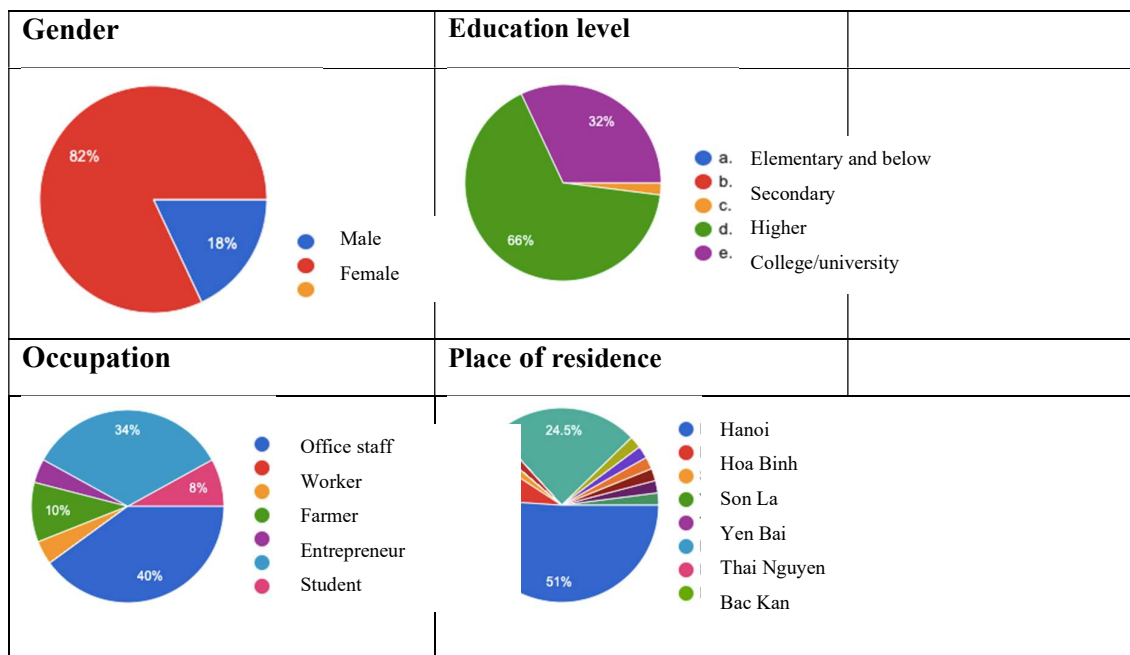
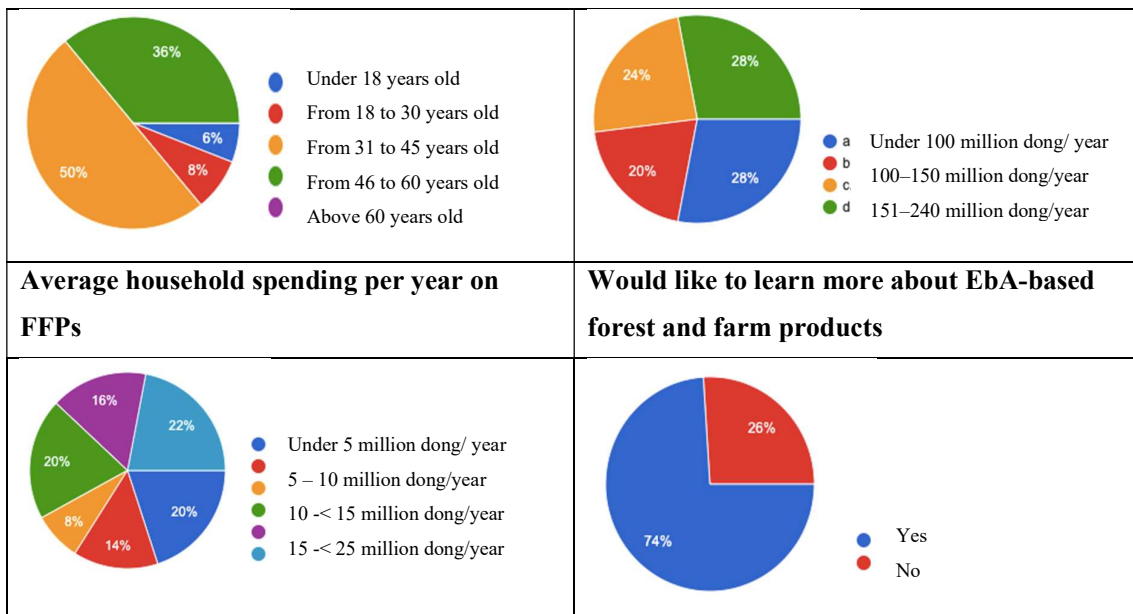


Figure 2 shows age and income segmentation. The dominant age group for FFP consumers is 31–45 years (50%), followed by those aged 46–60 years (36%). These groups are generally more financially stable and health conscious, making them prime targets for EbA-labelled products.

A significant portion of respondents have an average household income of over VND 150 million/year (~US\$ 5,974), with 58% spending at least 10% of their income on FFPs. This spending capacity suggests that FFP producers should target middle- to upper-income consumers who are willing to invest in higher-quality products.

**Figure 2. Consumer survey data: age, household income, spending and interest in FFPs**

Age	Average income of the household
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**Consumer interest:** A notable 74% of respondents expressed interest in learning more about EbA-based forest and farm products and evaluating their quality. This finding highlights the importance of educational campaigns to raise awareness about the ecological and health benefits of EbA products.

In conclusion, the results suggest that FFPOs should focus their marketing efforts on educated, middle- to high-income urban consumers, particularly women aged 31–60. Additionally, public education about the benefits of FFPs, particularly those with EbA certification, should be a core part of marketing strategies.

### 2.2.2 Shopping habits

The survey results provide valuable insights into the shopping habits of consumers, which are critical for shaping the marketing strategy for EbA-based forest and farm products. Figure 3 shows the products typically purchased.

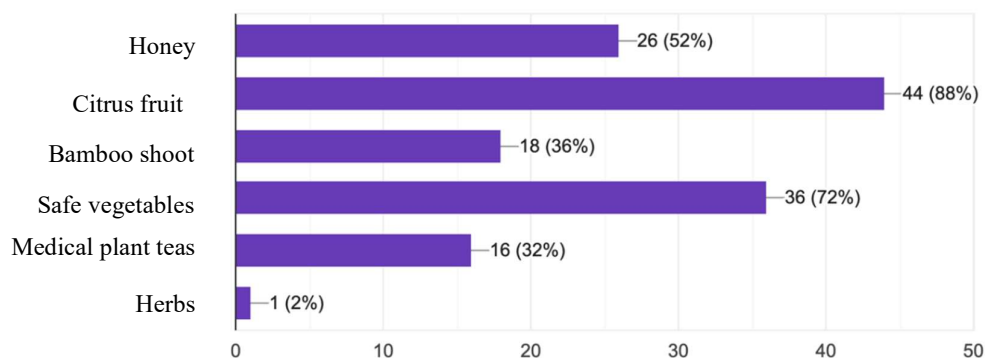
**Popular products:** The survey reveals that fruits such as pomelos, oranges and tangerines are the most frequently purchased items, with 88% of respondents regularly buying them. Safe vegetables are also commonly bought by 72% of respondents, followed by honey (52%). However, medicinal herbs have limited appeal, with very few respondents purchasing them regularly.

**Implications for product development:** The strong consumer preference for fruits and safe vegetables indicates that EbA-labelled products in these categories would have high potential for success. Marketing efforts should focus on promoting the ecological and health benefits of these products. However, there is also a need for more targeted marketing and education to increase awareness and demand for less frequently purchased items, such as medicinal herbs.

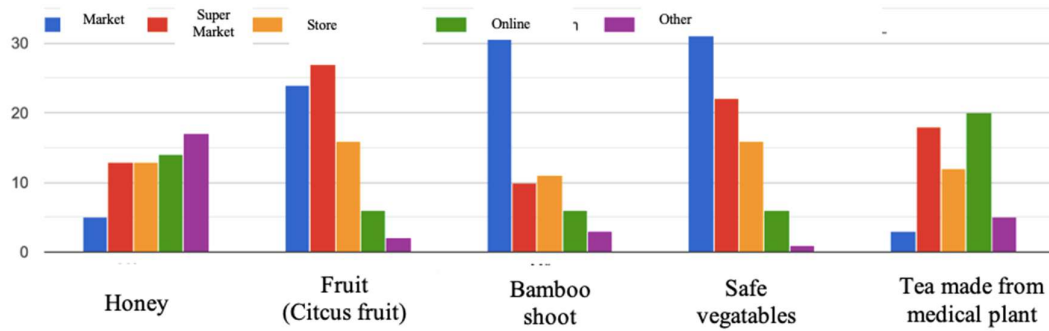
**Distribution channels:** Most respondents purchase fruits, vegetables and bamboo shoots from traditional markets, supermarkets and convenience stores (Figure 4). Honey and medicinal herbs, on the other hand, are more commonly bought online or directly from production locations.

**Strategic insights:** This information highlights the importance of a multichannel distribution strategy. For popular products such as fruits and vegetables, maintaining a strong presence in physical retail locations is crucial. However, for honey and medicinal herbs, online platforms and direct sales channels should be prioritised, reflecting the different shopping preferences for these products. FFPOs can capitalise on the growing trend of online shopping by investing in e-commerce platforms and building partnerships with local retailers.

**Figure 3. Consumer survey data: forest and farm products purchasing habits**



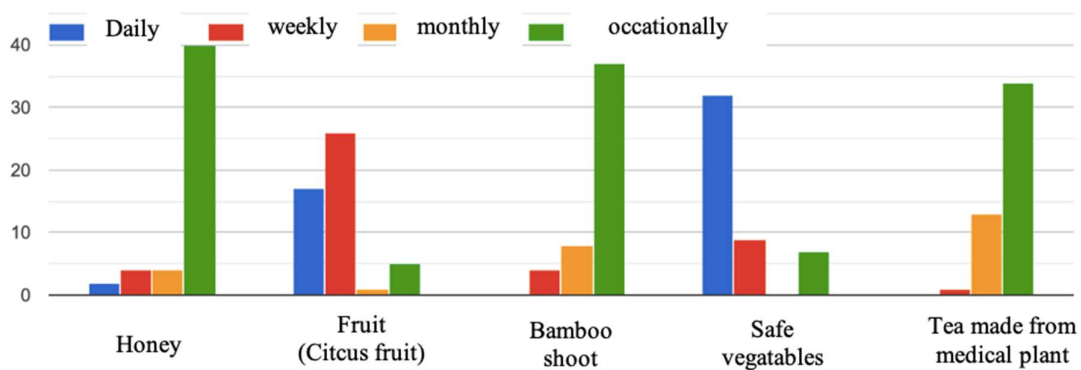
**Figure 4. Consumer survey data: where consumers purchase FFPs**



**Regular purchases:** The survey indicates that consumers buy safe vegetables and fruits on a weekly or even daily basis (Figure 5). In contrast, bamboo shoots, honey and medicinal herbs are purchased occasionally, often during holidays or when needed.

**Marketing timing and outreach:** The high frequency of fruit and vegetable purchases suggests that marketing campaigns for these products should be continuous and consistent, with regular promotions to keep consumers engaged. In contrast, products such as bamboo shoots, honey and medicinal herbs should be marketed strategically around peak demand periods, such as holidays or special events. Seasonal promotions and limited-time offers could drive higher sales during these times.

**Figure 5. Consumer survey data: how frequently consumers purchase FFPs**



The results of Section 3 of the survey offer crucial insights into consumer awareness and behaviour regarding collective labels, PGS, and EbA certifications. Here is a detailed analysis based on the findings:

### 2.2.3 Awareness of collective labels/PGS and EbA

**Moderate brand recognition:** The survey shows that 60% of respondents are aware of collective labels or PGS, while 74% expressed interest in buying EbA-based forest and farm products. This suggests a growing, but not yet universal, awareness of these certifications among consumers.

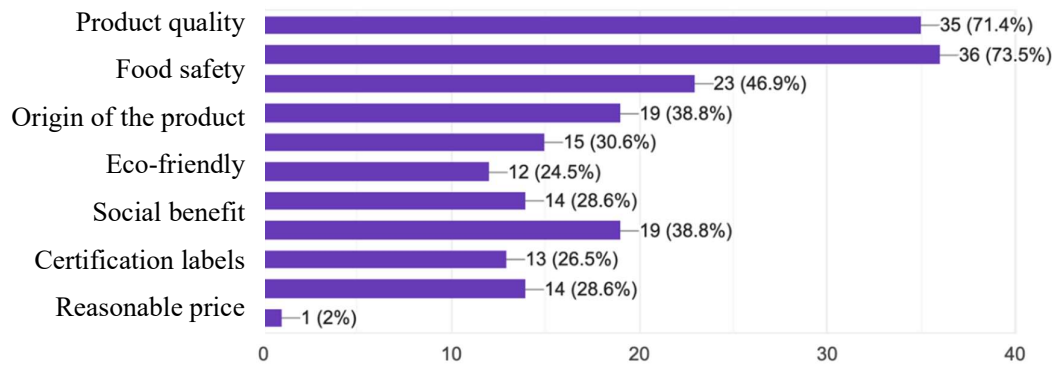
**Opportunity for awareness campaigns:** Given that 40% of respondents have not yet heard of collective labels or PGS, there is significant potential for expanding consumer education on the value of these certifications. Marketing campaigns should focus on increasing visibility and understanding of PGS and EbA labels, especially highlighting their environmental and social benefits, to boost recognition.

**Most common labels:** Figure 6 shows the consumer survey respondents' label preferences and usage. The survey reveals that VietGAP (73.5%) and OCOP (71.4%) are the most recognised and frequently used labels, followed by products labelled 'safe' or 'food hygiene and safety' (46.9%), and Vietnamese National Standards (TCVN) organic (38.8%). PGS organic products, although recognised by 30.6% of respondents, are used less frequently.

**Implications for product development:** The dominance of VietGAP and OCOP labels indicates strong consumer trust in these certifications. Therefore, FFPOs should focus on aligning their products with these standards while continuing to emphasise PGS and TCVN certifications for niche markets.

For PGS-certified products, efforts must be made to improve consumer familiarity and trust, which can be achieved through targeted promotional activities and education on the participatory approach to certification.

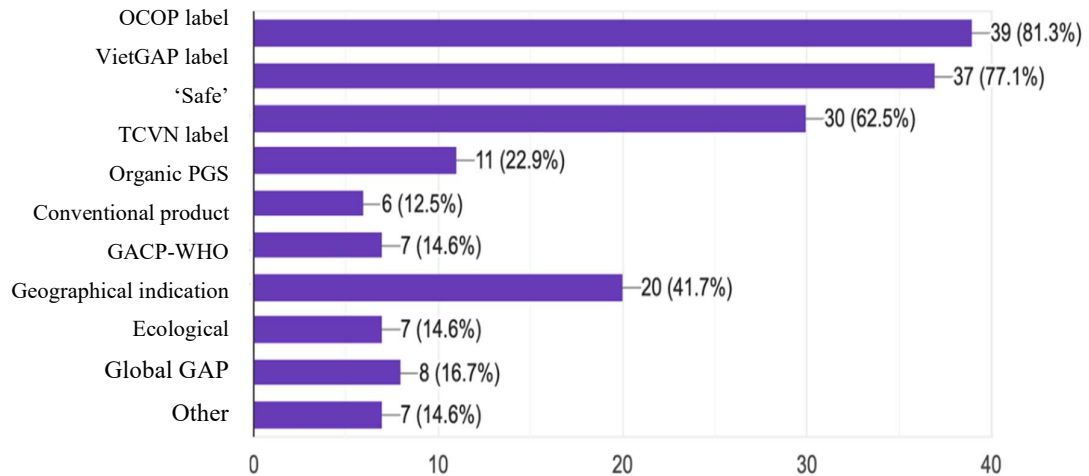
#### **Figure 6. Consumer survey data: product label usage habits**



**Key drivers for choosing certified products:** Figure 7 shows the key factors influencing consumer purchases of certified products (such as VietGAP, PGS, TCVN, and OCOP). The top three factors are product quality, food safety and product origin. Additionally, 41% of respondents indicated that reasonable pricing is a crucial factor in their purchasing decisions.

**Marketing insights:** Communication strategies should highlight the superior quality, safety and traceability of certified products. Emphasising the local origin and eco-friendly production methods associated with EbA-certified products could also strengthen their appeal. Pricing strategies will also be essential: while consumers are willing to pay for quality and safety, competitive pricing remains an important consideration.

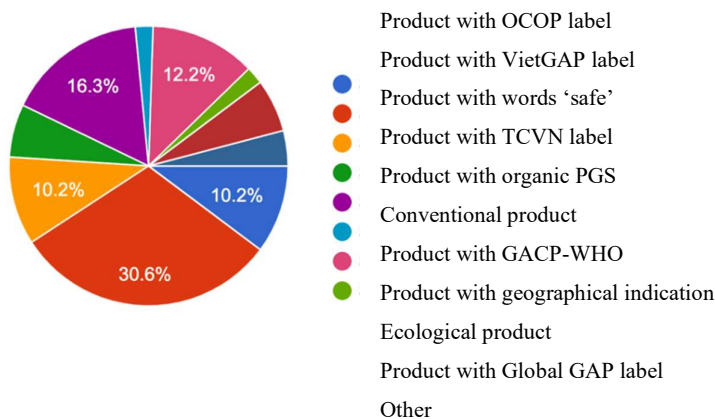
**Figure 7. Consumer survey data: top product criteria for using FFPs**



**Room for growth:** Figure 8 shows levels of consumer satisfaction with PGS organic products. While 16.3% of respondents reported that they were highly satisfied with PGS-certified organic products, the relatively lower market penetration of these products compared to other labels indicates that there is a need to increase consumer awareness and trust in PGS. Promoting the environmental sustainability, community involvement and organic benefits of PGS products will be crucial in boosting their market share.

**Potential for upscaling:** Since PGS-certified products already enjoy a certain level of satisfaction among consumers, FFPOs should prioritise raising the visibility of these products. Educational campaigns focusing on the participatory and community-based aspects of PGS can build stronger consumer loyalty and drive repeat purchases.

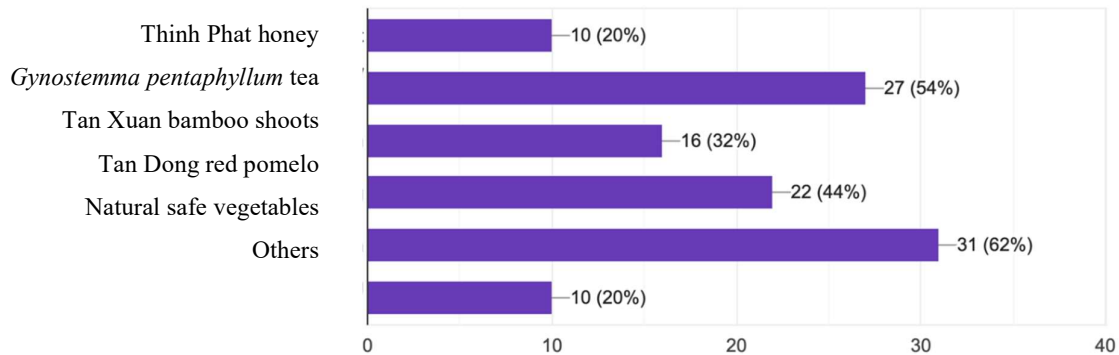
**Figure 8. Consumer survey data: satisfaction with PGS-certified organic products**



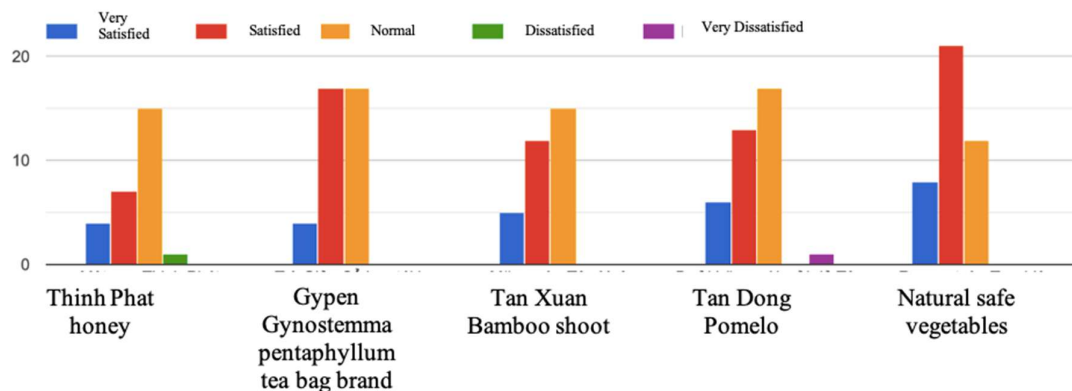
### 2.2.4 Feedback on selected forest and farm products

The results from Part IV of the survey provide valuable insights into consumer awareness, usage and satisfaction related to specific EbA-based forest and farm products originating from the project area (Figures 9, 10 and 11).

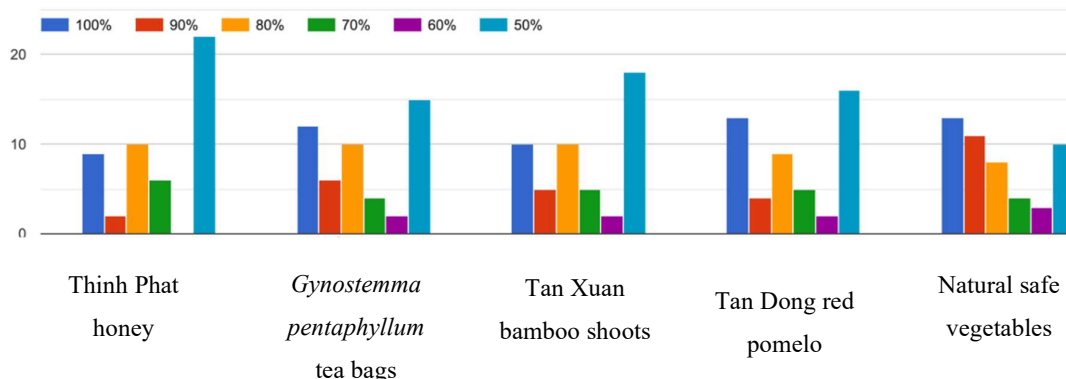
**Figure 9. Consumer survey data: awareness of selected FFPs in this study**



**Figure 10. Consumer survey data: satisfaction level with selected FFPs**



**Figure 11. Consumer survey data: likeliness to recommend selected FFPs to others**



The analysis indicates that natural safe vegetable products have achieved significant awareness, with 62% of consumers familiar with these products. However, consumer satisfaction remains average, and only 50% are willing to recommend the products. This suggests a need for stronger communication regarding their health benefits and quality, as well as the development of certifications tied to sustainable sourcing to enhance consumer trust. Similarly, for Tan Lac Son tea, 54% of consumers are aware of the product, yet their satisfaction is also moderate, with many hesitating to recommend it. This indicates the necessity of building a positive image for the product by emphasising its health benefits and leveraging social media channels to raise consumer awareness.

Regarding Tan Dong red pomelos, 44% of consumers have heard of the product, but satisfaction levels are average, with 50% uncertain about recommending it. To improve this situation, organising tasting events and promoting the product at markets and supermarkets, along with attractive promotional programmes, could encourage repeat purchases. For Tan Xuan bamboo shoots, only 32% of consumers know about the product, indicating low awareness, while satisfaction remains merely average. To enhance the likelihood of recommendations, boosting communication about its nutritional benefits and expanding distribution channels is essential. Finally, Think Phat honey has very low awareness, with only 10% of consumers familiar with it, and satisfaction levels need significant improvement. This highlights the need to build a compelling narrative around the product, focusing on sustainable production processes and providing samples or promotional programmes to attract new consumers.

