

Produce exporters  
losing half to spoilage

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Spoilage and poor storage practices are costing Thai produce farmers and exporters more than 2.92 billion baht a year, or eight to nine million baht a day, says transport logistics expert Chris Catto-Smith.

He said that 20-35% of exports of baby corn, asparagus, exotic fruits and other perishables are spoiled during transport or storage. This is causing supermarkets in the European Union (EU) and the UK to shun