Overall, to optimise the potential of EbA-based forest and farm products in the market, more proactive marketing strategies are necessary to improve consumer satisfaction and loyalty. By emphasising product quality, sustainable certifications, and enhancing consumer education, organisations can develop more effective collective labels, thereby increasing the value and market share of these products.

### **2.2.5 Opinions on quality and pricing**

Analysis of the survey results from Part V regarding consumer opinions on quality and price when purchasing EbA-based forest and farm products reveals several important points that can influence marketing strategies (Figures 12 and 13).

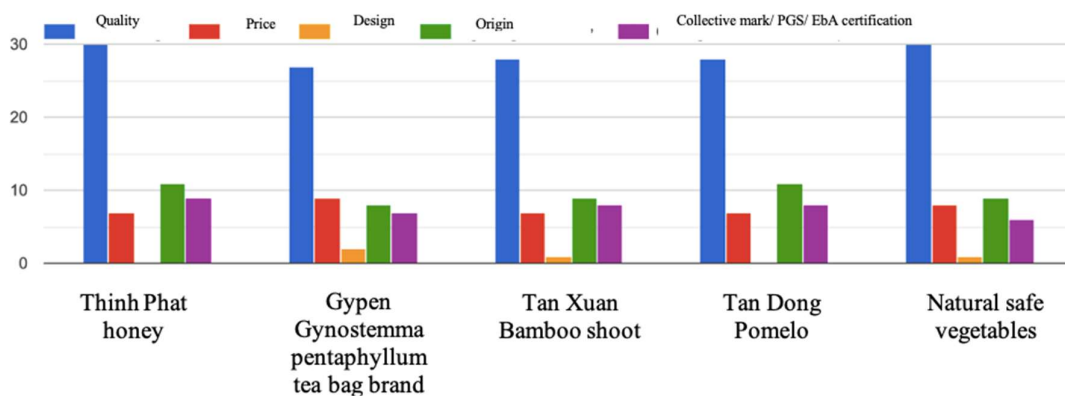
According to the collected information, quality is the factor that most consumers consider the most important when deciding to purchase a product. This result not only reflects the high demand for quality from consumers but also indicates that marketing strategies should focus on emphasising and affirming product quality. Building a strong brand image around quality can be a decisive factor in enhancing consumer trust and boosting sales.

Additionally, the survey shows that a majority of consumers rate the prices of products with EbA certification as reasonable. Only a few consumers feel that the prices are somewhat high. This suggests that consumers are likely to accept the current price level as long as they perceive corresponding value in the product’s quality. To leverage this advantage, organisations can develop communication campaigns aimed at enhancing awareness of the product’s value, emphasising the health benefits and sustainability that these products offer.

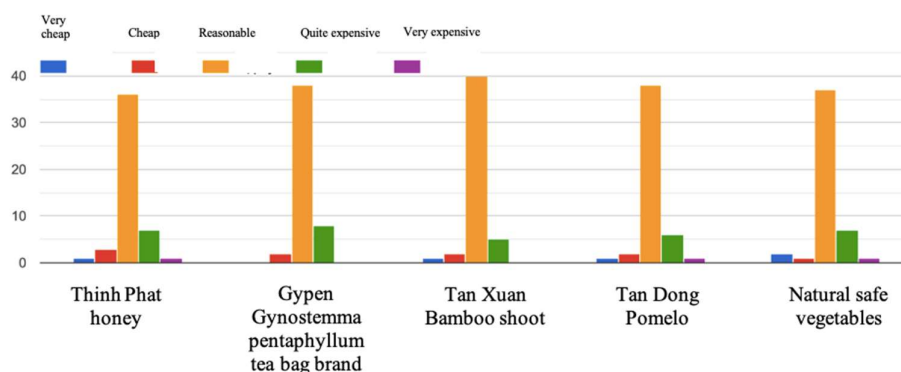
Finally, by surveying the features that consumers desire from EbA products, organisations can explore additional benefits that should be targeted. This not only helps in product development but also creates opportunities to attract new consumers and retain existing ones. Products can be optimised to meet consumer needs and expectations, thereby increasing their value in the market.

In conclusion, the survey results indicate that quality is the top factor influencing purchasing decisions, while current prices are perceived as reasonable. This information provides an important foundation for adjusting marketing strategies, from emphasising product quality to developing additional benefits that consumers desire.

**Figure 12. Consumer survey data: top priorities when purchasing selected FFPs products**



**Figure 13. Consumer survey data: price assessment of selected FFPs**



### 2.2.6 Opinions on online shopping

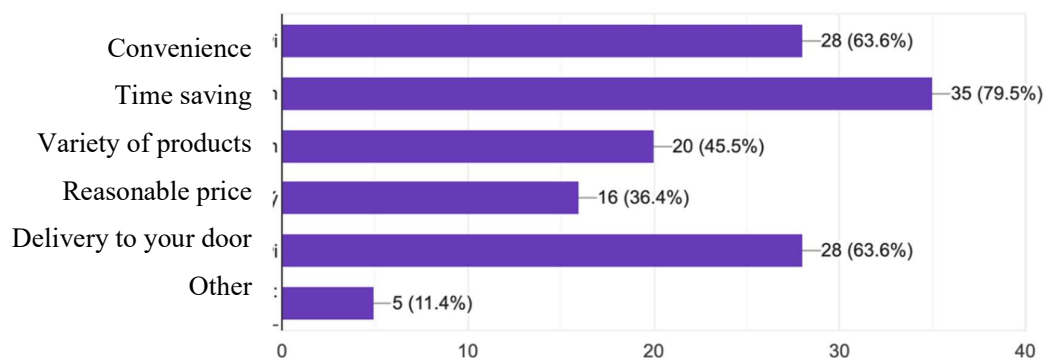
Part VI of the survey explores consumer perceptions of online shopping. The result of the survey highlights a significant shift towards online shopping among consumers of FFPs.

The fact that 52% of respondents frequently purchase selected FFP brands online indicates a strong readiness for digital sales channels. This trend is crucial as it not only reflects changing consumer habits but also suggests a potential market for FFPOs to tap into.

The key benefits identified by respondents – time-saving, convenience and home delivery – underscore the need for FFPOs to adapt to these preferences. In a fast-paced world, consumers are increasingly prioritising convenience, and enhancing online shopping capabilities could improve consumer satisfaction and sales.

Therefore, FFPOs should consider expanding their online sales channels, potentially investing in user-friendly e-commerce platforms and effective logistics solutions to facilitate home delivery.

**Figure 14. Consumer survey data: benefits of buying FFPs online**



### **2.2.7 Suggestions and feedback**

#### Part VII

of the survey provides valuable insights into consumers' willingness to pay a premium for certified products. The finding that 84% of respondents are willing to pay more for FFPs with collective marks/PGS and EbA is promising. This strong inclination towards higher-priced certified products suggests that consumers perceive added value in quality and sustainability certifications.

This readiness to pay a premium presents a significant opportunity for FFPOs to scale their offerings. It indicates that effective marketing strategies focusing on the benefits of certification – such as health, sustainability and social responsibility – could resonate well with consumers and enhance brand loyalty.

#### **Suggestions for increasing consumer awareness of EbA-based products and labels:**

Questions 29 and 30 gathered suggestions for increasing awareness of EbA/PGS labels and using effective communication channels. The feedback gathered can inform targeted communication strategies. Identifying useful ideas from respondents on how to enhance awareness of certification marks is crucial for FFPOs. This might involve leveraging social media, email campaigns, and community outreach programmes to educate consumers about the benefits of these products.

Furthermore, understanding that consumers are interested in receiving information via email or text message provides a clear direction for developing communication strategies. FFPOs can build databases of consumer contacts and utilise these channels for promotions, product information and educational content, thereby keeping consumers engaged and informed.

## **3 Theoretical basis for EbA-based forest and farm products marketing plans**

### **3.1 Characteristics of EbA-based forest and farm products**

Forest and farm production is a sector with many distinct characteristics compared to other production sectors, creating unique features in FFP marketing. FFPs primarily meet basic human needs, mainly food. The demand for food is extremely diverse, rich and tends to fluctuate in terms of quantity and quality, from direct consumer products to processed products, and from material products to basic elements of accompanying services. Generally, food-consumption demand varies significantly depending on the level of societal development. Additionally, food demand is not highly sensitive to price changes (low price elasticity), meaning that even as food prices increase or decrease, the demand for food changes very little. To enhance competitiveness in FFP production, it is essential to:

- Focus on understanding demand trends and finding ways to satisfy emerging needs
- Emphasise creating product differentiation, product quality and quality of related services, and
- Diversify products and services to meet the needs of various consumer groups.

FFPs are natural products or products of natural origin, containing essential qualities for human life and health. Each product has a distinctive taste and colour, and consumption often forms habitual preferences. FFP marketing should therefore consider that, whether a product is directly consumed or processed, it must ensure its nutritional value and safety for users. Because these are products of natural origin, any processing should maintain the natural characteristics, such as taste and colour, without altering the product's inherent nature. Additionally, since most food products are perishable, a specialised transportation system, appropriate storage, processing technology, and clear expiration dates are essential.

The production and supply of FFPs are highly seasonal and localised, often leading to imbalances in supply and demand. At the beginning and end of the season, supply often falls short of demand, while in the middle of the season, supply usually exceeds demand, creating challenges for both producers and consumers. Therefore, FFP marketing should focus on strategies to extend the crop season through reasonable plant and animal variety structuring, off-season production, and the application of technical advances to mitigate seasonality. Intermediaries need proper storage, processing and preservation plans, while distributors

should expand markets to distribute products from surplus areas to deficit areas, particularly for local and speciality products.

FFP production and business activities heavily depend on natural conditions, as reflected in the adage, ‘good harvest, low price – bad harvest, high price’. This demonstrates the sector’s dependency on weather conditions, with favourable weather leading to abundant harvests and lower prices, and unfavourable weather resulting in poor harvests and higher prices according to the law of supply and demand. This characteristic requires FFP marketing to include risk-prevention plans, such as expanding business scope (such as increasing the area of raw material production and product purchasing in poor harvests), expanding consumer markets during good harvests, and linking with insurance activities, particularly for key products.

A portion of FFPs is produced and consumed as plant and livestock varieties or as raw materials for the processing industry. This characteristic demands a strategic approach and is often closely monitored and managed by the state, given the special nature of these products as agricultural and forestry production inputs. For example, the recognition of plant and animal varieties and confirmation of disease-free, original, purebred or certified varieties are all necessary. Additionally, agricultural and forestry products used as raw materials for processing industries require strict compliance with standards on quantity, quality, size and shape.

### **3.2 Developing a marketing plan**

Marketing encompasses a comprehensive set of activities including promotion, attraction and consumer care, all aimed at delivering products or services from the place of production to consumers while maintaining strong consumer relationships. These activities range from market research, understanding consumer needs, product or service development, promotion and distribution, to ensuring that these actions meet consumer needs, attract and retain consumers, and achieve business goals. The primary goal of marketing is to create value for consumers and satisfy their needs through the business’s products or services.

Philip Kotler, known as the father of modern marketing, defines marketing as “the art of creating value, communicating, and distributing those values to satisfy customer needs, with the goal of bringing optimal profits to the business” (Kotler and Armstrong 2015). This definition highlights the importance of understanding consumer needs in order to satisfy them and increase profits. In today’s business environment, marketing strategies must be consumer-

oriented and focused on meeting consumer needs. It is crucial for every business to adopt a comprehensive marketing strategy that integrates all key aspects of marketing. Several marketing theories have been developed to guide companies and managers in this area.

The marketing plan is a central tool for directing and coordinating marketing efforts. The strategic marketing plan identifies the target market and the value proposition based on identified marketing opportunities, while the tactical marketing plan addresses product features, promotion, pricing, sales and more. According to Kotler and Keller (2006), the marketing plan is essential in large companies where many functions at different levels are involved in marketing planning. However, for small companies, the focus of the marketing plan may be more streamlined, with less emphasis on interaction between departments and levels.

A marketing plan is a document that outlines the actions needed to achieve specific marketing objectives. This plan can be created for a single year, known as an annual marketing plan, or for multiple years as a multiyear marketing plan. It may also be integrated into the overall business plan. While some companies have a formal, documented marketing plan, others may not have a written version or may only have it conceptualised mentally. The marketing planning process is typically divided into several steps; though the names of these steps may vary across different documents, the content usually remains consistent.

### **3.3 Analysing the current situation and marketing opportunities**

The purpose here is to get a clear picture of the current situation of the company. This involves identifying and analysing the market, including both the surrounding market environment and the competitive landscape. Gathering and summarising information from various sources such as articles, websites, statistics, brochures and annual reports is often necessary to obtain a comprehensive view of the company. Using tools such as Google or other search engines can aid in collecting this information. Once gathered, models and tools can convert the data into useful insights about the company's current situation.

To analyse the current situation, the 5C analysis framework can be applied: company, collaborators, consumers, competitors and climate or context. SWOT analysis is another valuable tool used to assess a company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Opportunities and threats relate to the external environment, while strengths and weaknesses

pertain to the internal environment of the company. Marketing opportunities are those areas where consumer needs and preferences align with a company's offerings.

According to Kotler and Keller (2006), there are three types of marketing opportunities. The first type is to offer something that is scarce. The second type is to offer something already present in the market but in a new and superior way. The third type often involves introducing a new product. Marketing opportunity analysis (MOA) helps determine the attractiveness and likelihood of success by asking:

- Can the benefits be convincingly communicated to the identified target market?
- Can the identified target market be reached using cost-effective media and trade channels?
- Does the company have access to the key capabilities and resources needed to deliver consumer benefits?
- Can the company deliver these benefits better than potential competitors?
- Does the financial return meet or exceed the company's required investment threshold?

External threats are identified and analysed, with plans developed to address them if they occur. When considering competition and opportunities in the current situation analysis, the 4Ps framework – product, price, promotion and place – can be used. The 4Ps, or marketing mix, were first formally conceptualised by McCarthy in 1960 in his influential book *Basic Marketing: A Managerial Approach* (see also Table 3). This marketing mix addresses issues such as:

- Understanding consumer needs and wants
- Identifying the reasons for current product failures
- Finding ways to solve problems and change public perception of the product/service
- Creating distinctive features to increase competitive advantage, and
- Understanding how the product interacts with consumers and vice versa.

**Table 3. Characteristics of 4P marketing**

<b>4P</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Product	What is being offered?	Describe the product or service that the business offers to consumers.
Price	How much does it cost?	Determine the pricing strategy and how to price it to attract consumers.
Place	Where is it available?	Decide on the distribution channels and where consumers can buy the product or use the service.
Promotion	How will consumers know about it?	Determine the advertising and marketing strategy to create awareness and attract attention to the product or service.

These four Ps are parameters that marketing managers can control to overcome internal and external obstacles in the marketing environment. The goal of making decisions regarding these parameters is for consumers in the target market to perceive value and create positive responses:

- **Product decisions:** The term ‘product’ encompasses the actual goods, the materials that constitute the product, as well as the accompanying services. Examples of product decisions include: brand name, product function, styling, quality, safety, packaging, repairs and support, warranty, accessories and services.
- **Price decisions:** Price decisions involve several elements, such as: pricing strategy (e.g. skimming price or market penetration price), suggested retail price, volume discounts and wholesale pricing, cash and early payment discounts, seasonal pricing, bundling, price flexibility, and price discrimination.
- **Place (distribution) decisions:** Distribution refers to the process of getting goods to consumers. Key distribution decisions include: distribution channels, market coverage, specific channel members, inventory management, warehousing, distribution centres, order processing, transportation and reverse logistics.
- **Promotion decisions:** Within the marketing mix, promotion encompasses various aspects of marketing communications, which are intended to convey product information with the aim of generating a positive consumer response. Key promotion decisions include: promotional strategy (pull or push), advertising, personal selling

and sales force, sales promotions, public relations and publicity, and marketing communications budget.

When planning the marketing mix, FFPOs must also consider the consumer's perspective, where the 4Ps are converted into 4Cs: customer value, cost to satisfaction, convenience to buy and communication (Gilaninia et al. 2013 – see Figure 15).

**Figure 15. The 4 Cs: product, price, promotion and place**



Source: Gilaninia et al. (2013).

In today's consumer-driven environment, FFPOs are beginning to adopt a 'pull' approach, where products are created to meet consumer needs. This shift was the impetus for Lauterborn to develop the 4C model in 1990, after declaring the traditional 4P method obsolete (Janse 2024). Lauterborn's 4C model, with its consumer-centric orientation, has shifted the marketing focus from mass media marketing to niche marketing. By implementing a niche marketing strategy, FFPOs can accurately identify who their consumers are and focus on addressing the needs of that specific audience. The four elements in the 4C model include:

**Consumer solutions:** The 4C strategy prioritises consumer solutions, meaning each product introduced to the market must effectively address consumer problems and meet their needs, rather than merely serving as a profit-making tool for FFPOs. This requires FFPOs to deeply understand their target consumers, listen to their needs, and address their pain points to provide solutions. To achieve consumer solutions, FFPOs should ensure they:

- Correctly identify and target their consumer base
- Listen to feedback and advice from consumers
- Proactively provide value to consumers

**Consumer costs:** The second C in Lauterborn's model is consumer costs, which refers to the total cost consumers incur for the product. This includes not only the purchase price but also any additional costs related to usage, transportation, maintenance and opportunity costs. It is crucial to set costs in a way that optimises profits for FFPOs while ensuring benefits for consumers. To address cost issues, FFPOs should:

- Choose the appropriate pricing strategy
- Research the total costs consumers are willing to incur
- Determine the buyer's cost sensitivity, and
- Analyse competitors' costs and similar products

**Convenience:** Convenience is the third factor in the 4C marketing model and is crucial in influencing consumer decision-making. FFPOs must remove all barriers that hinder consumers from accessing their products. This involves:

- Identifying obstacles that prevent consumers from learning about and purchasing products
- Finding solutions to overcome these barriers, and
- Building a multi-channel sales system so consumers can easily find products in any distribution channel.

**Communication:** The final factor, communication, is essential for maintaining relationships and retaining consumers. Communication involves two-way interactions between the seller and the buyer and should occur before, during and after a purchase. With the development of the internet, FFPOs can now easily communicate and engage with consumers through online platforms. Communication requires FFPOs to:

- Always listen to consumer feedback and consider suggestions
- Provide support to consumers whenever needed, and
- Share and update in a timely way the latest news about products and the business with consumers.

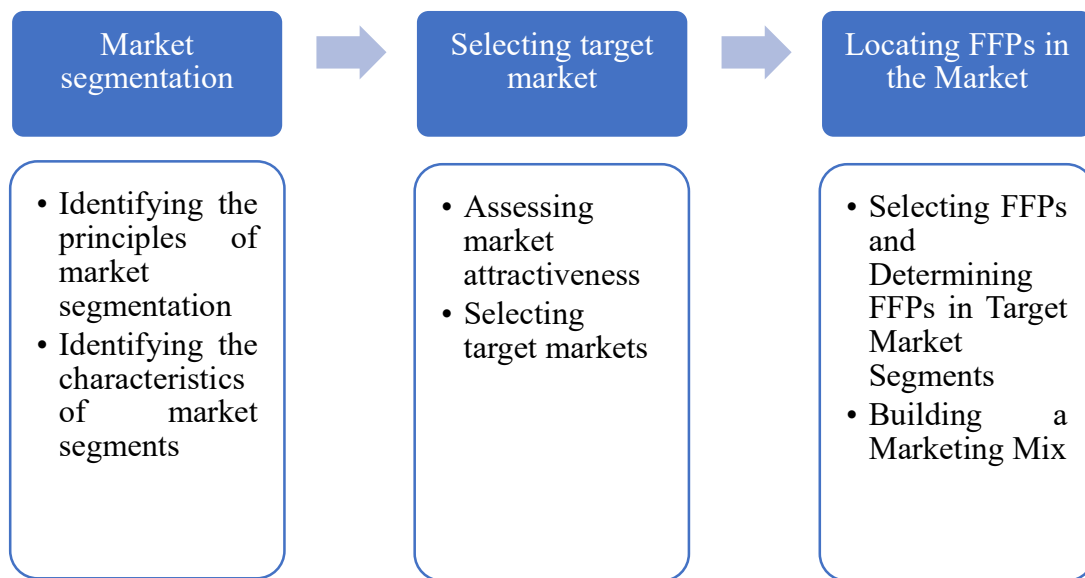
### **3.4 Defining a marketing strategy and marketing objectives**

The general explanation of ‘strategy’ as a term is that it refers to a plan outlining how an organisation will achieve its objectives. It is important not to confuse strategy with objectives. Strategy indicates the direction in which a company aims to move, while objectives specify what is to be achieved within a particular time frame, typically quantified in numerical terms.

The foundation of a marketing strategy lies in market segmentation, selecting target markets, and positioning EbA-based forest and farm products in the market. Market segmentation involves identifying niche market segments that have distinct needs and profiles. Once these market segments are identified, FFPOs can target one or more of them. For each market segment, FFPOs communicate the benefits through tailored marketing plans (Kotler and Armstrong 2015).

There are various types of segmentation, such as demographic segmentation (which includes market segmentation by industry, size, location, etc), purchasing approaches (which take into account different consumer purchasing policies), and other situational factors such as order size or urgency (Dibb et al. 2002). Additionally, the criteria for effective market segmentation include: specific characteristics; measurable and collectible data showing size and profile characteristics; accessibility of the segment; sufficient size to be profitable; and stability of the segment (Beane and Ennis 1987).

After establishing market segments, FFPOs can target the most desirable ones that present the greatest opportunities. To reach these target markets, various marketing channels can be employed, including distribution channels for product delivery, service channels such as banks and warehouses, and communication channels encompassing all methods used to convey and receive messages from target consumers (Kotler and Armstrong 2015). In targeting the right segments, FFPOs must also focus on positioning: establishing the place that the FFPO occupies in the minds of consumers. If a brand’s positioning is well established, it can further guide the marketing strategy (Ries and Trout 2000). The process of positioning a product in the market involves the steps shown in Figure 16.



**Figure 16. The process of positioning FFPs in the market**

When planning strategy, Michael Porter (1998) proposed three fundamental strategies that serve as a strong foundation for strategic thinking: cost leadership, differentiation, and focus.

- **Cost leadership:** With this strategy, a business aims to keep prices lower than its competitors in hopes of capturing a larger market share. In this approach, expertise in engineering, procurement, manufacturing and physical distribution is prioritised over marketing skills. However, this strategy can be threatened by other companies that are even more aggressive in cost-cutting.
- **Differentiation:** EbA and sustainability standards can fit into multiple approaches within the differentiation strategy for EbA-based forest and farm products.

Specifically:

- **Better quality:** EbA and sustainability standards such as organic PGS, OCOP and Global GAP (a brand of farm assurance standards based on good agricultural practice) directly enhance the perceived quality of FFPs by ensuring that products are produced using environmentally responsible practices. These practices contribute to improved soil health, biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource use, which ultimately result in products that are healthier and safer for consumers. This aligns with growing consumer demand for eco-friendly products, positioning these products as premium quality offerings.

- **Innovation:** EbA itself represents a form of innovation in agricultural and forestry practices. By adopting EbA standards, FFPOs can implement cutting-edge, nature-based solutions that improve resilience to climate change and environmental degradation. This innovation not only adds value to the product but also differentiates it from conventional products that may not address the same sustainability concerns. Standards such as VietGAP, Global GAP and PGS certify these innovative approaches, providing credibility to the claims of environmental and social benefits.
- **Speed:** Although EbA and sustainability practices may not always directly enhance production speed, they contribute to long-term efficiency. Healthier ecosystems and sustainable practices often lead to more resilient production systems that can recover faster from shocks, reducing downtime and supply-chain disruptions in the long run. Additionally, businesses that are early adopters of these standards can capitalise on emerging market trends toward sustainability, gaining first-mover advantages.
- **Cost efficiency:** While EbA-based products may initially come at a higher production cost, over time, sustainable practices can reduce input costs (e.g. lower reliance on chemical fertilisers or pesticides). Moreover, these products offer value-added benefits such as long-term ecosystem health, reducing the overall environmental costs associated with unsustainable practices. From a marketing perspective, the challenge is to communicate this long-term cost efficiency to consumers, helping them recognise the broader economic, environmental and social value of paying a premium for EbA-certified products. Thus, EbA and sustainability standards can serve as multidimensional differentiation tools that elevate product quality, foster innovation, and ensure long-term cost efficiency, while positioning EbA-based forest and farm products as leaders in sustainable and responsible production.
- **Focus:** With this strategy, a business concentrates on narrow market segments. Within these segments, the company may employ either a cost leadership or differentiation strategy. The company's objectives should be quantitative not qualitative, meaning they must be measurable. Dynamic objectives are preferred, meaning they should adapt to external environmental changes and market shifts rather than being fixed on the company's internal history. Each objective must have a designated person responsible for its achievement.

In addition to these three core strategies, John Westwood (2016), in his book *How to Write a Marketing Plan*, suggests incorporating distribution and promotion strategies. Distribution and promotion are critical aspects of a marketing plan that can significantly influence sales. For example, altering distribution by improving service or changing marketing channels can impact sales outcomes. In terms of promotion, businesses can adjust their advertising methods or develop new sales promotion strategies to better suit their specific situation, convincing potential consumers to purchase their products (Westwood 2016: 56).

### **3.5 Developing a marketing programme**

Developing a marketing programme is the crucial next step after formulating a strategy. These programmes are designed to help achieve the company's objectives. One challenge is to create targeted marketing programmes that are cost-effective. The combination of these activities is often referred to as the marketing mix. Additionally, these activities involve how the company adapts to the market and how it influences market dynamics. Even the most well-formulated strategy can fail if the accompanying programmes are not well-implemented. For instance, if the strategy is to achieve technological leadership, there must be robust programmes in place to strengthen the research and development (R&D) department. Once these programmes are established, it is essential to estimate their costs. The value of a particular investment is then compared to its cost, taking into consideration the needs of both stakeholders and shareholders. It is also crucial to remain vigilant about changes in the external environment, as shifts in the market may necessitate adjustments to the marketing programmes to stay aligned with the company's goals.

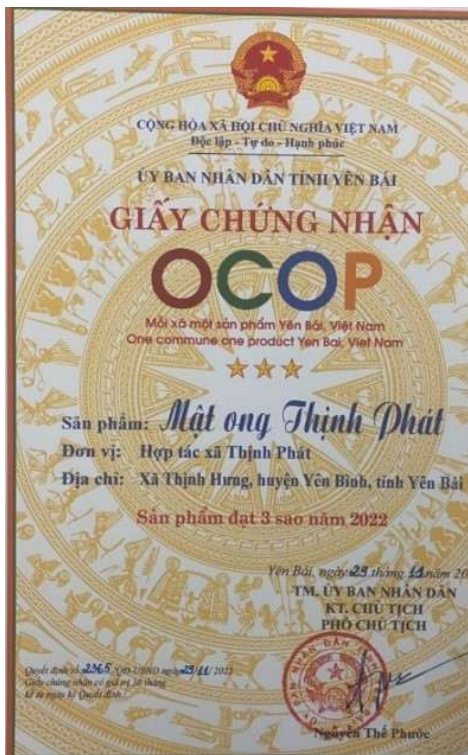
### **3.6 Marketing-effort management and tracking**

The final and crucial step is managing the marketing effort. Once all the preceding steps in the planning process have been executed and a plan to achieve the company's goals has been established, it is essential to manage and monitor the plan's implementation. This step is key to evaluating the success of a marketing strategy or programme and demonstrating its importance to the company. The critical aspect of this step is its execution, rather than how it is executed. Parameters to track might include inbound versus outbound orders, cost of sales, marketing expenses, delivery services and payments, among others.

## 4 Marketing plan for honey products

### 4.1 Current situation and marketing opportunities

Thinh Phat Cooperative is an FFPO located in Thinh Hung commune, Yen Binh district, Yen Bai province. It was established in May 2022 by Ms Nguyen Thi Nguyet, who serves as the director. The cooperative focuses on large timber-forest planting, beekeeping and other agricultural products such as chickens, fish and fruits. The cooperative comprises 15 official members and eight associate members. Ms Nguyet and the cooperative's members have developed the Thinh Phat honey brand, which has received three-star OCOP certification in 2022, ensuring quality and expanding the market for their honey products.



The analysis of the cooperative includes assessing its capabilities, resources, methods and organisation. The current situation is reviewed through marketing economics, product development, production, logistics and personnel. Initially, Ms Nguyet focused on local marketing in Yen Binh district and Yen Bai province, enhancing brand awareness by visiting grocery stores to sample honey and engage with potential consumers. Marketing efforts also included participating in themed and seasonal fairs. These activities laid the foundation for the brand's consumer base. The cooperative now manages 700 beehives, produces 10,000 litres of honey annually, and in 2022 generated VND 1.5 billion (equivalent to around US\$60,000)

in income. In 2023, the cooperative's revenue reached nearly VND 2 billion (equivalent to around US\$80,000), a 20% increase from 2022, and it has improved local incomes by 10–20% through product sales and employment. The income for cooperative members ranges from VND 100 to 120 million (equivalent to around US\$3,900–4,800) per year. Ms Nguyet emphasises her commitment to supporting local farmers with quality seeds and beekeeping techniques to help them develop their household economies.

Most members of the cooperative are working-age women. The cooperative has created a social network for farmers to share knowledge and enhance their skills in forestry, beekeeping and organic farming. It has facilitated better access to loans, financial resources and markets. The cooperative has empowered women and improved their social networks in forest and farm production, enhancing their roles in the cooperative and the community.

Thin Phat Cooperative offers high-quality honey products from Yen Binh district. It manages 50 hectares of forest with key species such as acacia, bodhi, cinnamon, and various fruit trees such as pomelo, jackfruit and lemon. Bees are kept under the forest canopy and fruit trees, benefiting from abundant nectar sources and providing safe habitats. This setup reduces input costs and supports pollination, enhancing biodiversity and crop reproduction. The cooperative's honey, a multifloral variety, reflects the diverse flowers within a 3km radius of the hives, resulting in unique colours and flavours. The honey types include:

- Forest honey, with flavours from local wildflowers
- Pomelo blossom honey, with a mild pomelo aroma, and
- Herb honey, with a sweet and distinctive herbal scent.

These products are nutritious and produced with careful honeybee management and harvesting processes to ensure quality and safety. The honey is sold locally in Yen Binh and major cities with increasing demand for high-quality, clean honey, and through online platforms such as Co.opmart and social media channels such as Facebook and Zalo.

However, logistics pose challenges. Deliveries occur weekly based on store orders, with most stores purchasing small quantities, though some order larger amounts. The current delivery system operates but is less efficient than ideal. The cooperative also sells honey directly but in smaller quantities compared to stores, and consumers can use their own containers.

Thin Phat Cooperative follows a four-month honey collection cycle and eight-month bee maintenance period. The peak honey-harvesting season is from February to the end of May, with bees collecting pollen from pristine forest vegetation. The period from June to the following February focuses on bee maintenance, facing challenges such as weather and pollen scarcity, requiring supplementary pollen feeding. The cooperative uses an integrated pest management (IPM) approach and biological pest control methods. Some members apply sustainable forest-management principles to achieve Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification, enhancing forest value.

To ensure honey quality, the cooperative has built a storage facility. It packages honey in 350ml glass jars, and provides full product information with QR codes for traceability. The cooperative secures product purchases, supports members, and lists products on the Voso e-commerce platform. Ensuring food-safety quality is a priority, with OCOP three-star certification validating quality and market expansion. Annual honey sales range from 6.5 to 6.7 tonnes, with production closely matching sales volume. The cooperative's current marketing focus includes defensive and offensive strategies to retain existing consumers and expand its consumer base.



Main honey products of Thin Phat Cooperative (Source: Thin Phat Cooperative)

The business goal of the cooperative is to provide economic benefits to all its members, continue to drive forest planting and biodiversity conservation locally through beekeeping under forest canopies, and empower women. To achieve this goal, the cooperative needs to build a solid consumer base:

- A large and stable consumer base helps the cooperative more easily sell its members' products, negotiate better prices, and minimise the impact of market fluctuations. This leads to increased revenue and profits, improving the cooperative's financial situation.
- A stable consumer base enables the cooperative to better forecast and plan production, ensuring business stability. Building and maintaining long-term consumer relationships is crucial for the cooperative's sustainable development.
- Developing a strong consumer base fosters unity and cooperation among members.

## **4.2 Analysis of the honey market**

The honey market encompasses a diverse range of consumers, and there is no distinct demographic segment to target, as honey is a widely consumed product. This broad demographic makes it challenging to precisely describe consumer behaviour or purchase potential in a way that is useful for marketing planning.

According to the Vietnam Beekeepers Association, domestic honey consumption in Vietnam is on the rise, driven by an increasing consumer interest in natural and health-conscious products. In 2022, domestic honey consumption reached approximately 7,000 tonnes, a notable increase from previous years. Honey is becoming a popular choice as a natural sweetener and alternative medicine among many families.

Simultaneously, the Vietnamese honey industry is heavily focused on exports, with around 90% of production being sold abroad, primarily to major markets such as the USA, European Union (EU), Japan and South Korea. Despite challenges such as anti-dumping duties imposed by the USA, Vietnamese honey continues to have a strong presence in these markets.

Overall, the honey industry in Vietnam is performing well and is expected to continue growing, meeting the rising demand from both domestic and international markets. Currently, Vietnam produces about 64,000 tonnes of honey annually, with 54,000 tonnes allocated for export and the remaining 10,000 tonnes consumed domestically. This sector's growth presents both opportunities and challenges for Think Phat Cooperative.

## **4.3 Analysis of market competitors**

Think Phat Cooperative primarily operates in Yen Binh district, Yen Bai province. Located in a lowland area, the cooperative's coordinates range from 21°44'30'' to 21°54'25'' North latitude and 104°00' East longitude. The district covers a natural area of just over 77,260

hectares, bordered by Thac Ba Lake on three sides. It adjoins Luc Yen district to the north, Van Yen, Tran Yen and Yen Bai City to the west, Phu Tho province to the south, and Tuyen Quang province to the east. The district centre is 4.5km from Yen Bai City and 170km from Hanoi. The cooperative serves a delivery area, including some stores in major cities. Currently, Think Phat Cooperative's marketing area is relatively small compared to other cooperatives in Yen Bai province and neighbouring areas.

Data collected from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development reveal that Think Phat Cooperative faces competition from both within and outside the province:

- **Yen Bai:** The province has favourable conditions for agriculture, particularly beekeeping. Cooperatives such as the Hung Think Agricultural and Service Cooperative, Phuc Loi Agricultural and Service Cooperative, and Tan Dong General Service Cooperative have developed significantly, focusing on producing forest honey, pomelo honey and longan honey. These cooperatives not only serve the domestic market but also aim for export.
- **Hoa Binh:** The province is renowned for its large-scale beekeeping cooperatives such as Hoa Binh Honey Cooperative and Kim Boi Honey Cooperative, which are famous for their forest honey. Newer cooperatives, such as the Tu Ne Beekeeping Cooperative established in 2023, focus on forest honey. Hoa Binh also emphasises the development of diverse bee products such as royal jelly and pollen to enhance product value and expand markets.
- **Son La:** The province has several beekeeping cooperatives, particularly in Moc Chau and Yen Chau districts. The Moc Chau Agricultural and Service Cooperative is notable for its ban-flower and mustard-flower honey, distinctive products of the Northwestern highlands.
- **Thai Nguyen:** The province's climate and terrain are suitable for beekeeping, with cooperatives such as the Tan Cuong Agricultural and Service Cooperative and Thai Nguyen Honey Cooperative focusing on tea-flower honey and herbaceous-flower honey. These products are highly regarded for their quality and are popular both domestically and internationally.
- **Bac Kan:** Known for its star anise honey and forest honey. Cooperatives such as Bao Chau Agricultural and Service Cooperative and Ba Be Honey Cooperative have developed unique honey products, expanded their market reach, and increased income for beekeepers.

Competitive analysis reveals that cooperatives in the research area share several common features:

- **Product diversity:** They focus on diversifying bee products, such as honey, royal jelly, pollen and beeswax, to enhance product value and meet market demand.
- **Product quality:** Honey quality is strictly controlled, especially for products such as longan honey, ban-flower honey and tea-flower honey, which helps build brand reputation and consumer trust.
- **Market reach:** In addition to domestic markets, cooperatives are expanding their international exports.
- **Government support:** Cooperatives receive assistance from local authorities and agricultural promotion programmes, which helps improve production capacity and market expansion.

#### 4.4 Defining marketing strategies and goals

The following sections provide an analysis of the position of Think Phat Cooperative compared to its competitors.

##### 4.4.1 Product offering

The cooperative's three-star OCOP honey has numerous applications in both food and manufacturing. In the food sector, honey is used as a natural sweetener. In manufacturing, it serves as a flavouring agent and moisturiser in soaps and cosmetics. To ensure high-quality honey, the bees are kept in forest and fruit tree plantations (such as pomelo, lemon and jackfruit) within a diverse flora environment, resulting in a variety of honey products. The cooperative has started a pilot project to cultivate organic pomelo to enhance the value of the pomelo and ensure a clean source of pollen and nectar for beekeeping. At Think Phat Cooperative, bees are integrated with crops, providing a rich nectar source and valuable products when properly pollinated (e.g. pomelo, longan, papaya or temperate fruits). Cooperative members use plant-based or biological pesticides for vegetables and fruits to protect the environment. According to interview results, about 30% of households at Think Phat Cooperative use organic fertilisers for cultivation. They also implement IPM practices to control and manage pests using biological traps or natural enemies.

#### 4.4.2 Market presence, brand recognition and pricing

Survey results show that 20% of respondents are aware of the Think Phat honey brand (Figure 9). Most consumers have an average perception of this product (Figure 11 shows the likelihood of recommending it to friends is moderate (50/50). The cooperative also employs a competitive pricing strategy: survey results indicate that most consumers consider the price of Think Phat honey to be reasonable (Figure 13).

#### 4.4.3 Distribution channels

The cooperative's honey is sold to individual consumers both within and outside Yen Binh district, major cities, local retail stores, and neighbouring areas such as Lao Cai, Thai Binh, Hanoi, Bac Giang and Bac Ninh. Additionally, honey is sold to online buyers through e-commerce platforms such as Co.opmart and social networks such as Facebook and Zalo. These sales channels are performing well. In 2023, the cooperative's revenue reached nearly 2 billion VND (equivalent to around US\$80,000), a 20% increase from 2022. The cooperative also improved the incomes of 25 local residents by 10–20% through product sales and employment.

#### 4.4.4 Consumer base

- **Individual consumers (end users):**
  - Middle- to high-income consumers (who prefer organic, natural products and are willing to pay more for high-quality honey)
  - Health-conscious consumers (those seeking natural honey without preservatives or added sugars for daily use in a healthy diet)
  - Urban consumers (typically residing in large cities such as Hanoi, Da Nang, Ho Chi Minh City, and shopping through modern channels such as supermarkets, clean food stores or online).
- **Retail stores and supermarkets:** These are ideal distribution channels for the cooperative's honey, especially when the product has certifications for quality, food safety or natural origin. These outlets can help reach a large number of consumers, particularly in major cities.
- **Traditional markets:** Some consumers still prefer shopping at markets where they trust vendor recommendations.
- **Hotels, restaurants and cafés:** This group requires high-quality honey for preparing dishes and beverages, often using honey as a sugar substitute, especially in healthy food and drink options.

- **Business consumers (B2B):** Includes:
  - Food and beverage manufacturers (who might use honey as an ingredient in confectionery, beverages or health products)
  - Gift and event companies (who may purchase honey as a premium gift for consumers or partners, especially during holidays).

#### 4.4.5 Marketing and advertising

The cooperative’s current marketing efforts are lacking. There is no digital marketing activity in place. While the cooperative uses Facebook and Zalo for product marketing, it relies on personal accounts rather than a dedicated Think Phat honey brand page. The cooperative does not actively monitor marketing activities or engage in digital marketing. They are interested in integrating digital aspects into marketing but lack the time, resources and skills to do so. No full-time staff member is dedicated to this activity.

#### 4.5 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

Analysing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) is an easy way to see the whole picture of the cooperative’s situation compared to its competitors (Table 4). This helps cooperatives to be aware of and prepare for potential challenges in the future.

**Table 4. SWOT analysis of Think Phat Cooperative**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weakness</b>
The integration of beekeeping and environmental protection Good management capacity and extensive experience Unique products due to diverse ecological positioning OCOP certification	Lack of social media presence Leadership transition Domestic and imported competition Limited production scale
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
Sustainable consumption trends Development of pollination services Expansion of distribution channels New leadership generation	Climate change Competition from imported honey and local competitors Financial difficulties Pressure from large-scale honey producers

Source: Field survey and in-depth interview with cooperative director, 2024.

The Think Phat Cooperative has several strengths, such as its integration of beekeeping with environmental protection. By applying the EbA label to its honey products, the cooperative not only taps into the rich biodiversity of the environment but also creates a unique value proposition aimed at consumers who prioritise eco-friendly products.

Additionally, the cooperative benefits from strong management capabilities and extensive experience, particularly through its leader, Ms Nguyet, who possesses solid expertise and has participated in numerous beekeeping training programmes. This foundation supports the development of high-quality honey products, especially when combined with sustainable labels such as EbA. Furthermore, the cooperative's honey has a distinctive flavour due to its production area, which is located within a mixed forest and agricultural environment, helping it to stand out in the market. The cooperative has also achieved OCOP certification at the three-star level, instilling initial consumer trust that can be leveraged to build a stronger brand through sustainable labels.

However, there are weaknesses to address. The cooperative lacks a strong presence on social media, missing out on the power of digital marketing. The absence of a strategy on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and its website limits its reach to potential consumers.

Additionally, the impending retirement of Ms Nguyet and some other members may complicate leadership succession, which could hinder the maintenance and development of new initiatives, including the EbA label. The cooperative also faces competition from both domestic and imported honey products, especially from professional honey producers, which could erode its market share if it does not quickly develop a robust brand. Moreover, despite current stable productivity, the cooperative encounters financial and human resource constraints that limit its capacity for scaling up production and product offerings.

The cooperative has opportunities to capitalise on as well. There is a growing trend among consumers toward sustainable products. Implementing the EbA label could help position the cooperative's honey as an environmentally friendly product, creating a competitive advantage. In addition to honey production, the cooperative could develop pollination services, a promising sector that could provide significantly higher economic value. Expanding distribution channels through the EbA label and sustainable certification could

allow the cooperative to tap into higher-end markets, including large supermarket chains and export opportunities to demanding markets such as Europe and North America. Transitioning to a new generation of leadership could also bring fresh ideas and marketing strategies, particularly in enhancing digital presence and product promotion.

Nonetheless, the cooperative faces several challenges. Climate change poses risks through the potential emergence of new diseases and pests, threatening bee populations and honey production. Increased competition from imported honey and local producers may diminish market share, especially in the absence of sustainable labels to differentiate products. Financial difficulties may arise, as developing and implementing the EbA label requires investment in technology and infrastructure, while the cooperative's current capital is limited. Additionally, larger-scale honey producers could exert strong competitive pressure, particularly as they have access to broader distribution channels.

The potential for improving marketing aspects through an EbA label is significant. An EbA label would differentiate the cooperative's products from those without sustainable certification, enhancing product value and providing a foundation for building a stronger brand. Furthermore, marketing products under an EbA label can target consumers who prioritise green and sustainable products. Increasing online presence and utilising digital channels will help the cooperative reach a broader consumer base. Sustainable labels facilitate access to premium distribution channels and expand export markets, particularly those requiring green certifications. Lastly, EbA labels can be utilised in educational campaigns promoting biodiversity protection and climate change adaptation, thereby establishing the cooperative as a socially and environmentally responsible organisation.

In summary, utilising an EbA label would not only enhance the product value and competitive capacity of Think Phat Cooperative but also open up numerous development opportunities. To maximise this potential, the cooperative needs to invest in marketing strategies, enhance its online presence, and systematically build its brand.

#### **4.6 Target markets and product positioning**

- **Local consumers:** Individuals who value natural, high-quality honey and prefer to support local producers.
- **Health-conscious consumers:** Those seeking natural remedies, organic products and sustainable practices.

- **Tourists:** Visitors to Yen Bai interested in local specialities.
- **Speciality stores:** Retailers focusing on organic and environmentally friendly products.
- **Product positioning:** The cooperative's honey products are certified as OCOP three-star. Thinh Phat Honey is packaged in 350ml glass jars, maintaining quality as per established standards. The packaging includes detailed product information and a QR code for easy traceability.

## 4.7 Developing marketing strategies

### 4.7.1 Consumer-focused strategy

This type of strategy focuses on the value provided to consumers. The cooperative sells honey to local stores. The bees are kept under forest and fruit tree canopies, resulting in a diverse range of honey products. The honey is available in 450g and 750g jars, with liquid honey packaged into squeeze tubes for convenience and cleanliness. Crystallised honey is produced within a 20km radius of the cooperative, ensuring local production in Yen Binh, Yen Bai. All products are made by cooperative members with years of experience in honey production. Offering a variety of products meets diverse consumer needs. Local and domestic honey production satisfies consumers who want to support local, small-scale, farmer-run cooperatives. Quality control is straightforward due to individual jar packaging, ensuring consistent honey quantities and eliminating the risk of underfilled jars. The production method has remained unchanged for years, ensuring product consistency.

### 4.7.2 Pricing strategy

The cost for consumers is not an issue, as the product is available on the shelves of most local grocery stores in Yen Bai. Grocery stores are where people buy their food, and purchasing honey there incurs no additional cost for consumers compared to travelling to a speciality store. Consumers who prefer to bring their own containers can visit the cooperative and buy honey at VND 130,000 (equivalent to US\$5.19) per jar (350ml), which is cheaper than in stores, reducing the overall cost for consumers even when visiting the cooperative.

### 4.7.3 Distribution strategy

Convenience for consumers in obtaining the product in good condition is key. As mentioned in the cost section, products are sold in local grocery stores, allowing consumers to purchase

honey conveniently while shopping for other essentials. The cooperative is not currently in a position to start an online store, but if a new director takes over, creating an online store should be considered.

#### **4.7.4 Communication strategy**

To enhance communication between the cooperative and consumers, the cooperative's Facebook page will be updated regularly next summer, sharing information about beekeeping and summer activities. Product-related information, including honey recipes and various uses, will also be shared. A Zalo page should be created, featuring images from the apiary and showcasing ongoing activities. The Zalo page will offer insights into the life of a professional beekeeper, including bee care and honey harvesting. Engaging with social media will provide consumers with a direct communication channel with the cooperative and ensure quick response times, fostering interactive communication.

### **4.8 Developing a marketing programme**

#### **4.8.1 Building a brand**

The cooperative should create marketing materials that emphasise the story of Think Phat Cooperative, highlighting its sustainable practices, the role of the local community in honey production, and how these practices align with the principles of EbA. This narrative will focus on the cooperative's commitment to biodiversity, soil and water conservation, and its efforts to combat climate change through sustainable beekeeping.

The cooperative should also organise honey-tasting events and beekeeping workshops that focus on the importance of EbA practices in honey production. These events will engage the community, build brand loyalty, and promote awareness of the cooperative's commitment to sustainability.

The packaging design should reflect the natural and eco-friendly attributes of the product, reinforcing its appeal to health-conscious and environmentally aware consumers. Information on the EbA label should be prominently featured to educate consumers about its significance and the cooperative's commitment to sustainable practices.

#### 4.8.2 Social media marketing

The cooperative should utilise platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube to attract followers interested in sustainable products and to showcase products and share consumer testimonials while educating consumers on the benefits of natural honey and the EbA label. Instead of investing in paid advertising, the cooperative should focus on creating engaging content that resonates with environmentally conscious consumers. This will include posts on the environmental benefits of honey production, the cooperative's sustainability efforts, and the stories behind the beekeepers.

Different content strategies should be employed across different platforms: Facebook should feature informational posts about EbA practices and sustainability, while Zalo should focus on visually appealing content showcasing the beekeeping process. The Yen Bai e-commerce platform should aim to attract more local consumers through targeted promotions of EbA-certified honey products. Effective management of these social media channels will be crucial, and hiring experienced staff for content creation and engagement will enhance reach and impact.

The cooperative's Facebook page currently has 120 followers and will be revitalised with a posting schedule starting in June 2024. This schedule will include 1–2 posts per week highlighting honey production processes, the role of EbA in ensuring product quality, and featuring recipes that incorporate honey, promoting its versatility in sustainable cooking. The Zalo profile will also be established in early June, emphasising high-quality images of the beekeeping process and EbA practices, with updates scheduled for 2–3 times a week to engage with the audience meaningfully.

The effectiveness of social media marketing will be assessed through metrics such as follower counts, post engagement (likes, comments, shares), and the growth in inquiries about EbA-certified honey. Utilising analytics tools from Facebook and Zalo will help track performance and refine content strategies to better align with consumer interests in sustainable products.

#### 4.8 Monitoring and evaluation

Think Phat Cooperative should engage in the following M&E activities:

- **Feedback collection:** Regularly gather feedback from consumers and retailers on their awareness and perceptions of the EbA label and sustainable practices.

- **Sales tracking:** Monitor sales across distribution channels, especially for EbA-certified products, and adjust marketing strategies based on consumer responses.
- **Market trends:** Stay informed about market trends related to sustainable consumption and adapt positioning strategies to maintain relevance and competitiveness in the eco-conscious consumer market.

#### **4.10 Marketing budget**

The cooperative should allocate its annual marketing budget based on revenue, prioritising investments in market development, product promotion, and brand building specifically around the EbA label. This budget should allow flexibility for adjustments based on emerging opportunities and challenges in the sustainable products market.

## 5 Marketing plan for *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea products

### 5.1 Current situation analysis and marketing opportunities

Tan Lac Son Cooperative, Man Duc Commune, Tan Lac District, Hoa Binh Province was established in 2014, with Mr Do Trong Hiep as the director. It operates as a cooperative with seven founding members. The cooperative has nine members, including four men and five women, and collaborates with 30 households, totalling 115 farmers managing 75 hectares of forest and farmland. Among the cooperative members, 67% are from the Muong ethnic group and 33% are Kinh. The area dedicated to growing *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* under forest canopy is 30 hectares. The cooperative's main products include medicinal plants (such as *Solanum procumbens* and *Gynostemma pentaphyllum*), seasonal vegetables, and *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea. The cooperative's name – meaning ‘new joy for the mountain region’ – reflects its members' aspirations: innovation and creativity, joy and happiness, stability and strength.

Tan Lac Son Cooperative recognises the potential of *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* and has conducted surveys on its varieties and quantities in Tan Lac. The cooperative has identified a sizable population of the small five-leaf variety of *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* in Tan Lac district, known for its scientifically proven benefits for cardiovascular health, cholesterol reduction, diabetes management, obesity prevention and stress relief. Consequently, the cooperative invested in facilities for processing *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea, using plants harvested from the mountainous regions of Phu Vinh and Phu Cuong communes in Tan Lac district, Hoa Binh province. The cooperative operates two production facilities, including five tea-roasting units, one tea-bagging machine, four sealing machines, one vacuum machine, one herb chopper, and an expiration date printer.

The cooperative grows *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* on 30 hectares of mountainous terrain across three communes: Phu Cuong, Phu Vinh and Lo Son. Initially, the cooperative's production facility only had a drying oven, with its main product being loose-leaf *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea. This tea, like other regular teas, is used for brewing and has gained popularity among consumers for its benefits in managing blood lipids, diabetes and overall health recovery. With support from the Tan Lac district's economic and infrastructure department and its own funding, the cooperative upgraded its equipment, including a tea-bagging machine, leading to the introduction of 4g tea bags. In the future, the cooperative

plans to research and master extraction technology to produce concentrated *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* extract.

The Tan Lac Son Cooperative's production facility has been certified for food safety standards by the Hoa Binh provincial sub-department of quality control for agricultural, forestry, and fishery products. The cooperative's products are gradually standardised in terms of sensory attributes, quality, packaging and labelling. The annual raw material procurement for *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* ranges from 4.5 to 5 tonnes. Harvesting and processing for *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* have improved the income of about 200 farmers by 10–20% through additional earnings from NTFPs. The cooperative also provides employment for four to five workers with an average monthly income of VND 5 to 6 million (equivalent to around US\$200–240).



*Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea for infusion (Source: Tan Lac Son Cooperative)



*Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea bags are pre-measured at 4 grams per sachet (Source: Tan Lac Son Cooperative)

Unlike most other organisations, Tan Lac Son Cooperative prioritises controlling the product supply chain. The cooperative organises fresh plant procurement from local villages, directly inspects and screens the raw materials, and performs processing and packaging to ensure product quality. The cooperative uses 100% small five-leaf *Gynostemma pentaphyllum*, a variety scientifically validated for its health benefits, in contrast to other organisations that use various folk varieties. Currently, the cooperative's products are available to consumers in Quang Ninh, Thanh Hoa, Hanoi, Da Nang, Ho Chi Minh City and An Giang through various distribution channels, including health food stores, supermarkets, buying groups, and direct consumer orders. The cooperative also actively participates in trade fairs and has developed a website to promote and sell products while engaging consumers through social media platforms such as Facebook and Zalo.

The cooperative's organisational structure includes a director, collection teams in local areas, and a tea-production team at the cooperative's headquarters, which suits the operational conditions and is easy to manage. The leadership's and members' capabilities in market-oriented and sustainable agricultural production have been enhanced. The cooperative employs five full-time workers (in production and administration) and about 120 temporary workers are involved in harvesting fresh *Gynostemma pentaphyllum*. The cooperative also collaborates with two groups of 115 farmers, primarily women, who regularly harvest raw materials.

The cooperative produces about 4–5 tonnes of dried *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* annually, generating around 480 million VND (equivalent to just over US\$19,000) in revenue. In addition to dried *Gynostemma pentaphyllum*, the cooperative also sells *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea bags under the brand 'Gypen' at VND 120,000 (equivalent to US\$4.79) per pack (75 × 4g tea bags). With experience in supporting farmers in livelihood development, organic farming systems, biodiversity conservation and ecological farming practices, the cooperative has worked with local communities to create naturally favourable, organic product areas and implement Good Agricultural and Collection Practices (GACP). GACP is similar to GAP (Good Agricultural Practices), which emphasises the implementation of safe and sustainable production methods. GAP requires producers to take measures to protect the environment and human health. However, GACP places greater emphasis on the harvesting and processing of medicinal plants. GACP ensures that harvesting methods do not harm the natural sources of medicinal plants. Thus, GAP and GACP differ in that GAP primarily focuses on agricultural production processes, while GACP encompasses not only the production process but also harvesting and processing.

The cooperative's future development direction is to expand its production facilities and distribution network to fully realise the potential of *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* in Tan Lac and Hoa Binh. The cooperative aims to achieve an annual sales growth rate of 10–15% to increase member income and its expand production scale and market reach. The current marketing goal is to enhance brand recognition, bring the cooperative's brand closer to domestic consumers, strengthen consumer relationships and explore international markets.

## **5.2 Analysis of the *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea market**

Market analysis results indicate that Tan Lac Son Cooperative's *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea has significant growth potential and can dominate the market both domestically and internationally. To ensure the cooperative's sustainable development, maintaining product quality and expanding distribution channels will be crucial. The implementation of the EbA/sustainable label across the value chains will need to be carried out systematically, from production and processing to consumption, in order to enhance value addition and protect the environment while ensuring benefits for local residents. The market for this product is rapidly expanding due to the factors outlined in the following sections.

### **5.2.1 High product quality**

Tan Lac Son's *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea is made from the well-known five-leaf variety, recognised for its superior health benefits. The product has received a three-star OCOP certification, ensuring its quality and food safety.

### **5.2.2 Potential markets**

The cooperative not only supplies products domestically but also plans to expand into international markets. Their products are already available in various provinces throughout Vietnam.

### **5.2.3 Sustainable raw material development**

Hoa Binh province is actively developing areas for cultivating medicinal herbs, focusing on valuable herbs, including *Gynostemma pentaphyllum*. By the end of 2022, the province had over 2,145 hectares dedicated to cultivating medicinal and aromatic plants, including significant areas for lemongrass (1,576 hectares), *Solanum procumbens* (294 hectares), and black pseudo-ginseng (218 hectares). Additionally, there are smaller areas for other herbs such as turmeric, mugwort, *Gynostemma pentaphyllum*, *Codonopsis*, basil and others.

Currently, about 64.5 hectares are under forest canopy, and the province also harvests various naturally occurring medicinal plants. The development plan for medicinal plants in Hoa Binh aims to establish specific climate zones for research and development, including areas such as Hang Kia, Phu Canh, Thuong Tien and Ngoc Son. This plan also focuses on the conservation and sustainable management of 10 key medicinal plant species, targeting the conservation of 70% of species by 2025 and 100% by 2030. The province is also promoting a value chain model from cultivation to processing and sales.

#### 5.2.4 Local government support

Hoa Binh province supports organisations and individuals in developing and maintaining medicinal herb cultivation models, contributing to sustainable livelihoods for local residents. This support includes various programmes such as the National Target Programme for New Rural Development (offering loans, technical training, consulting, quality seedlings and market support); the Agricultural Investment Promotion Programme (providing grants, financial support and policy incentives for medicinal plant projects); and technical support programmes (including training sessions, workshops and expert consultations).

#### 5.3 Analysis of market competitors

The leadership of Tan Lac Son Cooperative assesses the current market for *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea as moderately competitive. However, it is anticipated that competition will intensify in the future, as competitors continuously seek to lower their prices. Hoa Binh province is renowned for its diverse range of medicinal herbs, resulting in numerous cooperatives and companies that produce *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea. These entities are also focused on enhancing product quality and expanding their market reach, which creates direct competition for Tan Lac Son Cooperative. Local producers may also act as potential competitors, supplying raw materials to rival companies. Provinces such as Lao Cai, Yen Bai, and Cao Bang provide favourable conditions for cultivating *Gynostemma pentaphyllum*, and many businesses in these regions are developing their own *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea products. A notable direct competitor identified by Tan Lac Son is Tu Linh Gynostemma, produced by Tu Linh Pharmaceutical Company, founded in 2002 by Professor-Doctor Nguyen Van Mui. This company has robust sales capabilities, extensive advertising strategies, and markets its products in a higher segment, supported by a well-organised and professional distribution system.

- **Domestic market competitors:** *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea is available in various formats, including tea bags, dried herbal tea and extracts. Currently, Tan Lac Son Cooperative offers only two product lines: natural *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea and tea bags. To maintain competitiveness, the cooperative must engage in continuous product innovation and diversification. The leadership plans to introduce new offerings, such as *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* extract and pre-packaged tea bags. To accomplish this, Tan Lac Son will need to invest in additional equipment, including extraction vessels, herbal extractors, and a 5-in-1 tea bag packaging machine.

- **International market competitors:** On the international stage, particularly in developed countries, there is a growing trend toward natural and health-oriented products. This trend presents a significant opportunity for Tan Lac Son; however, it also entails the challenge of meeting international quality standards to cater to a broad market.

In light of these competitive dynamics, the feasibility of implementing the EbA/sustainable label across all value chains is clear. By investing in sustainable practices and maintaining high-quality standards, Tan Lac Son can differentiate itself in a crowded marketplace. Focusing on the sustainability aspect of *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* cultivation and processing will not only enhance the cooperative's brand image but also appeal to health-conscious consumers both domestically and internationally. This strategic emphasis on sustainability can foster consumer loyalty and potentially increase market share in the growing health products segment.

## **5.4 Defining marketing strategies and goals**

The following sections provide an analysis of the position of Tan Lac Son Cooperative compared to its competitors.

### **5.4.1 Product offering**

Tan Lac Son Cooperative distinguishes itself by utilising 100% five-leaf *Gynostemma pentaphyllum*, a variety known for its superior health benefits. This sets them apart from many competitors who often use various traditional types, including three-leaf, seven-leaf, nine-leaf, or larger five-leaf varieties, which may not provide the same efficacy.

### **5.4.2 Market presence, brand recognition and pricing**

Recent surveys indicate that 54% of respondents are familiar with the Tan Lac Son *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea brand and express satisfaction with the product. However, the likelihood of these consumers recommending the product to others is moderate, showing a balanced perception (50/50).

Tan Lac Son Cooperative employs a competitive pricing strategy. Survey results reveal that most consumers perceive the pricing of Tan Lac Son's *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea as reasonable, positioning the cooperative favourably within the market.

### 5.4.3 Distribution channels

The cooperative has established a presence in several key locations, including Quang Ninh, Thanh Hoa, Hanoi, Da Nang, Ho Chi Minh City and An Giang. Their products are accessible through various channels such as health food stores, supermarkets, buying groups, and direct consumer orders.

### 5.4.4 Consumer base

- **Individual consumers:** Targeted consumers include health-conscious individuals, particularly middle-aged and elderly people who are potential buyers, along with those with medium to high incomes capable of purchasing premium health products. Residents of major cities such as Hanoi, Hai Phong and Ho Chi Minh City, many of whom prefer natural health solutions, also form a significant part of the consumer base.
- **Hospitality consumers:** This segment encompasses restaurants, cafés and spas that may incorporate *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea into their menus or wellness offerings, as well as healthcare facilities that could include the tea in their health programmes.
- **Retail consumers:** The cooperative's retail partners include supermarkets, health food stores, speciality shops, and natural product retailers.

### 5.4.5 Marketing and advertising

The cooperative's marketing initiatives are generally perceived as effective, with an established online presence through their website (<https://tanlacson.com/gcl/#>) and a Facebook page boasting 1.2k likes and followers (<https://www.facebook.com/tanlacson/>). However, their engagement in marketing and digital strategies is limited due to constraints in time, resources and skills. As a result, they predominantly rely on traditional marketing methods. For instance, one of their *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea advertisements appears on an e-commerce site, but consumer feedback is sparse, with no reviews for the branded Gypen *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea bags and only one four-star review for the Tan Lac Son Natural *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea.

To capitalise on market opportunities and improve competitiveness, it is crucial for Tan Lac Son to develop and implement a more dynamic marketing strategy. This includes embracing digital marketing and refining their advertising efforts to enhance brand visibility and consumer engagement. Furthermore, aligning their branding with sustainability principles,

particularly through the EbA label, will not only appeal to health-conscious consumers but also strengthen their market position across all value chains.

### 5.5 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

Using SWOT analysis is an effective way to understand the overall situation that the cooperative frequently encounters. By reflecting on the current situation through SWOT analysis, the cooperative can identify potential future challenges and prepare for them. This approach can even help in avoiding some threats or managing issues if they are anticipated and addressed in advance. Table 4 presents insights from the cooperative’s owners regarding the current situation of Tan Lac Son Cooperative compared to its competitors through SWOT analysis.

**Table 5. SWOT analysis of Tan Lac Son Cooperative**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weakness</b>
Diverse expertise among founders Commitment to sustainability High-quality raw materials Skilled workforce Sustainable value-chain development	Limited product diversification. Small production scale Limited financial resources
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
Growing demand for green products Potential for international market expansion Support from government and policies promoting medicinal plant development	Intense competition Stringent standards Climate change impacts

The Tan Lac Son Cooperative has established a strong brand in the medicinal plant sector in Hoa Binh since its founding in 2014. With members possessing diverse expertise but sharing a common goal of collaborating to become stronger and more efficient, the cooperative has achieved significant success in developing natural and environmentally friendly products, particularly its Gyphen tea. Additionally, the cooperative has transitioned its production process to sustainable and organic practices, creating high-quality and safe raw materials for consumers.

However, the cooperative still faces several weaknesses. The limited product diversification, with only two offerings – loose tea and tea bags – has reduced its market expansion capacity and ability to meet large market demands. The small production scale also restricts its competitiveness, while weak financial resources lead to a lack of marketing capabilities, primarily relying on free channels.

Currently, Tan Lac Son is presented with significant opportunities. The growing trend towards green and healthy consumption creates favourable conditions for the development of *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea products. The cooperative has the potential to expand into international markets, particularly in developed countries with high demand for natural products. Furthermore, government support and policies promoting medicinal plant development are crucial factors that help the cooperative leverage resources and scale up production.

Nevertheless, significant challenges remain. Competition from other producers, both within and outside the province, could affect Tan Lac Son's market share. Meeting domestic and international quality standards will also require the cooperative to invest more in production processes and quality control to satisfy increasing consumer demands. Additionally, climate change poses negative impacts on the growing conditions for *Gynostemma pentaphyllum*, potentially reducing yield and product quality. To overcome these challenges, the cooperative needs to focus on cost management, expanding production scale, and adhering to international standards.

In this context, implementing an EbA label or other sustainable labels could serve as effective solutions to enhance the marketing aspects of *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea products. This label would not only add value to the products but also raise consumer awareness of environmental protection and sustainable development responsibilities. To deploy the EbA label, the cooperative should intensify promotional activities, educate the community about the product benefits, and build a sustainable supply chain. This approach will not only help Tan Lac Son assert its brand and enhance its reputation in the eyes of consumers but also enable it to better seize existing opportunities, thereby strengthening its competitive position in the market.

## 5.6 Target market and product positioning

To segment the market for Tan Lac Son's *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea, several factors need to be considered, including demographics, geography, psychographics (consumer behaviour) and purchasing behaviour. The primary target market segments are:

- **Middle-aged and older adults (aged 45 and above) in major domestic cities:** This group has a high demand for healthcare products and the financial means to afford them.
- **Health and environmentally conscious consumers (typically 25–45 years old):** This group includes individuals with busy lifestyles who seek natural and sustainable products to enhance their health.
- **International markets in Asia and developed countries:** Exploit the high demand for natural and health-related products.

The cooperative should position Tan Lac Son *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea based on product quality, distribution systems and customer service. Key aspects to emphasise in positioning include:

- **Compliance with food safety standards:** The product meets GAP standards, is of high quality and has health benefits.
- **Timely harvesting:** *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* is harvested at the optimal time to meet quality requirements.
- **Commitment to natural and organic practices:** The cooperative ensures natural, organic production and follows GACP guidelines. The processing is hygienic and efficient, aiming to produce a convenient, health-beneficial product with minimal environmental impact. The product packaging should feature the slogan: '100% natural – no preservatives.'

## 5.7 Developing marketing strategies

### 5.7.1 Consumer-focused strategy

Target Audience: Consumers interested in health benefits such as cardiovascular support, cholesterol reduction, and immune enhancement. This includes elderly individuals, those with chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension, as well as young people focused on long-term health. The cooperative should emphasise that their *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea is made from high-quality, wild-harvested leaves from the eastern slopes of the Ngoc Son –

Ngo Luong Nature Reserve, that the product is processed using a clean method to preserve the active compounds. Packaging should clearly outline health benefits and usage instructions.

### 5.7.2 Pricing strategy

The cooperative should develop a pricing strategy based on detailed cost analysis, market review, and competitive pricing to ensure profitability while remaining competitive. The cooperative should implement flexible pricing policies such as discounts for loyal consumers, periodic promotions, and bundle offers. It should also consider export-related costs including shipping, marketing, advertising and any required certifications.

### 5.7.3 Distribution strategy

The cooperative should utilise a mix of distribution channels, including direct sales, retailers, wholesalers, intermediaries, online platforms (such as Shopee, Lazada, Postmart) and traditional retail outlets (such as pharmacies, supermarkets and health food stores). It should ensure a streamlined purchasing process from order placement to fast, efficient delivery, and offer accessible consumer support via phone, email and online chat.

### 5.7.4 Communication strategy

- **Clear messaging:** Emphasise the cooperative’s commitment to environmental sustainability and health benefits, reflecting the growing consumer demand for eco-friendly products. Messaging should convey: ‘Tan Lac Son *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea bags are 100% natural, sourced sustainably from the eastern slopes of the Ngoc Son – Ngo Luong Nature Reserve. Our commitment to eco-friendly practices ensures that we minimise environmental impact while providing a high-quality product. Each package contains 75 individual tea bags, designed to last an average user a month, with additional bags recommended for enhanced health benefits.’
- **Incorporating EbA:** The cooperative should highlight how its production methods align with EbA principles, promoting biodiversity and ecosystem health. For instance, it should emphasise that the cultivation and harvesting processes are designed to enhance the resilience of local ecosystems, which supports sustainable community livelihoods and climate adaptation.
- **Diverse communication channels:** The cooperative should utilise a multichannel approach, including social media, email marketing, health blogs, and traditional media

(newspapers, radio) to reach various segments of the target market. Each channel should consistently communicate the environmental benefits and health advantages of the product.

- **Consumer engagement:** The cooperative should foster active participation and feedback from consumers through:
  - **Live health consultations:** Offer sessions that educate consumers about the health benefits of *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea and the importance of sustainable consumption.
  - **Product trials and sampling:** Allow potential consumers to experience the product firsthand, particularly in eco-focused events or community health fairs.
  - **Special promotions on Facebook:** Create campaigns that highlight its sustainable practices and the health benefits of *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea, reinforcing the importance of choosing environmentally friendly products.
  - **Community-building activities:** Establish a dedicated Facebook group for consumers to share their experiences, provide feedback, and engage in discussions about health and sustainability, fostering a sense of community among users who value eco-friendly products.

## 5.8 Developing a marketing programme

### 5.8.1 Building a brand

To target the identified consumer segments, Tan Lac Son Cooperative should:

- **Educate and inform:** Provide detailed information on the health benefits of *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea through websites, blogs and social media, and create educational content such as articles, videos and scientific studies that also discuss the importance of EbA in sustaining health and natural resources.
- **Build a brand on natural and organic values:** Emphasise the product's natural origin, clean production and eco-friendly packaging with clear labelling, and the cooperative's commitment to EbA principles in preserving the local ecosystem.
- **Offer samples and loyalty programmes:** Distribute samples at health food stores, traditional medicine clinics, and trade fairs. Establish a loyalty programme with special offers for repeat consumers.

- **Collaborate and network:** Partner with traditional medicine clinics, hospitals and health centres for product introduction; build relationships with major distributors and organic food chains.

### 5.8.2 Social media marketing

- **Content marketing:** Create engaging and valuable content weekly, including content on health benefits, usage guides, success stories and videos. Incorporate information about how EbA practices contribute to the sustainability of the product.
- **Facebook advertisement campaigns:** Run targeted advertisements during key periods such as spring, winter, holidays, health events and product launches. Implement remarketing to re-engage previous website visitors.
- **Consumer engagement:** Respond promptly to consumer inquiries on Facebook and the website, run loyalty programmes, and organise contests and giveaways.
- **Community building:** Develop a community of *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea users on Facebook to share experiences and provide support. Host online events and encourage consumers to share their stories.
- **Influencer collaboration:** Partner with key health opinion leaders and influencers for product reviews and social media promotion, emphasising the cooperative's commitment to sustainability and EbA.

### 5.9 Monitoring and evaluation

Regularly assess the effectiveness of marketing campaigns and adjust strategies as needed.

- **Marketing results assessment:** Regularly evaluate sales performance, profit margins, and marketing expenses relative to revenue.
- **Policy review:** Conduct quarterly and semi-annual reviews of marketing policy implementation, ensuring alignment with EbA principles and sustainability goals.

### 5.10 Marketing budget

As an agricultural producer, the cooperative should allocate a budget for marketing activities, product promotion, and brand building based on revenue. Adjust the marketing budget periodically according to needs and real-time performance, ensuring sufficient funds are directed towards promoting EbA practices and sustainable initiatives.

## 6 Marketing plan for bamboo shoot products

### 6.1 Current situation analysis and marketing opportunities



Main products of Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative (Source: Tan Xuan Agricultural Cooperative)

Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative is an FFPO established in 2019, located in Tan Xuan Commune, Van Ho District, Son La Province, under the leadership of Ms Cao Thi Tam as the cooperative director.

The cooperative specialises in the production of dried bamboo shoots and comprises 80 members (60 women and 20 men). Ms Tam and the cooperative members have successfully built the Tan Xuan Bamboo Shoot brand, with the dried bamboo shoot product receiving a four-star OCOP rating in Son La province, recognised as a speciality of Son La highly appreciated by consumers nationwide.<sup>1</sup>

Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative processes several products, including dried bamboo shoots, shredded dried bamboo shoots, dried bamboo shoots with thicker stems), dried ‘pig’s tongue’ bamboo shoots, and cassava noodles. The cooperative began by purchasing fresh

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<sup>1</sup> A four-star OCOP product is a locally sourced good or tourism service that has a brand, reflects the cultural characteristics and advantages of the locality, and has good market accessibility. The product has an average evaluation score ranging from 70 to under 90 points based on the OCOP criteria.

bamboo shoots from local farmers and processing them into dried products. To ensure food safety and hygiene, the cooperative has invested in building a modern production facility and drying kilns. Fresh bamboo shoots, after being harvested, are washed with well water, boiled, cut into pieces, and sun-dried. On cloudy days, the bamboo shoots are placed in the drying kiln for about 6 hours. When the sun is out, the drying time can be reduced, and the bamboo shoots are sun-dried, enhancing their flavour and colour.

Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative has chosen a sustainable development path by improving the quality and value of its dried bamboo shoot products. With support from the GREAT Project, cooperative members have been trained in sustainable harvesting and processing of natural forest bamboo shoots, ensuring organic standards are met. The cooperative has invested in facilities and equipment with a total investment of VND 1.5 billion, reaching a production capacity of 1 tonne of dried bamboo shoots per day. Additionally, the project has provided support in building product branding and integrating the products into e-commerce platforms.

Ms Cao Thi Tam, the cooperative director, shared that the cooperative has expanded its bamboo shoot sourcing area to over 1,000 hectares. In 2020, the cooperative's dried bamboo shoot product was certified as a four-star OCOP product, doubling its value compared to before. In 2021, the cooperative's revenue reached VND 3 billion, with profits accounting for 30–35%. Each member earns a monthly salary of VND 5–6 million (equivalent to US\$200–240). The cooperative also helps improve the income of more than 60 local residents by 10–30% through product sales and labour opportunities. Ms Ha Thi Tut, a resident of Buot hamlet, Tan Xuan commune, shared that before, her family did not have stable employment and relied on harvesting bamboo shoots during the season for extra income. Since the establishment of the Tan Xuan 269 cooperative's bamboo shoot processing plant, her family has joined the cooperative, learning the standard process for producing dried bamboo shoots with guaranteed food safety, earning VND 4.5–5 million (equivalent to US\$180–200) per person per month.

Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative has adopted smokeless drying technology to enhance the flavour, colour and aroma of the bamboo shoots. The cooperative also uses QR codes for product traceability. Cooperative members have become proficient in utilising digital marketing platforms and e-commerce sites such as Shopee, Voso, Zalo and Facebook.

The cooperative's future development strategy includes expanding production according to VietGAP standards and simultaneously expanding its market, with the goal of exporting bamboo shoots to international markets.

The cooperative aims to achieve annual sales growth with a business growth rate of about 10–15% to increase income for its members, expand production scale and broaden market reach. The cooperative's marketing goal is to maintain consumer loyalty to its products, gain new consumers, establish a presence on social media, and explore new channels for direct consumer interaction. The objective is to cultivate not just product loyalty but also brand and producer loyalty among consumers.

## **6.2 Analysis of the bamboo shoot market**

### **6.2.1 Bamboo shoot market dynamics**

Health and wellness trends are driving the bamboo shoot market. Bamboo shoots are naturally high in fibre, protein and vitamins A, C and E, while being low in fat and sodium. These nutritional qualities make them an appealing choice for health-conscious consumers. Additionally, bamboo shoots are a common ingredient in Asian cuisine, which is gaining popularity worldwide. As dishes from Chinese, Thai and Vietnamese cuisines become more mainstream, the demand for bamboo shoots rises in tandem. Bamboo shoots are also being incorporated into a variety of new food and beverage products, including plant-based alternatives to meat, functional meals and drinks. This expansion broadens the market for bamboo shoots, making them more accessible to consumers. Bamboo shoots are being promoted as a sustainable and ethical food choice. Bamboo is a renewable resource, and bamboo shoots are often cultivated using traditional, environmentally friendly methods. As a result, they are becoming a popular choice among consumers who seek eco-friendly and ethically sourced food products. The increasing popularity of plant-based diets, along with the versatility of bamboo shoots as a vegetarian or vegan alternative, is making them more appealing. As consumers look for alternative nutritional sources, bamboo shoots stand out as a sustainable, plant-based ingredient with a unique texture and flavour that can be used in a wide range of culinary applications.

### **6.2.2 Limited supply: a significant market challenge**

Despite being a popular and adaptable ingredient, bamboo shoots face supply challenges due to their unique growth patterns and harvesting methods. Bamboo produces shoots cyclically, appearing only during certain seasons. This limited growing period restricts the availability of fresh bamboo shoots for significant portions of the year, posing challenges in meeting continuous market demand.

Furthermore, bamboo growth is highly dependent on geography and climate, exacerbating these supply constraints. Bamboo thrives in specific regions and under particular environmental conditions, limiting its supply. Soil type, temperature, and humidity all significantly impact the growth and yield of bamboo shoots. This regional dependency can lead to uneven distribution and limited access to fresh bamboo shoots in markets that rely on imports or where bamboo is not native, disrupting supply chains and market stability.

The short shelf life of bamboo shoots adds another layer of difficulty, as fresh bamboo shoots have a relatively limited shelf life and can spoil quickly, making storage and transportation challenging. All these factors contribute to supply volatility, which can affect prices and overall market dynamics.

### **6.2.3 Developing new products and expanding market potential**

Bamboo shoots, long valued in various cuisines for their distinct flavour and nutritional benefits, have extensive applications beyond their traditional uses. By offering unique bamboo shoot-derived products, such as value-added items such as pickled bamboo shoots, bamboo chips or snacks, the market can provide a range of convenient, appealing options for consumers seeking novel culinary experiences. Additionally, exploring the production of beverages, canned or frozen foods, as well as powders or flours made from bamboo shoots, can extend their usability to a broader audience, ensuring availability and accessibility year-round.

Beyond the culinary sector, the introduction of beauty and wellness products, such as cosmetics or supplements, leveraging the potential benefits of bamboo shoots in non-food industries, can tap into the health and wellness market. Furthermore, collaborating with chefs to develop premium culinary applications and creating ready-to-eat meals using bamboo shoots can cater to diverse consumer tastes. Each of these avenues requires a complex process of research, development, and marketing, with the ultimate goal of establishing a vibrant

market for bamboo shoots by meeting a wide range of consumer needs, preferences, and lifestyles.

#### **6.2.4 Market trends for bamboo shoots**

According to Exactitude Consultancy, the global bamboo shoot market is projected to grow from US\$ 0.44 billion in 2023 to US\$ 0.68 billion by 2030, at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6.55% during the forecast period.

Bamboo is a fast-growing plant that can be cultivated in a wide range of climates. This has led to increased accessibility to bamboo shoots due to the expansion of bamboo farming in various regions around the world. The e-commerce sector for bamboo shoots is rapidly expanding, making it easier for consumers to purchase bamboo shoots regardless of their location.

In the bamboo shoot industry, there is an increasing focus on sustainability. For example, some companies are exploring environmentally friendly bamboo cultivation and harvesting techniques. Bamboo shoots are being used in a variety of cosmetic products, including facial cleansers, moisturisers, and masks. This is due to their high content of antioxidants and other skin-beneficial compounds.

Based on a combination of document research and field surveys, it has been found that Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative, known for its dried bamboo shoot products, has achieved significant success and strong consumer support both within and outside of Son La Province. The cooperative's dried bamboo shoots are highly regarded for their exceptional quality: natural golden colour, distinctive aroma, free from preservatives, and subjected to rigorous quality-control processes. Dried bamboo shoots are commonly used in traditional dishes such as stir-fries, soups, and vermicelli, and are also popular as a culturally significant gift from the mountainous regions of Northwest Vietnam.

The market for Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative's dried bamboo shoots is expanding, with various trade promotion plans including product displays, advertising, and distribution in supermarket chains and safe food stores. The product has earned a four-star OCOP certification in Son La Province, reflecting its recognised quality and brand value.

However, Tan Xuan Cooperative still faces challenges, such as securing stable market outlets for its products and enhancing management and sales skills among its members. The cooperative is actively seeking training and expert consultation to improve its business capabilities and scale up production.

Overall, with its high-quality products and well-planned market expansion strategy, Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative has strong growth prospects, both domestically and internationally.

### **6.3 Analysis of market competitors**

Bamboo shoots are a traditional agricultural product with many processing and trading enterprises and cooperatives involved. Currently, the market is filled with numerous producers and cooperatives offering similar products to Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative, including fresh bamboo shoots, dried bamboo shoots, vacuum-packed bamboo shoots, and various bamboo shoot-based products such as pickled bamboo shoots.

Competitors within the province include:

- Son La Bamboo Shoot Cooperative (Chieng Co Commune, Mai Son District, Son La Province), and
- Huu Nghi Bamboo Shoot Processing Facility (Moc Chau Town, Moc Chau District, Son La Province).

Competitors from outside the province include:

- Bac Kan Province:
  - Thanh Xuan Agricultural Cooperative (Thanh Van Commune, Cho Moi District, Bac Kan Province), and
  - Hoang Tuan Cooperative (Quang Chu Commune, Cho Moi District, Bac Kan Province).
- Hoa Binh Province:
  - Muong Dong Cooperative (Tan Lac Commune, Muong Dong District, Hoa Binh Province), and
  - Xuan Thinh Bamboo Shoot Production Facility (Luong Son Town, Luong Son District, Hoa Binh Province).
- Thai Nguyen Province:

- Thai Nguyen Agricultural Cooperative (Phu Luong Commune, Phu Luong District, Thai Nguyen Province), and
- Tan Cuong Bamboo Shoot Processing Facility (Tan Cuong Commune, Thai Nguyen City, Thai Nguyen Province).
- Yen Bai Province:
  - Yen Bai Agricultural Cooperative (Dai Lich Commune, Van Chan District, Yen Bai Province), and
  - Ngoc Lan Bamboo Shoot Processing Facility (Mau Dong Commune, Van Yen District, Yen Bai Province).

These competitors offer products similar to those of Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative. Tan Xuan dried bamboo shoots are highly regarded by consumers as one of the best-tasting foods and a unique product of the Son La region. They are suitable for use in dishes such as stir-fries, soups, and vermicelli, and are also popular as gifts, embodying the cultural richness of the Northwest highlands.

## **6.4 Defining marketing strategies and goals**

### **6.4.1 Product offering**

Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative specialises in producing dried bamboo shoots with distinctive characteristics. The standout features of Tan Xuan bamboo shoot products include their golden-brown colour, thick texture, fine veins, very dry to the touch with no dampness, and a unique fragrance that cannot be mistaken. The bamboo shoots are carefully sundried to prevent mould. After drying, they have a natural yellow colour that is visually appealing and appetising.

Importantly, all dried bamboo shoot products are subject to strict quality control before being marketed, with a commitment to no preservatives or harmful substances. They are a popular choice for festive meals during Tet and weddings. The dried bamboo shoots have been recognised with a four-star OCOP certification, which has helped build consumer trust.



Dried bamboo shoot products of Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative (Source: Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative)

Tan Xuan bamboo shoots are a speciality of Van Ho, recognised as a four-star OCOP product of Son La province. The story behind the product has been featured on various social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, as well as on online news outlets such as Son La Newspaper and the Son La Provincial Electronic Information Portal. Just type the phrase ‘Măng nứa Tan Xuan’ (Tan Xuan bamboo shoots) into the Google search bar, and you will find numerous articles and videos the brand.

#### **6.4.2 Market presence, brand recognition and pricing**

Survey results indicate that 32% of respondents are aware of the Tan Xuan bamboo shoots brand (Figure 9), with 100% expressing satisfaction when using this product (Figure 10). However, the cooperative needs to invest more in advertising and brand promotion to increase consumer awareness of the Tan Xuan bamboo shoot brand.

The cooperative employs a competitive pricing strategy. Survey results show that most consumers find the price of Tan Xuan bamboo shoots to be reasonable (Figure 13).

#### **6.4.3 Distribution channels**

Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative’s bamboo shoot products are distributed through high-quality channels such as supermarkets, convenience stores, and food shops in Hanoi and

neighbouring provinces. Additionally, the cooperative sells products locally to consumers and tourists.

#### 6.4.4 Consumer base

Tan Xuan cooperative’s consumer base includes families, restaurants, hotels, clean food stores, and retailers specialising in organic and natural products. These consumers prefer high-quality, organic, and natural goods. Therefore, the Tan Xuan bamboo shoots brand continues to assert its position as an organic, natural product harvested from the pristine highlands of Son La. It is nutrient-rich, chemical-free, and produced following traditional methods.

The market segmentation should target consumers who are willing to pay a premium for high-quality, organic products. However, product variations or packaging could be tailored to cater to consumers with lower incomes as well.

#### 6.4.5 Marketing and advertising

Currently, the cooperative’s marketing efforts are insufficient, with no active digital marketing in place. Tan Xuan Bamboo Shoots has a Facebook page with 157 likes and 180 followers.<sup>2</sup> However, the cooperative lacks the time, resources, and skills needed to engage in proactive digital marketing. While Tan Xuan has begun marketing on social media, with Facebook as the main platform, the posts about the bamboo shoots are sparse and lack focus, leading to limited consumer engagement and feedback.

### 6.5 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

**Table 6.**

***SWOT Analysis of Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative***

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Rich raw material resources	Limited market access
Organic processing methods	Weak management skills
High product quality	Inconsistent digital marketing
Strong cultural connection	

<sup>2</sup> See [www.facebook.com/MangNuaTanXuan269](https://www.facebook.com/MangNuaTanXuan269)

<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
Growing consumer demand for clean, safe food Potential for export EbA labelling as a differentiator Product diversification	Intense competition Market volatility Climate change

Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative stands out in several key areas compared to its competitors, particularly when considering the potential of EbA labelling. One of its primary strengths is the rich resource of bamboo forests, with the cooperative managing 300 hectares. This stable supply of raw materials gives Tan Xuan a significant advantage, as competitors may face higher costs for sourcing similar resources.

Additionally, the cooperative employs organic processing methods, ensuring the bamboo shoots are dried naturally and free of preservatives, which appeals to health-conscious consumers. The high quality of its bamboo shoots has earned Tan Xuan a four-star OCOP certification, reinforcing its product’s credibility. Furthermore, Tan Xuan benefits from a strong cultural connection, as its bamboo shoots are deeply rooted in the region’s heritage, adding sentimental value for consumers and providing an edge in local and regional markets.

However, despite these strengths, Tan Xuan faces several challenges. Market access remains limited, largely due to a lack of comprehensive digital marketing strategies. The cooperative struggles to reach broader urban and international markets, which hampers its growth potential. Another significant weakness lies in the management skills of its members, who require further training in digital sales, financial management, and marketing execution. While the cooperative has initiated online sales, it has yet to fully capitalise on digital platforms to drive significant consumer engagement or sales.

The cooperative also has several opportunities to expand and improve. The growing global demand for clean, safe, and sustainable food presents a significant opportunity for Tan Xuan. With the right marketing approach, its bamboo shoots could be positioned as premium eco-friendly products. Additionally, the cooperative’s aspirations to enter export markets align with the increasing global demand for eco-certified products, opening further avenues for growth. The adoption of an EbA label, emphasising sustainable practices and environmental stewardship, could differentiate Tan Xuan’s products from competitors, particularly for

consumers who prioritise sustainability. There is also potential for product diversification, as the cooperative could explore producing other bamboo-based or eco-friendly products, broadening its market appeal.

Nevertheless, Tan Xuan faces several threats that could hinder its progress. The bamboo shoot market is highly competitive, with larger brands wielding superior marketing and distribution networks, which could overshadow Tan Xuan's efforts. Market volatility, especially fluctuations in raw material prices and rising production costs, poses a risk to profitability if stable pricing mechanisms are not established. Moreover, the cooperative is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, which is already affecting bamboo production through irregular rainfall and rising temperatures, potentially reducing both supply and quality.

The introduction of an EbA or sustainable certification label could significantly enhance Tan Xuan's marketability. Certifications such as EbA, VietGAP, and OCOP play a crucial role in building consumer trust, particularly as environmental protection and sustainability become increasingly important to consumers. By promoting the sustainability of its production methods, Tan Xuan could leverage the fact that 84% of surveyed consumers are willing to pay more for certified products, positioning its bamboo shoots as a premium, eco-friendly choice. The EbA label would not only set Tan Xuan apart from competitors in terms of quality but also highlight its positive ecological impact, justifying higher pricing and attracting health-conscious consumers, especially in urban markets such as Hanoi.

To successfully implement the EbA label, several strategic steps are recommended. Educational campaigns focused on increasing awareness of the EbA label could be launched through workshops, marketing initiatives, and digital content, helping to build consumer understanding of the sustainability benefits Tan Xuan's products offer. Enhancing digital marketing efforts through social media and e-commerce platforms would broaden the cooperative's reach, particularly in urban areas, while driving greater engagement. Certification support from programmes such as GREAT, alongside financial and technical assistance, would further strengthen Tan Xuan's credibility, enabling it to compete more effectively in both domestic and international markets. Additionally, diversifying distribution channels, including expanding into clean food stores, supermarkets, and online platforms, would provide Tan Xuan with wider market access and opportunities for sales growth.

In conclusion, the integration of an EbA label into Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative’s marketing strategy has the potential to transform its weaknesses into strengths, helping to mitigate the threats posed by competition and climate change. By expanding market access, enhancing digital marketing capabilities, and leveraging eco-certifications, the cooperative is well-positioned to capitalise on the growing consumer demand for sustainable, high-quality products, ensuring its continued success.

## 6.6 Target market and product positioning

Based on an analysis of the product’s characteristics, market trends, and consumer behaviour, Table 8 shows recommended consumer base along with the rationale for each segment.

**Table 7. Target markets for Tan Xuan Bamboo shoots**

<b>Consumers</b>	<b>Target segment</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Local and regional consumers	Health-conscious consumers, culinary enthusiasts and local households	<p>Product characteristics: Tan Xuan bamboo shoots are recognised as a four-star OCOP product, indicating high quality and local authenticity. This appeals to consumers who prioritise fresh, organic and local produce.</p> <p>Market trends: There is a growing trend among consumers towards healthy eating and organic products, especially in urban areas where health consciousness is increasing.</p>
Restaurants and hotels	Restaurants specialising in traditional Vietnamese cuisine, hotels and resorts offering local dishes	<p>Product usage: Bamboo shoots are a common ingredient in Vietnamese cooking, especially in traditional dishes. By targeting restaurants and hotels, FFPOs can tap into a market that values authentic, high-quality ingredients.</p> <p>Market demand: The hospitality industry often seeks unique and local ingredients to differentiate their offerings, and Tan Xuan bamboo shoots provide that authenticity.</p>
Urban markets	Urban health food stores, gourmet	Consumer behaviour: Urban consumers, especially in larger cities such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, have shown a preference for organic and high-

	shops and online shops	<p>quality local products. This segment is also more likely to shop online, providing an avenue for e-commerce sales.</p> <p>Market expansion: Expanding into urban markets increases the product's visibility and accessibility, helping to build a larger and more diverse consumer base.</p>
Tourists and visitors	Tourists visiting Son La province, ecotourists and cultural tourists	<p>Cultural appeal: Tourists often seek authentic local products as souvenirs or unique culinary experiences. Tan Xuan bamboo shoots, with their local origin and cultural significance, are well-positioned to meet this demand.</p> <p>Promotion potential: Collaborating with local tourism agencies can promote Tan Xuan bamboo shoots as a must-try local speciality, increasing sales and brand recognition.</p>
Food processing companies	Small and medium-sized food processors, pickling companies, and snack producers.	<p>Product integration: Bamboo shoots are often used in processed food products such as pickles, sauces and snacks. Partnering with food-processing companies can open up new markets and increase demand for raw bamboo shoots.</p> <p>Market synergy: These companies may also promote the Tan Xuan brand in their own products, further enhancing brand visibility.</p>
Export markets	Exporters specialising in Asian cuisine and health foods	<p>International demand: Countries with large Asian populations or a strong market for Asian cuisine, such as the USA, Japan and South Korea, have a consistent demand for high-quality bamboo shoots.</p> <p>Market Differentiation: As a four-star OCOP product, Tan Xuan bamboo shoots have a quality assurance that can differentiate them in competitive international markets.</p>
Corporate and	Corporate cafeterias, canteens and	<p>Bulk purchasing: These buyers often purchase in bulk, providing a stable and significant demand source for bamboo shoots.</p>

institutional buyers	educational institutions	Health and sustainability initiatives: Many corporations and institutions are increasingly focused on providing healthy and sustainable food options, aligning well with the qualities of Tan Xuan bamboo shoots.
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The cooperative should position its products by emphasising quality, distribution system, and consumer service. The slogan ‘Tan Xuan Golden Bamboo Shoot – A Speciality of Van Ho, Son La’ can be used to highlight these aspects. To position the product effectively, the cooperative should underscore the following product-quality features:

- Products are produced following safety and quality standards such as GAP and OCOP.
- High-quality, health-beneficial products.
- Commitment to no use of preservatives or harmful chemicals.

Additionally, the cooperative should create a slogan that enhances its image with consumers, such as ‘Golden Bamboo Shoot – Elevating Fine Dining’ or ‘Tan Xuan Bamboo Shoot – Feeding Your Foodie Soul.’

## 6.7 Developing marketing strategies

To achieve its marketing goals, Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative should focus on several key marketing strategies aimed at strengthening its market presence and product appeal. A **consumer-centric strategy** is crucial, ensuring that all bamboo shoots are produced through natural, safe processes without harmful chemicals, meeting food safety and hygiene standards. The cooperative can diversify its product range, offering items such as dried nua bamboo shoots, shredded bamboo shoots, and other variations to meet diverse consumer preferences.

### 6.7.1 Pricing strategy

In terms of **pricing strategy**, the cooperative should offer its products at competitive prices that reflect their quality and value. For instance, dried nua bamboo shoots are priced at VND 130,000 for a 500g package. The cooperative can also optimise transportation costs to keep the final price affordable for consumers. Promoting long-term cost savings through the use of clean, health-safe bamboo shoots will be a valuable message on e-commerce platforms.

## 6.72 Distribution strategy

The cooperative should make use of multiple distribution channels, ensuring its products are accessible in major supermarkets, convenience stores, traditional markets, and online platforms. Packaging should be smart, eco-friendly, and easy to preserve. Building partnerships with local distributors will enhance product availability, and promotional programmes, including discounts and loyalty schemes, can boost consumer interest and retention. A strong brand associated with sustainability, quality, and community support is essential, and the cooperative should focus on building brand recognition through distinctive logos and clear branding.

### 6.7.3 Communications strategy

The **communication strategy** must ensure that the product's origin, production process, and health benefits are effectively communicated to consumers. This involves building an official website and creating social media pages on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. While a Facebook page exists, the cooperative should aim to increase engagement, which is currently low. Creating content such as videos and high-quality images of the production process, as well as sharing stories about local farmers, will humanise the brand and make it more relatable. Seasonal and holiday promotions, such as during harvest season or major holidays, should also be leveraged to increase visibility and consumer interest.

## 6.8 Developing a marketing programme

### 6.8.1 Implementation

Given its small scale, Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative should consider hiring 1–2 marketing staff members to manage and enhance its marketing efforts. These staff members would be responsible for analysing market trends, gathering product images, and maintaining updated marketing materials such as catalogues and leaflets.

### 6.8.2 Building a brand

To build strong consumer relationships and boost brand recognition, the cooperative should focus on several marketing programmes. **Brand positioning** should highlight the product's unique selling points (USPs) such as its local origin, organic farming methods, and quality certifications such as OCOP or PGS. Crafting narratives that connect the product to the local community and its traditions will further strengthen the brand.

### 6.8.3 Digital marketing

A **digital marketing strategy** is essential. The cooperative should utilise social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Zalo to share content about sustainable practices, the health benefits of bamboo shoots, and consumer testimonials. Partnering with e-commerce platforms such as Tiki, Lazada, and Shopee would allow the cooperative to reach a broader audience. Email marketing and search engine optimisation (SEO) efforts should be enhanced to boost product visibility and searchability.

### 6.8.4 Partnerships and consumer engagement

Building **local partnerships** with restaurants and hotels, and by participating in local markets or trade shows can help the cooperative reach consumers and retailers directly. Offering bulk purchasing deals or exclusive supply agreements can further these partnerships and build credibility.

In terms of **consumer engagement**, implementing feedback mechanisms and offering loyalty programmes can foster consumer loyalty. **Product sampling** and promotions, such as offering free samples or creating product bundles, can encourage new consumers to try the products.

Storytelling and education through content marketing – blog posts, videos, and infographics – should focus on the nutritional value of bamboo shoots and the cooperative’s sustainable practices. Hosting workshops or farm visits where consumers can learn about the production process will strengthen community engagement and consumer trust.

## 6.9 Monitoring and evaluation

Regular monitoring of marketing performance is crucial. Marketing staff should evaluate sales volume, profit, and the marketing expenses-to-revenue ratio regularly. The cooperative should also conduct quarterly or semi-annual reviews of its marketing policies to ensure alignment with its overall strategy and goals.

## 6.10 Marketing budget

As a producer of agricultural products, Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative should prioritise investment in market development, product promotion, and brand building,

particularly in the early stages. The cooperative's marketing budget should be distributed among various activities and adjusted based on actual needs and market feedback. Allocating a portion of revenue to marketing will ensure sustained growth and brand development.

### **6.11 Potential of EbA/sustainability labelling**

The potential of EbA or sustainability labelling for Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative's products can significantly enhance its marketing efforts. Certifications such as EbA not only emphasise environmental protection but also align with the growing consumer demand for eco-friendly, sustainable products. By highlighting the ecological benefits of its production methods, Tan Xuan can attract a broader audience, particularly health-conscious and environmentally aware consumers.

EbA labelling could improve brand trust, which is a key factor driving consumer behaviour. Many consumers are willing to pay more for certified products, and by obtaining and promoting an EbA certification, Tan Xuan can position its products as premium, eco-friendly choices, thereby justifying higher pricing and attracting a higher-income consumer segment. The use of an EbA label would also differentiate Tan Xuan from competitors and build a strong narrative around sustainability, which is increasingly important in modern marketing.

Incorporating sustainability certifications into the cooperative's overall marketing strategy will not only boost product credibility but also contribute to long-term consumer loyalty and brand differentiation, positioning Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative as a leader in sustainable agricultural practices.

## **7 Marketing plan for red pomelo products**

### **7.1 Current situation analysis and marketing opportunities**

The Tan Dong Organic Pomelo Cultivation and Agricultural Services Cooperative was established in 2019, under the leadership of Tran Hong Nang. This cooperative operates in the agricultural sector, particularly focusing on organic pomelo cultivation and processing. The cooperative consists of 25 male members (11 Kinh and 14 Muong ethnic members) and manages 7 hectares of forest land.

Located in in Dong Lai commune, Tan Lac district, Hoa Binh province, the Tan Dong Cooperative benefits from favourable natural conditions for agriculture. Dong Lai is characterised by mountainous terrain, a cool climate, and fertile alluvial soil, ideal for fruit cultivation. The cooperative specialises in the organic cultivation of pomelos and other fruits. In addition to producing organic pomelos, it offers agricultural services such as technical consulting, seedling supply, crop care, and product harvesting.

Tan Dong Cooperative is committed to producing organic pomelos using advanced technologies, strictly avoiding harmful chemicals to ensure consumer health. Their products are quality tested and meet organic standards, with the Tan Lac red pomelo receiving PGS organic certification.

The Tan Dong organic pomelo is cultivated using natural organic farming methods, ensuring a clean and safe product. The pomelos are known for their juiciness and delicious flavour. Over the years, the Tan Dong organic pomelo has established a strong brand and competitive market presence, contributing to improved livelihoods for cooperative members. To achieve the high standards of pomelo production, all 25 cooperative members (all male) have participated in organic agriculture training. Organic farming requires high technical standards and strict adherence to food safety regulations. Members of the cooperative strictly avoid using chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Instead, they use composted manure mixed with EM (effective microorganisms) products and a mixture of soybeans soaked with fresh fish and snails for 2–3 months to fertilise the trees. Additionally, the cooperative prioritises the use of natural herbs such as ginger, chili, garlic, and alcohol-soaked mixtures to prevent pests and diseases.

According to Mr Tran Hong Nang, director of Tan Dong Cooperative, the 2022–2023 crop season yielded 500 tonnes of Tan Dong red pomelos (approximately 584,000 fruits). The average selling price was VND 18,000 per fruit. At this price, each member household earned between VND 600 and 800 million per hectare after deducting costs. This income from pomelo cultivation is relatively high compared to other crops in the area.

To achieve a three-star OCOP rating for the Tan Dong red pomelo, the cooperative continually improves product quality and packaging. With support from provincial farmers' unions, cooperative management members have enhanced their management and business skills, received guidance on market connections, and ensured product stability, thus improving the livelihoods of cooperative members. The provincial agricultural, forestry, and fishery product-quality management department also supports the cooperative with product traceability labels, helping protect the brand.

The cooperative plans to continue expanding production towards VietGAP and PGS organic standards. Simultaneously, the cooperative aims to broaden its market reach, with an emphasis on exporting red pomelos to the global market.

Tan Dong is currently taking steps to expand and enhance organic pomelo production standards to achieve sustainable and EbA certifications. Applying these standards not only strengthens brand value but also targets the environmentally and health-conscious consumer segment. Additionally, obtaining these certifications will reinforce consumer trust in product quality and sustainability, thereby creating a competitive advantage for Tan Dong's red pomelo in the market.

## **7.2 Analysis of the red pomelo market**

The cooperative aims to increase annual sales to approximately VND 9–9.5 billion from 2023 to 2025, with an annual growth rate of 10–15%, and an annual output of 500–600 tonnes of fruit. The marketing goal for Tan Dong Cooperative is to maintain existing distribution networks (such as in Hanoi), expand into neighbouring provinces such as Vinh Phuc and Bac Giang, and target central and southern provinces such as Da Nang and Ho Chi Minh City. The aim is to enhance the competitiveness of Tan Dong red pomelo, improve professionalism in distribution, and strengthen communication and advertising efforts to promote product quality and production environment. The cooperative also seeks to specialise its sales team and reduce intermediary distribution steps.

Red pomelo is the key crop in Tan Lac district, Hoa Binh province, providing high production value for many farming households and gaining acceptance from both domestic and international consumers. The district currently maintains 1,250 hectares of pomelo production, primarily concentrated in communes such as Ngoc My, Dong Lai, Thanh Hoi, Tu Ne, Phong Phu, My Hoa, and Man Duc township. The total fruit output is nearly 20,000 tonnes, valued at over VND 200 billion. Red pomelo accounts for nearly 90% of the planted area and production, with the remaining area producing green skin pomelo and Dien pomelo.

Discussions with local farmers, cooperatives, and other stakeholders indicate a very favourable market outlook for Tan Lac red pomelo. Based on farmers' calculations, with a minimum selling price of VND 10,000 per fruit and an average yield of 20 tonnes per hectare, the value of red pomelo cultivation in Tan Lac district will not be less than VND 200 million per hectare. As of June 2023, the district has nearly 230 hectares of red pomelo certified under GAP, VietGAP, organic, or Global GAP standards. Additionally, six out of 153 hectares have been granted planting area codes, and three pomelo products have achieved a three-star OCOP rating at the provincial level.

In 2022, the average harvest value from pomelo in the province exceeded VND 194 million per hectare. In some areas with intensive cultivation, such as Thanh Hoi, Dong Lai, and Tu Ne, harvest values reached VND 380–415 million per hectare.

### **7.2.1 Product market links**

Approximately 18% of the fruit is sold through enterprises, cooperatives, or farms; about 60% is sold through traders who buy directly at the orchard; 20% is sold directly to retailers, with the remainder sold at agricultural fairs, recreational centres, and tourist attractions in the region. As a result, it is expected that the district's pomelo exports to the USA, EU, UK and New Zealand will reach 1,000–1,200 tonnes in 2023. During the same period the previous year, farmers in the district also exported 6 tonnes (5,500 fruits) of red pomelos to the UK.

To sell all the harvested pomelo, the Tan Lac district agriculture and rural development office has advised the district people's committee to direct localities to quickly harvest ripe pomelos and create favourable conditions for central and local media agencies, as well as organisations and individuals, to promote and advertise the product. In addition, district departments and related units are encouraged to increase inspection and supervision to prevent unfair

competition, price manipulation, or negative propaganda that could damage the reputation of Tan Lac red pomelo, including on social media.

For farmers supplying pomelos to the market, they must ensure the quality and quantity as per consumer requirements, and adhere to food safety standards. Additionally, they must excel in post-harvest processing, packaging, labelling, and applying the Tan Lac red pomelo logo, with clear production origin details for traceability purposes. For enterprises or large-scale pomelo buyers, economic contracts should be established, with commitments to price and quantity as agreed. The district's agriculture and rural development office will act as a coordinator, working with relevant units to introduce and connect traders with pomelo producers and suppliers in the district, addressing any bottlenecks or issues in pomelo distribution.

### **7.2.2 Current and potential markets**

The current and potential market for Tan Dong Cooperative is Hanoi, which has a fast-growing economy, high residential income, a developed system of supermarkets, restaurants, and clean food stores, and an increasing demand for high-quality fruit products. Next are neighbouring provinces such as Vinh Phuc and Bac Giang, which have experienced relatively rapid growth in recent years, driven by the development of major industrial zones such as Binh Xuyen, Khai Quang, and Quang Chau.

### **7.2.3 Southern market potential**

In the southern region, particularly in Da Nang and Ho Chi Minh City, there is significant market potential for the cooperative to develop. These areas have fast-growing economies, developed systems of supermarkets, restaurants, and clean food stores, and high demand for quality fruits. Locally, the demand for fruits, including Tan Lac red pomelo, is high among tourists, with the fruit being a popular choice in local restaurants and hotels.

Market segmentation by geographic location suggests a strong potential for market penetration in Hanoi, neighbouring provinces, and the central and southern regions, aligning well with the cooperative's production capacity and current resources.

### **7.3 Analysis of market competitors**

The primary competitors of Tan Dong Cooperative are other cooperatives within Tan Lac district. A notable example is the Binh Minh Comprehensive Agricultural Services and Rural Development Cooperative in Thanh Hoi commune. This cooperative manages over 35 hectares of red pomelo, produced according to Global GAP standards, with a harvest of over 700 tonnes of pomelos per season, equivalent to approximately 700,000 fruits. The cooperative has secured a contract to export 20 tonnes of pomelos (about 20,000 fruits) to the United Kingdom. The remaining pomelos are planned to be supplied to restaurants and supermarkets in Hanoi. Additionally, the cooperative collaborates in the distribution of nearly 2,000 tonnes of pomelos (produced on 100 hectares) from local farmers in Thanh Hoi commune. Notably, in the 2022 pomelo season, the cooperative conducted an exploratory export of 2,000 red pomelos to the UK market.

Another significant competitor is the Giang Loc Red Pomelo Production, Processing, and Consumption Cooperative in Tu Ne commune, which has also signed a contract to export 30 tonnes of Global GAP-standard red pomelos to the EU, while reserving approximately 570 tonnes for the domestic market. Additionally, other regions in Hoa Binh province or neighbouring provinces also produce red pomelos, posing competition in the market. These regions, along with those producing well-known and high-quality pomelos, such as Phuc Trach Pomelo (Ha Tinh), Doan Hung Pomelo (Phu Tho), and Nam Roi Pomelo (Vinh Long), present significant competition to Tan Lac red pomelos in the national market.

These competitors not only challenge Tan Lac Cooperative in terms of brand recognition but also in pricing. The high costs associated with organic production, which requires significant investment and strict adherence to standards, create barriers for producers looking to enter the organic market (organic production costs are higher than conventional production costs).

In addition to in-province competitors, Tan Dong Cooperative faces competition from other well-known pomelo-producing regions outside the province, such as Phuc Trach Pomelo (Ha Tinh Province) and Green Skin Pomelo (Ben Tre Province), which are also major competitors, especially in distribution channels in major cities.

### **7.4 Defining marketing strategies and objectives**

### 7.4.1 Product offering

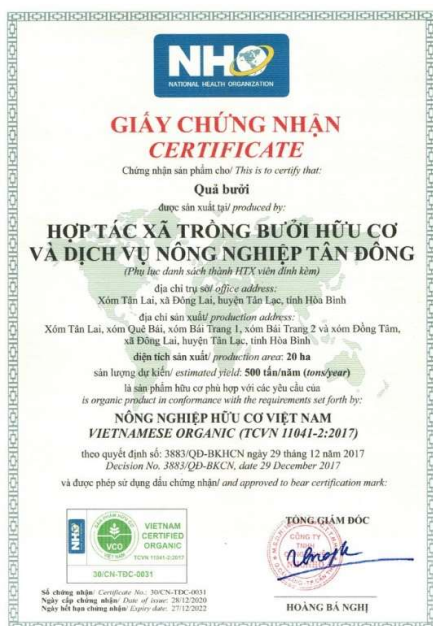
Tan Dong pomelos stand out for their organic certification and health benefits. With Vietnam’s organic certification and OCOP recognition, Tan Dong red pomelos are positioned as premium, health-conscious products. The cooperative should emphasise the product’s traceability and organic farming methods in its messaging.

### 7.4.2 Market presence, brand recognition and pricing

Survey results indicate that 44% of respondents are aware of the Tan Dong organic red pomelo brand (Figure 9). However, the brand is only rated as average by consumers, with some expressing dissatisfaction with the product (Figure 10).

Tan Dong’s pricing reflects its organic production costs, targeting consumers willing to pay a premium for high-quality, chemical-free products. To justify higher prices, the cooperative must highlight the added value of organic certification and health benefits. Offering reasonable discounts for bulk purchases and loyalty programmes will help encourage repeat consumers (Figure 13).

Tan Dong’s red pomelo has clear traceability, and the cooperative’s pomelos are certified organic and OCOP. Over the years, Tan Dong organic pomelo has established its brand and competitiveness in the market, contributing to improved livelihoods for the cooperative’s members.



### **7.4.3 Distribution channels**

The cooperative primarily targets the domestic market, relying on both direct sales to traders who visit the orchards and organised trips to provinces to promote the pomelo. Over the years, Tan Dong red pomelo has made its way into markets in cities such as Hanoi, Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, and Binh Duong, as well as some clean food stores, supermarkets, and convenience stores in Hanoi. The cooperative also participates in trade fairs to promote its products.

### **7.4.4 Consumer base**

The cooperative's consumers include:

- Residents of Hoa Binh and nearby provinces who seek fresh, safe products and typically shop at local markets, retail stores, or agricultural fairs, and
- Consumers in Hanoi, mainly those with middle to upper-middle incomes, who are health conscious and prefer organic products, shopping at organic food stores, high-end supermarkets, or online through reputable e-commerce platforms.

### **7.4.5 Marketing and advertising**

The cooperative currently uses local media channels such as newspapers, radio, and television to advertise its products. However, its online marketing efforts have been less effective.

## **7.5 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats**

The Tan Dong Cooperative has several notable strengths that position it competitively within the market. Its product quality aligns with Vietnam's organic standards, which significantly enhances its reputation and consumer trust. The cooperative benefits from experienced leadership, with the director and members fully committed to organic farming practices. This dedication is further reinforced by a reliable QR code traceability system, supported by the Digital Agriculture Cooperative, ensuring transparency and product authenticity.

However, the cooperative faces several internal challenges. The high costs of organic production present financial strain, and the quality of products among cooperative members can sometimes be inconsistent due to varying levels of expertise in organic farming techniques. Additionally, the cooperative lacks sufficient investment in infrastructure, which hampers its ability to go to scale and meet higher demand. Promotion of the cooperative's

products is limited, particularly in domestic markets, resulting in less visibility compared to competitors.

There are significant opportunities for growth, particularly with the rising global demand for organic and sustainable products. The cooperative is well-positioned to expand its production following organic agriculture and VietGAP standards, with favourable climate and soil conditions supporting this growth. Local authorities are also offering support, which could help the cooperative penetrate larger, high-value markets, including the potential for exports to Europe.

On the other hand, the cooperative faces external threats. Extreme weather conditions and market volatility pose risks to production stability and profitability. Additionally, meeting the stringent quality standards required for exporting to European countries remains a significant challenge. The cooperative must also continuously seek high-value markets to increase income for its members, ensuring that the financial benefits of organic farming are realised amidst fluctuating market conditions.

In conclusion, while Tan Dong Cooperative holds strong competitive advantages in quality and certification, overcoming its internal weaknesses and external threats through better infrastructure, consistent quality control, and more aggressive marketing efforts will be critical to its future success. Expanding into high-value markets, particularly internationally, presents a promising path forward, provided the cooperative continues to invest in both production and promotional strategies.

**Table 8. SWOT analysis of Tan Dong Cooperative**

Strengths	Weakness
<p>Products meet Vietnam’s organic standards, enhancing reputation and consumer trust</p> <p>Experienced leadership and members committed to organic farming practices</p> <p>QR code traceability system ensures product transparency and authenticity</p>	<p>High organic production costs create financial strain</p> <p>Inconsistent product quality among members due to varying levels of expertise in organic farming</p> <p>Lack of infrastructure investment limits production expansion</p> <p>Limited domestic product promotion results in low market visibility</p>

<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<p>Global demand for organic and sustainable products is growing significantly</p> <p>Favourable climate and soil conditions support production expansion</p> <p>Support from local authorities helps access larger markets, including exports to Europe</p>	<p>Risks from extreme weather and market volatility affect production stability and profitability</p> <p>Meeting stringent quality standards for exports to Europe is a major challenge</p> <p>Continuously seeking high-value markets is necessary to increase member income amidst market fluctuations</p>

## 7.6 Target market and product positioning

Organic pomelo is a growing market segment, appealing to health-conscious consumers who are willing to pay a premium for quality products. However, the Tan Dong Cooperative has not yet conducted a comprehensive market analysis to identify its target segments. Currently, the cooperative's products are primarily sold wholesale to traders from nearby provinces and Hanoi, missing opportunities to reach a broader market, including supermarkets, restaurants, hotels, and food stores in cities such as Hanoi, Da Nang, and Ho Chi Minh City. Based on consumer and market analysis, the consumer base for the red pomelo from Tan Dong Cooperative can be strategically targeted toward the segments outlined in Table 9.

**Table 9. Target markets for Tan Dong cooperative**

<b>Segments</b>	<b>Target markets</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Health-conscious consumers	Urban residents in major cities such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City who prioritise organic and healthy food options	<p>Product characteristics: The red pomelo is organically grown, appealing to consumers who value natural, pesticide-free products.</p> <p>Market trends: There is an increasing trend among urban consumers towards healthier lifestyles, including a preference for organic fruits and vegetables.</p>
Gourmet food retailers	Speciality food stores, organic grocery chains and	Product differentiation: Red pomelo is a premium product with unique flavour and health benefits,

	high-end supermarkets	making it well-suited for gourmet and organic food outlets. Market demand: These retailers cater to a niche market that seeks high-quality, unique and organic products, aligning with the qualities of the Tan Dong red pomelo.
Restaurants and juice bars	Restaurants, cafés, and juice bars that focus on fresh, organic and locally sourced ingredients	Product usage: Red pomelo can be used in a variety of dishes, drinks and desserts, making it a versatile ingredient for the food-service industry. Market demand: These establishments often seek to differentiate themselves by offering unique and healthy menu items, which can be achieved by incorporating organic red pomelo.
Export markets	Exporters and distributors specialising in organic and exotic fruits, particularly in countries with high demand for organic produce.	International demand: Countries such as Japan, South Korea and the EU have strong demand for organic fruits, and red pomelo from Vietnam can appeal to these markets. Market expansion: Entering export markets can increase brand recognition and provide access to a larger consumer base.
E-commerce shoppers	Online consumers, especially those who shop for organic and speciality food products on e-commerce platforms	Convenience: The growing e-commerce sector in Vietnam makes it easier for consumers to access organic products, including fresh fruits such as red pomelo. Digital reach: Selling online allows the cooperative to reach a broader audience, including urban residents who prefer the convenience of home delivery.
Corporate and institutional buyers	Corporate offices, health-focused institutions, and wellness centres	Health initiatives: Companies and institutions increasingly focus on providing healthy options for their employees or clients, making them potential bulk buyers of organic fruits such as red pomelo.

		Corporate gifting: Red pomelo can also be marketed as a premium, healthy gift option for corporate events or holiday gifting.
Community-supported agriculture (CSA) programmes	Community groups, cooperatives, and CSA programmes that support local farmers and provide organic produce to their members	Local support: CSAs and similar programmes are growing in popularity as consumers seek to support local farmers and access fresh, organic produce regularly. Direct sales: These programmes facilitate direct sales to consumers, ensuring a steady demand and building a loyal consumer base.

To position the product effectively, the cooperative should emphasise the following key points:

- Products are produced according to Vietnam’s organic agriculture standards.
- High-quality, health-beneficial products.
- Harvesting at the optimal ripeness for citrus fruits.
- Commitment to delivering the freshest products to consumers as quickly as possible.

Additionally, the cooperative should develop a slogan to reinforce its brand image: ‘Tan Dong Pomelo – Fresh taste from Tan Lac, Hoa Binh’ or ‘Fuel your day with the power of Tan Dong Pomelo.’

## 7.7 Developing marketing strategies

### 7.7.1 Consumer-focused strategy

The cooperative focuses on maintaining current consumer loyalty, particularly in key markets such as Hanoi, Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, and Binh Duong, while also seeking new consumers by activating communication channels. The cooperative should promote its products by emphasising that:

- Organic pomelos meet modern consumer preferences for health and food safety.
- Its pomelos are grown naturally, without harmful chemicals, offering succulent and flavourful fruits.

### **7.7.2 Pricing strategy**

- Organic production costs are higher than conventional methods, resulting in premium pricing. However, consumers are willing to pay more for organic products due to perceived health benefits.
- The cooperative's pricing includes production, losses, transportation, and management costs, with a flexible discount policy for bulk buyers.

### **7.7.3 Distribution strategy**

- Primarily sells to traders in Hanoi and neighbouring provinces but plans to expand to retail stores, supermarkets, and online platforms.
- The cooperative should establish a single-tier indirect distribution channel for larger markets such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and Da Nang.

### **7.7.4 Communication strategy**

- Currently lacks a strong social media presence. Developing Facebook, Instagram, and an online community would foster consumer engagement.
- Advertising should focus on utilising existing supermarket screens and promoting the cooperative's clean farming processes.
- Direct marketing via emails, catalogues, and events can further increase brand visibility.

## **7.8 Developing a marketing programme**

### **7.8.1 Implementation**

Due to its small scale, Tan Dong Cooperative should hire 1–2 marketing staff members to handle marketing tasks and complete existing marketing activities. The marketing staff should analyse market and consumer feedback on products, collect images of products, and update catalogues and leaflets sent to consumers.

The cooperative needs to regularly implement the following marketing programmes to enhance brand recognition, boost sales, and build consumer relationships through brand positioning by highlighting the product's unique selling points (USPs):

- Emphasising the organic certification, the product’s origin in the fertile land of Hoa Binh, and the cooperative’s sustainable farming practices, and
- Highlighting any quality certifications or awards, such as OCOP recognition.

The cooperative should continue to create diverse and engaging content about the production process of Tan Lac red pomelo to ensure transparency and trust. Stories about the product’s origin and health benefits should be shared through high-quality images, videos, and articles to encourage interaction and sharing from the community on social platforms. Educating buyers on how to select pomelo properly will increase consumer credibility.

### **Box 1. Guide to buying red pomelos**

To buy authentic Tan Lac red pomelos, select round fruits shaped like an inverted jar, weighing 0.8–1.2kg each. The fruit should have a thin, glossy skin, a pinkish-yellow hue, and a characteristic fragrance. If transporting over long distances or consuming immediately, choose fruits with slightly wilted skins. When storing, place the pomelo upside down on a bamboo or wooden rack or similar surface in a cool place. This method helps the pomelo stay fresh for over two months while retaining its quality and flavour.

For pomelos used for worship, do not wash them with water; instead, wipe off the dust with a dry cloth, then use a cotton cloth soaked in light alcohol to clean the entire fruit. After half a day, the pomelo will emit an appealing aroma. Let the fruit rest for at least five days for the flavour to develop fully.

## 7.8.2

### **Digital marketing**

The cooperative should continue using social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Zalo, and YouTube to increase interaction by creating polls, quizzes, and challenges related to the cooperative’s Tan Lac red pomelo to enhance user engagement. Gathering feedback and engaging in conversations with consumers will build relationships and trust. Using SEO keywords related to products such as ‘clean fresh red pomelos’ and ‘benefits of red pomelos’ will ensure the website and blog are optimised for easy Google searches.

Regular email marketing should be used to send new articles, recipes, and promotional information to loyal consumers to maintain consumer relationships. In addition, dedicated

landing pages for advertising campaigns should contain detailed information about red pomelo products, special offers, and subscription forms. The cooperative should:

- Use analytics tools such as Google Analytics and Facebook Insights to track campaign effectiveness, adjust content and strategy based on feedback and collected data, and optimise results.
- Content marketing: Create blog posts, videos, and infographics that educate consumers about the benefits of organic red pomelo, including recipes, health tips, and the cooperative's sustainability initiatives.
- E-commerce integration: List the product on popular e-commerce platforms such as Tiki, Lazada, or Shopee to reach a broader audience.
- Offer promotions, discounts, and subscription models for regular consumers.

### **7.8.3 Partnerships and collaborations**

- Local retail partnerships: Partner with organic food stores, supermarkets, and gourmet shops to stock Tan Dong red pomelo. Offer sampling sessions and promotional events to attract consumers.
- Restaurant collaborations: Approach restaurants and cafés to include the red pomelo in their menus. Offer bulk purchasing deals or exclusive supply agreements.
- Export collaborations: Work with exporters and distributors specialising in organic and exotic fruits. Ensure that packaging and branding meet international standards.

### **7.8.4 Product sampling and promotions**

- Free samples: Distribute free samples in high-traffic areas such as supermarkets, organic food stores, and during local events or markets. This helps to introduce the product to new consumers.
- Promotional offers: Create special offers, such as buy-one-get-one-free deals, discounts on bulk purchases, or loyalty programmes to encourage repeat purchases.

### **7.8.5 Community engagement**

- Farm tours and workshops: Organise farm tours or workshops where consumers can learn about organic farming practices and the benefits of red pomelo. This can help build a deeper connection with the brand.

- CSR initiatives: Engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, such as supporting local schools or environmental projects, to enhance the cooperative's brand image and appeal to socially conscious consumers.

#### **7.8.6 Consumer feedback and engagement**

- Feedback mechanism: Implement a system to collect consumer feedback through surveys, social media, or direct communication. Use this feedback to improve the product and consumer experience.
- Loyalty programmes: Develop a loyalty programme where regular consumers receive discounts, early access to new products, or exclusive offers. This helps in building a loyal consumer base.

#### **7.9 Monitoring and evaluation**

- Marketing results evaluation: Based on the annual plan, the marketing staff should regularly evaluate sales volume, profits, and marketing expenses/revenue.
- Policy review: Conduct quarterly and semi-annual reviews of the entire marketing policy implementation.

#### **7.10 Marketing budget**

Since the cooperative operates in the agricultural sector and is in its early stages, it needs to invest in market development, product promotion, and brand building. The cooperative can allocate the marketing budget based on revenue. The annual marketing budget should be allocated to various activities and may be adjusted periodically and according to the actual situation to ensure appropriateness.

## **8 Marketing plan for safe vegetable products**

### **8.1 Current situation and marketing opportunities**

Tu Nhien Safe Vegetable Cooperative is based in Dong Sang commune, Moc Chau district, Son La province. It was established in 2011, initially comprising 19 experienced and skilled households engaged in vegetable cultivation, with a total farming area of 7.5 hectares. By 2023, the cooperative had grown to include 38 members, consisting of 32 ethnic Kinh members and 6 members from the Muong, Thai, and Tay ethnic groups. The cooperative's vegetable farming area now spans 7.5 hectares, with an additional 17.5 hectares cultivated by 200 associated local farmers in the northwest, enhancing the cooperative's reputation in the community.

The cooperative grows 38 types of safe vegetables, adhering to VietGAP and organic standards, and is involved in agricultural services and ecotourism. Annually, the cooperative supplies over 1,000 tonnes of vegetables to the market. The production yield is high, with each cooperative member household earning between VND 50–70 million per 1,000 square metres of cultivated land per year. The cooperative's charter capital has now reached VND 3 billion, a 350% increase since its inception. The cooperative members are specialised vegetable growers, with vegetable production becoming the primary source of income for the farmers. In 2017, income from vegetables accounted for 62% of the total household income.

Compared to 2012, the scale of vegetable production has rapidly increased. In 2023, the cooperative saw a fivefold increase in total vegetable cultivation area (from 5 hectares in 2012 to 25 hectares in 2023, with 5 hectares fully converted to organic farming and 20 hectares in the process of conversion but not yet certified). Achieving this growth has been possible due to the cooperative's efforts to streamline its organisational structure, organise safe vegetable production, and develop an effective business strategy, resulting in several key achievements outlined in the following sections.

#### **8.1.1 Organisational structure**

The cooperative has restructured its operations in accordance with the 2012 Cooperative Law, ensuring compliance with all legal roles, including a president-cum-director (Ms Nguyen Thi Luyen, born in 1952), a vice director, a chief supervisor, four members responsible for cross-inspection, an accountant, a treasurer, and a party cell. Membership has expanded from 19

members in 2011 to 38 members today, increasing the production scale and working capital of the cooperative. The cooperative has established and strictly controls the production linkages with member households. The members contribute land for vegetable cultivation, and the cooperative plans and allocates specific types and quantities of vegetables to each member based on partner orders.

Ms Luyen shared, ‘I understand that a cooperative is almost like a business. I knew that an organisation with at least three party members could establish a party cell, so I initiated the formation of a party cell within the cooperative with four initial members to better understand local and national social policies.’ This strategic move has facilitated the cooperative’s access to local support policies. In fact, the cooperative has received support from Van Ho district twice, totalling 5,000 square metres of net houses, 3 ploughing machines, 1 grass cutter, 1 pesticide sprayer, VND 115 million from Son La province for a processing house, 10 hectares of rainwater irrigation from the Vietnam Gardening Association, an FFF-supported label printer, a 700-square-metre seedling house, and a 30-square-metre cold storage unit.

### **8.1.2 Production**

With support from the agriculture sector, scientists, NGOs, and local authorities, the cooperative has organised the production of 38 types of vegetables in compliance with VietGAP standards across 20 hectares. To ensure safe vegetable production, member households receive training on vegetable cultivation techniques and technologies, and they maintain production process logs, noting activities such as fertiliser application dates, pesticide use, and isolation periods. The cooperative divides its member households into four groups, with each group having a leader who conducts weekly cross-inspections to ensure compliance with the process. According to cooperative regulations, members who repeatedly violate the rules will be expelled.

The produce is sampled and tested by the relevant authorities. For example, according to regulations, vegetables must undergo a seven-day isolation period after pesticide use before being harvested. If residue is detected during inspection on the eighth day, the produce is not allowed to be sold. Ensuring clean products for consumers involves numerous rigorous inspections. The land used by member households is all legally documented, and the cooperative is licensed by the province, making production and business operations convenient without concerns over land shortages. Ms Luyen stated, ‘For the long-term

success of the cooperative, it is essential to have land ownership rights. Building greenhouses that last 10 to 20 years without land certificates would affect the farmers' production.'

### **8.1.3 Harvesting and post-harvesting**

With support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the department of agriculture and rural development, and the Son La provincial cooperative alliance, the cooperative has received investment in a processing and packaging facility that meets technical standards. The cooperative has established a comprehensive quality-management system to ensure food safety, tailored to the conditions of the processing facility.

Additionally, before harvesting, the Moc Chau district department of agriculture and rural development officials take samples from the fields for testing. If any pesticides residue is detected, the produce is not allowed to be sold. The cooperative's shipments are also stringently inspected by supermarket technicians before being accepted. Overall, with a strict quality-control process that involves both internal (internal management) and external (government agencies, third-party organisations, and chain actors) checks, the cooperative's safe vegetables meet quality standards when brought to market.

## **8.2 Analysis of the safe vegetables market**

The cooperative has established stable, long-term relationships with partners such as Big C, Metro, Aeon, Happy Mart, UCA Mart, and Huong Viet Sinh Co Ltd. Before signing production contracts, the cooperative sets reasonable guaranteed purchase prices, ensuring that members feel secure in investing in production, and product quality consistently meets VietGAP safe vegetable standards. Currently, market demand for safe vegetables, particularly Moc Chau vegetables, is very high, especially in Hanoi, providing a favourable opportunity for the cooperative to expand production. However, increased market demand also brings stricter requirements, necessitating that the cooperative continuously ensures product quality and diversifies products to meet market needs, improving production techniques, and minimising risks in production, transportation, and storage.

According to Ms Nguyen Thi Luyen, director of Tu Nhien Safe Vegetable Cooperative, the cooperative has observed and compiled data to assign tasks to members. Approximately 60% of fresh vegetables are sold through reputable supermarket chains such as MM Mega Market Vietnam, Big C and Aeon during the early part of the year and off-season periods. This strategy helps the cooperative increase prices by 40% during the off season compared to wholesale markets in Son La or Hanoi, ensuring annual growth of 5% to 10% in both revenue

and income, with annual revenue ranging from VND 7 to 8 billion. Additionally, the cooperative improves income by 10% to 20% for more than 150 local people through product sales and labour provision to the cooperative.

Despite these successes, the cooperative faces several challenges, such as a lack of capital for business expansion and equipment purchases (such as delivery vehicles), high transportation losses due to multiple intermediary stages, and difficulties in penetrating more demanding markets. Furthermore, the cooperative's vegetable products are still relatively unknown to consumers in Hanoi. The cooperative's traceability system for vegetable products is not yet fully developed, which is essential for building consumer trust. The product packaging system is also overlapping, with supermarket labels overshadowing the primary labels indicating product origin. Additionally, provincial support policies for developing the cooperative model have focused mainly on expanding production scale rather than on promotion, building a traceability system, enhancing control capabilities, and improving product quality and good production practices for new members, which is necessary for expanding the value chain in a strategic direction.

- **Development direction for the cooperative:** The cooperative aims to continue expanding its production scale in line with VietGAP standards, while simultaneously expanding its market, with the goal of exporting vegetables to the global market.
- **Business goals:** The cooperative's business goals include achieving annual sales growth of 10–15% to increase member income, expand production scale, and broaden the market.
- **Marketing goals:** To achieve these business goals, the cooperative's current marketing objectives are to continue strengthening brand recognition, bringing the cooperative's brand closer to consumers within the province, outside the province (Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, etc), and targeting export markets (EU, Japan).

The Tu Nhien cooperative is committed to meeting sustainable production criteria by applying EbA methods in safe vegetable cultivation. The cooperative is working to expand VietGAP standards and is also aiming for PGS certification focused on sustainability. This approach will enhance the image of clean, environmentally friendly vegetables, meeting the growing consumer demand for safe, high-quality products.

### **8.3 Analysis of market competitors**

Currently, there is a significant demand for vegetables and fruits. The cooperative has a clear understanding of its position and a sustainable market development strategy. Its main consumers are located in Hanoi. Research indicates that the demand for various types of vegetables in Hanoi is about 130,000 tonnes per month (approximately 1.6 million tonnes per year), requiring a diverse range of products. However, local production in Hanoi only meets less than 60% of the demand for seasonal vegetables and fruits. Additionally, the demand for quality and food safety is increasing. According to a report by the Department of Industry and Trade, over 80% of respondents in 2019 identified quality and food safety as decisive factors in their purchasing decisions. Furthermore, this project's survey found that 90% of consumers would buy products if they ensured quality and safety. Many forecasts suggest that the demand for safe vegetables in Hanoi will continue to grow at an average annual rate of 15–20%, reaching over 1 million tonnes by 2025. This presents an opportunity for the cooperative's products. However, the market structure is becoming more diverse in terms of quality and price, with higher demands for food safety and hygiene.

The cooperative has implemented several key factors impacting market development performance and has achieved significant progress in managing supply chain processes, marketing tools, and sales strategies. These factors are crucial for improving the cooperative's market development performance both now and in the future. One advantage in the supply chain process is the successful implementation of VietGAP standards in safe vegetable production, which meets the needs of traders and consumers effectively.

The market for safe vegetables is currently quite competitive due to traditional vegetable growers continuously seeking to reduce prices. Moreover, the safe vegetable market in Son La is growing rapidly, with increasing competition from a rising number of cooperatives and small businesses involved in safe vegetable production. These entities often have local knowledge and flexible production scales, such as Son La Clean Agricultural Products Joint Stock Company, which employs over 100 local workers. Some large enterprises from other regions are also expanding their operations into Son La, bringing strong competition with advanced technologies and professional management processes. For example, Son La Clean Agricultural Products Joint Stock Company in Thuan Chau district has spent four years researching and experimenting with organic farming models on approximately 60 hectares. Additionally, many local farmers are beginning to shift to safe vegetable cultivation and are directly selling their products at markets and through online sales channels.

However, to compete in this highly competitive market, the cooperative faces several issues that need attention. The quality of market information management and the use of research and data analysis tools is relatively weak, with a lack of systematic and scientific processes in data collection, classification, analysis, storage, transmission, and sharing. Market information data is often rudimentary, lacking in quantity (especially long-term forecasts), outdated, and inadequately assessed, primarily relying on secondary sources. The information technology infrastructure supporting data collection and analysis is limited and poorly managed. The local human resources for information management lack sufficient quantity, expertise, and skills in system management and technology application. This has significantly impacted the quality of market development efforts and the achievement of market development goals. Additionally, the implementation of marketing and sales tools lacks coordination and effectiveness, primarily from the seller's perspective, in terms of quality, timeliness, and cost.

## **8.4 Defining marketing strategies and objectives**

### **8.4.1 Product offering**

Moc Chau is effectively leveraging its potential to produce a wide variety of temperate vegetables such as tomatoes, cabbage, kohlrabi, cauliflower, and various leafy greens. The cooperative provides 38 varieties of vegetables that meet VietGAP standards. The vegetables are certified with the 'Moc Chau Safe Vegetables' trademark, registered under Decision No. 12175/QD-SHTT dated 3 March 2016 by the Intellectual Property Office, which is owned by the Moc Chau District People's Committee. To date, Moc Chau has developed nearly 58 hectares of VietGAP-standard vegetables across 12 cooperatives and production units. The Tu Nhien Natural Safe Vegetable Cooperative in Moc Chau, Son La, is a leading cooperative in producing and supplying natural safe vegetables in Moc Chau district, Son La province, and Vietnam as a whole.

### **8.4.2 Market presence, brand recognition and pricing**

- The cooperative employs a competitive pricing strategy. Survey results indicate that most consumers find the pricing of the Natural Safe Vegetables brand to be reasonable (Figure 13).

- A survey on brand awareness shows that 62% of respondents are familiar with the Natural Safe Vegetables brand (Figure 9) and express satisfaction with the brand (Figure 10).

### 8.4.3 Distribution channels

The cooperative's vegetables are sold through high-quality distribution channels such as supermarkets, convenience stores, and food shops. According to Anh (2020), the volume of vegetables produced by the cooperative represents the largest share of total vegetable consumption among cooperatives in Moc Chau, Son La. In 2016, the cooperative's vegetable sales totalled 449 tonnes, accounting for 65% of total consumption. Since late 2016, the cooperative has established a distribution link with the VinMart convenience store chain under the Vingroup conglomerate. The cooperative is responsible for supplying VinMart with two-to-three shipments per week, each averaging 2 tonnes. In 2019, the cooperative organised tastings of its branded 'Natural Safe Vegetables' at supermarkets to increase brand visibility. The tastings received positive feedback, with 100% of participants rating the product quality highly and expressing a willingness to purchase. Currently, the cooperative supplies 'Natural Safe Vegetables' to Big C supermarkets, with sales of about 3 tonnes per week at 100–200 VND/kg higher than traditional channels. The cooperative has developed marketing programmes to promote and introduce products to both local and external markets. A video report on the cooperative's activities and the 'Natural Safe Vegetables' value chain model in Moc Chau, Son La has been broadcast on the agricultural TV channel (VTC16), creating significant awareness in vegetable production and consumption.

### 8.4.4 Consumer base

The cooperative's vegetables are predominantly sold through high-quality distribution channels such as supermarkets, convenience stores, and food shops. According to interviews with the cooperative director, since late 2016, the cooperative has established a distribution link with the VinMart chain. From 2018 onwards, the cooperative has supplied various retailers and distributors focused on quality, including Fivimart, Metro, AEON, VinMart, Bac Tom, Biggreen, Trang An, Chat Viet, and Greenlife. In 2018, the cooperative supplied over 450 tonnes of vegetables to businesses in Hanoi, with Fivimart supermarkets accounting for over 50% of the volume. The cooperative has established stable, long-term partnerships with major retailers such as the Nhat Nam supermarket chain, Metro, and Chat Viet supermarket. All goods are priced reasonably before contracts are signed, ensuring that cooperative members can confidently invest in production while maintaining product quality according to

safe vegetable standards. The cooperative also has contracts with major supermarkets in Hanoi, including Metro, VinMart, and Big C, as well as with collective kitchens in schools and businesses in Moc Chau and Hanoi.

#### 8.4.5 Marketing and advertising

The cooperative’s marketing efforts are currently evaluated as fairly effective. The cooperative operates a website and a Facebook page with 872 likes and 903 followers.<sup>3</sup> However, the cooperative has not actively monitored its marketing activities or engaged in digital marketing. Although Ms Luyen has made efforts to promote the ‘Natural Safe Vegetables’ brand by participating in fairs and interviews on television, and has conducted 7–8 video shoots per year, the cooperative has largely relied on outdated marketing practices due to the director’s impending retirement. Recent changes have been fragmented and lack a cohesive, long-term strategy. The cooperative is in the process of a generational transition and aims to implement more effective digital marketing strategies with the new leadership.

#### 8.5 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

The cooperative has several advantages, including high product quality, strong brand reputation, market demand, and government support. However, it also faces challenges related to production scale, market access, and external environmental factors. Table 10 below outlines the cooperative’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

**Table 10. SWOT analysis of Tu Nhien Safe Vegetable Cooperative**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Clearly defined target consumer requirements Production system developed to meet consumer needs Established post-harvest product-processing guidelines Has created and signed product sales contracts	Limited production scale Lack of investment capital Weak market access and brand promotion Difficulties in adopting new practices

<sup>3</sup> See <https://htxrauantoantunhien.com.vn> and [www.facebook.com/rauantoanmocchau/?locale=vi\\_VN](http://www.facebook.com/rauantoanmocchau/?locale=vi_VN)

Built a brand and electronic traceability system	
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
Growing demand for safe vegetables Government policies supporting clean vegetables High export potential	Climate change Intense competition Production cost challenges Changes in regulations and standards

The cooperative clearly identifies target consumer requirements. Different consumers have varying demands regarding food safety, product quality standards, and certification methods. The target consumers for the cooperative are supermarkets, retail stores in Hanoi, and companies supplying food to school cafés, with sales through contracts. To supply vegetables to supermarkets and retail stores, the cooperative must provide the following documents: business registration certificate, food-safety certification, VietGAP certification, soil- and water-testing certificates, pesticide-residue testing certificates, and food-safety training certificates. Additionally, quality standards and packaging requirements vary by market. For supermarkets and retail stores in Hanoi, vegetables must be fresh, well-presented, and labelled with the cooperative’s brand; packaging must meet specific requirements, such as 0.5–1kg for tomatoes. For companies supplying school cafés, vegetables should be fresh, with a possible presence of pests, no requirement for appearance or labels, and packaging should be 10–20kg depending on the type. The cooperative’s processing centre and equipment are guided and supported by Fivimart supermarket.

To meet target consumer requirements, the cooperative has established a production system according to VietGAP standards. An internal food safety management system was set up, overseen by a control board elected by the cooperative members. The control board, consisting of five members (one head and four members responsible for different groups), operates independently, overseeing compliance with legal regulations and cooperative rules. Their main tasks include: production planning, quality monitoring, regular record-keeping checks, issuing warnings and handling violations, and notifying the director about violations and contributions. The cooperative has also developed a brand for Moc Chau vegetables and

has achieved national recognition. It has been transitioning to digital record-keeping and has a dedicated labour force, with over 80% being female, balancing vegetable farming with household responsibilities. The cooperative has successfully sold to major supermarkets in Hanoi and has certifications for organic farming on 5 hectares, with another 20 hectares transitioning to organic. The cooperative continually adapts to market demands and produces off-season vegetables.

Moc Chau's climate and soil conditions are ideal for high-quality vegetable production. The cooperative uses advanced technologies, such as water-saving irrigation and netting, and produces its own drip irrigation systems at low cost. It practices crop rotation to maintain soil health and prevent diseases.

The cooperative processes, packages, and sells vegetables directly to supermarkets. It has registered for food safety certification with the Son La Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. The cooperative follows good manufacturing practice (GMP) guidelines from Fivimart and has upgraded infrastructure, such as a processing facility, with financial support from the province, projects, and Fivimart. It has also invested in a dedicated truck for transporting vegetables to Hanoi, improving quality and reducing post-harvest losses.

Contracts are signed with supermarkets based on clear quality standards, such as VietGAP and food safety requirements. These contracts specify quantities and prices, with payments made through banks after 15 days. Each contract with supermarkets such as Metro, Aeon, Happy Mart, UCA Mart, and Huong Viet Sinh clearly outlines food-safety and quality standards.

The cooperative has built a brand for its safe vegetables and an electronic traceability system. It uses a certification label 'Safe Vegetables Moc Chau,' registered with the Intellectual Property Office. The label includes the cooperative's logo, product and cooperative information, and a QR code for traceability. This integrated label reduces labour costs and enhances market visibility.

To sustain development, the cooperative should leverage existing business environment opportunities: increasing demand for safe products, government support for clean and sustainable agriculture, and export potential.

However, the cooperative faces challenges such as limited production scale, lack of capital for expansion and equipment, and difficulties in entering demanding markets. Production scale limitations hinder meeting large market demands. Despite a four-star OCOP rating, the cooperative's fresh vegetables face investment challenges for post-harvest processing. Small tomatoes, for example, could be processed into jams or sauces for higher economic returns.

Market access and brand promotion are weak. The cooperative relies heavily on traditional distribution channels and lacks an effective marketing strategy to raise consumer awareness. Ms. Luyen is gradually transitioning responsibilities to her daughter, Ms Huong, who is expected to bring new marketing strategies to the cooperative.

Many members are from ethnic minorities such as Hmong and Muong, accustomed to traditional practices, which initially makes it difficult to adopt new methods such as VietGAP. The cooperative receives technical support from provincial and district agencies, including infrastructure investments and participation in product promotion fairs.

The biggest challenge has been climate change, with droughts and prolonged heat affecting water availability and damaging crops. Additionally, competition from other safe vegetable suppliers and imported products creates pressure, and production costs are higher for safe vegetables compared to conventional ones, affecting price competitiveness. Regulatory changes and standards also pose challenges for compliance and maintaining quality certifications.

## **8.6 Target markets and product positioning**

The Tu Nhien Natural Safe Vegetable Cooperative has outlined specific development directions for the near future: continuing to expand production in accordance with VietGAP standards. Alongside this expansion, the cooperative will also increase its market reach, with a strategic focus on exporting vegetables to international markets. Safe agricultural production is a direction encouraged by both the industry and local authorities. Based on factors such as market demand, target consumers, and the cooperative's competitive ability, the research team suggests the following target markets for the cooperative.

The cooperative should continue to build partnerships with supermarket chains, clean food stores, and expand distribution channels to high-end restaurants and hotels. It should focus on the Hanoi market and neighbouring provinces while also expanding to Ho Chi Minh City.

Both cities have large populations, high incomes, and significant demand for safe, organic food. These are strategic target markets for the cooperative. For export purposes, Japan and the EU have stringent organic food standards, and if the cooperative can meet these standards, these markets could be promising.

The cooperative should use product quality, distribution systems, and consumer service as key positioning tools. ‘Naturally Safe Vegetables from Moc Chau’ can be a strong positioning statement. To effectively position its products, the cooperative needs to highlight the following aspects:

- Products are produced according to quality and safety standards such as VietGAP.
- High-quality, health-beneficial products.
- Vegetables are harvested at the appropriate ripeness for each type.
- Commitment to the shortest time from harvest to delivery, ensuring fresh products.
- Additionally, the cooperative should design a slogan to create a distinctive image: ‘Fresh from the farm, straight to your plate’ or ‘Taste the goodness of nature.’

## 8.7 Developing marketing strategies

To achieve marketing goals, the cooperative should implement the following marketing strategies.

### 8.7.1 Consumer-focused strategy

The cooperative’s consumers include wholesalers such as large supermarkets in Hanoi, traders at wholesale markets (if products do not reach supermarkets), small supermarkets in Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Nam Dinh, Quang Ninh and Hai Phong, and vendors using pushcarts who purchase directly from the cooperative. End consumers are typically health-conscious individuals who value environmental and quality aspects. Therefore, the marketing approach should focus on:

- **Health benefits:** Safe vegetables are free from harmful chemicals, pesticides, or preservatives, providing significant health benefits, particularly for families with young children, the elderly, or those needing clean food due to health conditions.
- **Quality and freshness:** Safe vegetables usually have superior quality and freshness due to strict production processes and quality control.

- **Environmental contribution:** Consumers increasingly value sustainable products with minimal environmental impact. Choosing safe vegetables helps them feel they are contributing to environmental protection.

### **8.7.2 Pricing strategy**

With its value chain model, the cooperative produces and sells about 800 to 1,000 tonnes of clean vegetables annually. The selling price is generally about 2,000 VND/kg (equivalent to US\$0.08) higher than conventional vegetables. However, consumers are willing to pay a premium for food safety and health benefits. The cooperative should emphasise that, although the initial price may be higher, safe vegetables can save on medical costs related to foodborne illnesses. To alleviate cost burdens, the cooperative should work with supermarkets and retailers to offer promotions, discounts, or attractive service packages.

### **8.7.3 Distribution strategy**

The cooperative uses four distribution channels: direct from the cooperative to consumers (including tourists who help with word-of-mouth advertising), pushcart vendors (for products not suitable for supermarkets but meeting quality standards), wholesalers (large supermarkets or processing factories that order in bulk), and online sales through the cooperative's website. The cooperative should use multiple channels for better consumer access, ensure a simple and convenient purchasing process, and provide efficient and effective delivery. Additionally, the cooperative should offer consumer support through phone, email, and online chat to address inquiries and post-sale support.

### **8.7.4 Communication strategy**

The cooperative should use diverse communication channels to reach consumers, including social media advertising, email marketing, and traditional media such as newspapers, radio, and television. It should also enhance consumer interaction through activities such as livestreaming production processes, participating in events such as Moc Chau Vegetable Week to promote awareness of product quality and clear origin through QR codes on packaging.

## **8.8 Developing a marketing programme**

Given the cooperative's small scale, it needs to hire 1–2 additional marketing staff to handle marketing activities and improve existing marketing operations. Marketing staff should analyse market feedback, consumer opinions on products, and update product images in catalogues and leaflets sent to consumers.

The cooperative should regularly implement the following marketing programmes to enhance brand recognition, boost sales, and build consumer relationships:

- Continue participating in events such as Moc Chau Vegetable Week.
- Increase content quality (content marketing) to create engaging and valuable content to attract and retain users. Weekly blog posts should focus on health benefits of various vegetables (seasonal and off-season), usage and preparation tips, and consumer success stories. Monthly videos should include usage and preparation guides, shared experiences, and livestreams for direct consumer interaction. Infographics should be used to present important information clearly and visually.
- Run Facebook advertising campaigns during spring, winter and health events, and before and after major holidays, and use product launches or promotions to enhance reach and interaction with target consumers. Use Facebook Ads to create targeted campaigns based on age, interests, behaviours, and locations. Use remarketing ads to reach people who visited the website but did not make a purchase.
- Conduct consumer engagement and care activities to build sustainable relationships and increase interaction, such as promptly responding to consumer inquiries and feedback on Facebook and the website, implementing a loyalty programme with special offers and gifts, and organising contests and giveaways on Facebook to boost participation and engagement.
- Build and expand a community of loyal consumers and connect consumers by creating a Facebook group for sharing experiences, such as discussing the benefits of ginseng tea, and receiving support from the cooperative. Organise online events such as health seminars and online classes on ginseng tea usage. Encourage consumers to share their stories and post them on the cooperative's Facebook page.
- Collaborate with key opinion leaders and influencers to enhance credibility and reach a wider audience by inviting them to experience and review products, sending samples for reviews, and sharing their impressions on social media.
- Continuously monitor and analyse campaign effectiveness and adjust strategies as needed.

## **8.9 Monitoring and evaluation**

- Evaluate marketing results based on annual plans, with marketing staff regularly assessing sales volumes, profits, and marketing expenses relative to revenue.
- Conduct quarterly and semi-annual reviews of marketing policy implementation.

## **8.10 Marketing budget**

As the cooperative is involved in agricultural production and is in its early stages, it needs to invest in market activities, product promotion, and brand building. The cooperative can allocate marketing budgets based on revenue, adjusting allocations based on annual budgets and actual conditions.

## 9 Conclusions

### 9.1 Research findings

The marketing plan for EbA-based forest and farm products in the provinces of Bac Kan, Thai Nguyen, Yen Bai, Son La, and Hoa Binh aims to attract the attention of FFPOs to potential markets for products certified by PGS and committed to quality through the EbA method.

Based on the analysis of five product value chains from these provinces, including Thinh Phat honey, *Gynostemma pentaphyllum* tea, Tan Xuan bamboo shoots, Tan Dong red pomelo, and Tu Nhien natural safe vegetables, the study identifies clear opportunities for the development and expansion of EbA-based forest and farm products with PGS certification.

Results from surveys and interviews with 37 direct participants and 50 online participants show that 73.5% of consumers prefer products with the VietGAP label, 71.4% choose products with the OCOP certification, and 38.8% trust the TCVN organic label. However, only 30.6% of consumers are familiar with the PGS certification, indicating the need for measures to raise awareness about the value of EbA-compliant products. Additionally, 81.3% of respondents emphasised product quality as the top criterion when selecting FFPs, while 77.1% expressed particular concern for products with food-safety certification.

Although consumers are increasingly recognising the value of certifications such as PGS and EbA in protecting ecosystems and enhancing product quality, significant barriers remain in communicating and applying these certifications in practice. FFPO businesses and organisations face challenges in maintaining certifications due to high costs and complex processes. This calls for financial, technological, and communication support from relevant stakeholders.

An in-depth analysis of current certifications such as OCOP, VietGAP, and PGS reveals that for products to truly meet sustainable forest-farm standards based on the EbA approach, criteria for ecosystem protection, environmental restoration, and community support in the context of climate change must be integrated into the production process. The OCOP certification can expand biodiversity conservation criteria to support scaling the EbA model, while VietGAP can enhance requirements for resource management and land restoration. PGS, with its community-based approach, is the most suitable solution for promoting the EbA model, as it shares the same values of environmental protection and community development.

The study proposes solutions to improve and promote the use of certifications such as VietGAP, OCOP, and PGS combined with EbA criteria. These solutions include:

- Raising consumer awareness through educational campaigns and promoting the sustainable benefits of products following the EbA approach, emphasising their role in protecting soil, water, and biodiversity.
- Developing certification and shared label support programmes, particularly PGS certification, to enhance the credibility and trust of consumers in these products.
- Providing technical and financial support to FFPOs to overcome barriers in adopting the EbA approach, from local model building to widespread market implementation.
- Optimising distribution channels, including traditional retail and online channels, to meet the growing and diverse consumer demand for safe and sustainable products.

Finally, the study suggests integrating certifications such as OCOP, VietGAP, and PGS into marketing strategies to enhance consumer confidence while developing diverse distribution channels such as supermarkets, clean food stores, and online sales platforms. The implementation of this comprehensive marketing plan will help strengthen the position of EbA-based forest and farm products in the market, bringing sustainable value to both communities and ecosystems.

## **9.2 Validity and reliability**

The main objective of this report was to develop marketing plans and evaluate the potential for PGS organic certification for products certified under PGS with EbA quality claims for at least five FFPOs in at least five value chains. These objectives have been achieved.

Information was gathered from relevant literature, online sources, and e-books. Quantitative data were collected through an online survey, with the main goal of understanding the factors that consumers consider when purchasing FFPs and the brands they currently use. The survey was conducted both directly and online from April to July 2024, receiving 152 responses. This result is sufficient to collect information that meets the research objectives. Based on these statements, the research is considered reliable and valid.

## **9.3 Suggestions for further research**

This study aims to create marketing strategies targeting the segments in which FFPOs are involved. If the FFPOs gain more followers on social media channels, a broader survey could be conducted with more precise questions, approached from a qualitative perspective to gain deeper insights into consumer needs and desires.

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## Appendix 1. In-depth interview questions

The research objectives were to:

- Collect information from researchers, businesses, producers, support units, and consumers to develop a marketing plan aimed at scaling up the EbA approach, and
- Analyse the main barriers related to knowledge exchange, market access, and finance to promote EbA-based forest and farm products (vegetables, fruits, bamboo shoots, honey, medicinal herbs) in the market.

### What are EbA-based forest and farm products?

EbA is an ecosystem management approach aimed at mitigating the impacts of climate change, protecting the environment, and ensuring sustainable livelihoods for communities. In agriculture and forestry, EbA includes practices such as sustainable farming, responsible use of natural resources, and biodiversity protection.

EbA-based forest and farm products are natural, sustainably produced items that are environmentally friendly and climate resilient, such as honey, vegetables, fruits, bamboo shoots, and medicinal herbs, produced according to sustainable quality standards (such as OCOP, GAP, TCVN Organic, PGS Organic, GACP). These products not only have high quality but also incorporate local resources and knowledge to protect the environment and support local communities in achieving sustainable economic, social, and environmental development.

#### I. Questions for researchers, trainers and managers

**Question 1:** Can you share your understanding of the EbA approach and its application in agricultural and forestry production?

**Question 2:** How do you evaluate the role of research, training, and management in scaling up and developing EbA-based forest and farm products?

**Question 3:** Have you encountered any barriers in researching, training, or applying EbA-based products (eg financial, technological, or knowledge-related)?

**Question 4:** Can you share any methods or training programmes that have proven effective in disseminating knowledge about EbA-based forest and farm products?

**Question 5:** How do you assess the potential and market opportunities for EbA-based forest and farm products in the near future?

**Question 6:** In your opinion, how have certifications such as OCOP, GAP, GACP, or PGS Organic contributed to building trust and enhancing market value for forest and farm products?

**Question 7:** Do you think an ecological product label (EbA) should be developed for EbA-based forest and farm products? Why?

## **II. Questions for businesses**

**Question 1:** Have you ever heard of the ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) approach? If yes, can you share your perspective on its benefits for businesses?

**Question 2:** How do you evaluate the market potential of EbA-based forest and farm products?

**Question 3:** Have you faced any barriers in accessing the market or developing EbA-based products (eg financial, knowledge, or distribution channels)?

**Question 4:** For forest and farm products, what are your quality standard and certification requirements (eg OCOP, GAP, PGS Organic, GACP)? How do these certifications affect your purchasing decisions?

**Question 5:** What factors motivate you to participate in providing inputs or purchasing sustainable products, particularly EbA-based forest and farm products?

**Question 6:** In your opinion, are the current state policies and related organisational support sufficient to promote the development of sustainable EbA-based forest and farm products? What additional policies are needed to support businesses in this field?

**Question 7:** What distribution channels do you use to deliver forest and farm products to consumers? Are these channels as effective as expected? If not, what new distribution channels would you propose for EbA products?

**Question 8:** Do you think an ecological product label (EbA) should be developed for EbA-based forest and farm products? Could a PGS be applied to monitor, manage quality, and certify EbA products?

## **III. Questions for producers and FFPOs**

**Question 1:** Can you share your level of understanding of EbA approaches? What EbA methods has your organisation applied in production?

**Question 2:** What benefits have you seen from producing using the EbA method, in terms of economic, social, and environmental aspects? How have these benefits helped your organisation develop its business?

**Question 3:** What difficulties has your organisation faced in producing EbA-based products? How have these barriers affected market access?

**Question 4:** Can you share the quality standards and certifications your organisation follows (eg OCOP, GAP, PGS Organic, GACP)? How have these certifications affected your market access?

**Question 5:** Do you believe your organisation has the potential to scale up production of EbA-based products? What factors need improvement to support this process?

**Question 6:** Does your organisation face financial, technical, knowledge, or market-related difficulties in applying the EbA method and expanding production? What support do you expect from organisations or the government?

**Question 7:** How do you assess consumer awareness of EbA-based products? Do you think marketing strategies need to change to raise awareness?

**Question 8:** Does your organisation have a marketing strategy to promote EbA-based forest and farm products? Do you have any suggestions to enhance marketing effectiveness and market growth?

**Question 9:** Do you think your organisation needs to develop an ecological product label (EbA) for your products based on the EbA approach? Why?

#### **IV. Questions for support units**

**Question 1:** Can you share your awareness and understanding of the EbA method in supporting the production and development of forest and farm products? Does your organisation have any programmes supporting the application of EbA?

**Question 2:** What role does your organisation play in promoting the production and consumption of EbA-based products?

**Question 3:** What challenges has your organisation faced in supporting the implementation and scaling up of EbA? How have these challenges affected market and financial access for producers?

**Question 4:** Does your organisation have any programmes supporting market connectivity for EbA-based forest and farm products? What results have these programmes achieved?

**Question 5:** Can you share the main barriers that producers face in accessing financial, technical, or policy support to develop EbA-based products? Does your organisation propose any solutions to overcome these barriers?

**Question 6:** How do you evaluate the role of product certifications (OCOP, GAP, PGS Organic, GACP) in improving product quality and market access? Does your organisation have any programmes supporting producers to achieve these certifications?

**Question 7:** How do you assess current consumer awareness of EbA-based products? Does your organisation have any programmes aimed at raising consumer awareness about these products?

**Question 8:** Do you have any proposals for government policies or international programmes to promote the development of EbA-based forest and farm products?

**Question 9:** Should your organisation support producers/farmer organisations in developing an ecological product label (EbA) for their products? Could a PGS be applied to monitor, manage quality, and certify EbA products?

## **V. Questions for consumers**

**Question 1:** Have you ever heard of the concept of ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA)? If so, could you share your understanding of it?

**Question 2:** Do you regularly consume products such as honey, vegetables, fruits, and medicinal herbs produced under methods such as OCOP, GAP, organic PGS, or GACP? What reasons lead you to choose these products?

**Question 3:** What barriers do you encounter when deciding to purchase EbA-based forest and farm products? (For example, price, product information, availability).

**Question 4:** How do you evaluate the quality and safety of EbA-based forest and farm products compared to conventional products?

**Question 5:** Where do you usually seek information about forest and farm products? (For example, internet, media, friends, family).

**Question 6:** Have you ever purchased forest and farm products with EbA shared labels? Do you have any suggestions for producers, businesses, stakeholders, agencies, or organisations on how to improve the consumption of forest and farm products produced using EbA methods and carrying EbA shared labels?

**Question 7:** Do you pay attention to certifications such as OCOP, GAP, or PGS when selecting products? How do these certifications influence your purchasing decisions?

**Question 8:** In your opinion, is it necessary to develop an EbA shared label for EbA-based forest and farm products? Could a PGS be applied to monitor, manage, and certify the quality of EbA products?

**Question 9:** Do you feel that consuming EbA-based forest and farm products is part of your sustainable consumption efforts? Would you be willing to pay more for these products compared to conventional ones? Why?

## **Appendix 2. Consumer survey**

We are conducting a survey to analyse the value chain and provide recommendations and guidance for marketing strategies of forest and farm products labelled with EbA quality claims for selected FFPOs in the provinces of Bac Kan, Thai Nguyen, Hoa Binh, Son La, and Yen Bai.

We aim to understand your experience as a consumer of forest and farm products. Any information you provide will be kept strictly confidential, and your personal details will not be disclosed to others. We greatly appreciate your participation in this survey. Thank you!

### **I. Personal information**

- Are you the head of your household?
- What is your gender?
- What is your age group?
- What is your occupation?
- Where do you live?
- What is the average income of your household?
- On average, how much do you spend annually on purchasing safe forest and farm products?
- Are you interested in learning about and evaluating forest and farm products labelled with EbA quality claims?

### **II. Shopping habits**

- What products do you typically purchase? (honey, fruits including pomelo, orange, tangerine etc, bamboo shoots, safe vegetables of various kinds, herbal teas)
- Where do you buy these products? (market, supermarket, convenience store, online, other)
- How often do you purchase these products? (daily, weekly, monthly, occasionally)

### **III. Awareness of collective labels/PGS and EbA**

- Have you heard of collective or organic PGS labels?
- Are you aware of products certified with EbA quality claims?

- Are you interested in purchasing products certified with collective labels/PGS and EbA quality claims?
  
- Which of the following labels do you commonly use? (Multiple choices allowed)
  - OCOP products
  - VietGAP products
  - Products labelled as ‘safe’/’food safety’
  - Vietnamese National Standards (TCVN) organic products
  - PGS organic products
  - Conventional products (no labelling, traceability, or certification)
  - GACP-World Health Organization-certified products
  - Products with geographical indication (identification of the geographical origin of the product)
  - Ecological products
  - Global GAP products
  - Other
  
- Among all the labelled/certified products listed above, which label/certification do you consider the best?
  
- Please list the top three reasons that persuade you to use certified products:
  - Product quality
  - Food safety
  - Origin
  - Environmental friendliness
  - Social benefits
  - Certification and labelling
  - Reasonable price
  - Reputation and reviews
  - Convenience and accessibility
  - Social responsibility and consumer awareness

#### **IV. Feedback on selected forest and farm products**

- Have you heard of the following products?
  - Think Phat honey

- Tan Lac Son Gypen Giao Co Lam tea/Natural Giao Co Lam tea
  - Tan Xuan bamboo shoots
  - Tan Dong organic pomelo/red pomelo
  - Tu Nhien natural safe vegetables
  - Other (please specify the brand names for honey, herbal tea, bamboo shoots, pomelo, and vegetables you know)
- Which of the following products do you regularly use?
    - Thinh Phat honey
    - Tan Lac Son Gypen Giao Co Lam tea/Son Natural Giao Co Lam tea
    - Tan Xuan Bamboo Shoots
    - Tan Dong organic pomelo/red pomelo
    - Tu Nhien natural safe vegetables
    - Other (please specify the brand names for honey, herbal tea, bamboo shoots, pomelo, and vegetables you know)
- How satisfied are you with the following products?
    - Thinh Phat honey
    - Tan Lac Son Gypen Giao Co Lam tea/Son Natural Giao Co Lam tea
    - Tan Xuan Bamboo Shoots
    - Tan Dong organic pomelo/red pomelo
    - Tu Nhien natural safe vegetables
- How likely are you to recommend this brand to friends or colleagues?
    - Thinh Phat honey
    - Tan Lac Son Gypen Giao Co Lam tea/Son Natural Giao Co Lam tea
    - Tan Xuan Bamboo Shoots
    - Tan Dong organic pomelo/red pomelo
    - Tu Nhien natural safe vegetables
- Have you experienced any issues (eg quality, price, etc) with the following products?
    - Thinh Phat honey
    - Tan Lac Son Gypen Giao Co Lam tea/Son Natural Giao Co Lam tea
    - Tan Xuan Bamboo Shoots
    - Tan Dong organic pomelo/red pomelo

- Tu Nhien natural safe vegetables

## **V. Opinions on quality and price**

- What is the most important factor for you when purchasing these products?
- How do you evaluate the price of these products?
- What features do you think these products can achieve?

## **VI. Opinions on online shopping**

- Do you often purchase these products online?
- If yes, what benefits do you find in online shopping?

## **VII. Suggestions and feedback**

- Are you willing to pay extra for products with collective labels/PGS and EbA certification?
- Do you have any suggestions for making products with collective labels/PGS and EbA certification more popular?
- Are you interested in receiving information about these products via email or text message?

**Thank you so much!**

### Appendix 3. List of interviewees

<b>Research and training units</b>		
<b>TT</b>	<b>Full name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
1	ASS. TS. Dao The Anh	Deputy director of Vietnam Academy of Agricultural Sciences (VAAS)
2	NGND. TS. Pham Thanh Hai	Former principal of North Vietnam College of Agriculture and Rural Development
3	Ms. Tu Tuyen Nhung	Standing member of the Vietnam Organic Agriculture Association (VOAA)
4	TS. Phan Van Thang	Director of NTFPs Centre, Vietnamese Academy of Forestry Sciences
5	TS. Phung Huu Chinh	Chairman of the board of directors of Mountainous Bee Development Centre
6	Nguyen Thi Hai Xuan	Vietnam Certification Centre (Quacert)
7	ASS. TS. Dang Thi Phuong Lan	Director of the Institute for Agricultural Environment
8	TS. Do Thi Huong	Director of the Centre for Sustainable Rural Development (SRDC), Institute of Land Management and Rural Development, National Institute of Agriculture and Rural Development
9	Le Cong Hung	Dean of the Faculty of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Medicine – North Vietnam College of Agriculture and Rural Development
10	TS. Pham Thanh Que	Institute of Land Management and Rural Development, Vietnam National University of Forestry (VNUF)

<b>Business units</b>		
1	MA. Tran Manh Chien	Uncle Shrimp chain
2	MA. Nguyen The Hung	BigGreen chain
3	Thai Anh Tuan	Tam Dat chain
4	Nguyen Van Quan	Honest Sea Wolf chain

5	Phan Dinh Truong Thi	Ba Lanh chain
6	Tran Van Hieu	DACE Farm
7	Nguyen Thi Phuong Lien	Vinasamex
8	Nguyen Thi Bich Thuy	Hanuti

<b>Manufacturing units</b>		
1	Ma Thi Ninh	Yen Duong Cooperative
2	Nguyen Van Sy	Hai Dang Cooperative
3	Do Trong Hiep	Tan Lac Son Cooperative
4	Nguyen Thi Tam	Tan Xuan 269 Agricultural Cooperative
5	Nguyen Thi Nguyet	Thinh Phat cooperative
6	Tran Hong Nang	Tan Dong Organic Pomelo Cultivation and Agricultural Services Cooperative
7	Ms. Luyen	Tu Nhien Safe Vegetable Cooperative

<b>Support units</b>		
1	Hoang Hung	HND Hoa Binh
2	Luong Thi Thuong	HND Son La
3	Nguyen Phuong Dong	HND Yen Bai
4	Ma Thi Diem	Bac Kan People's Committee
5	Nguyen Van Nguyen	Thai Nguyen People's Committee

<b>Consumers</b>		
1	Ms. Huong	VOAA
2	Ms. Dung	Association of Food Transparency
3	Mr. Huan	Business households/consumers
4	Ms. Vieng	Consumer
5	Mr. Chung	Consumer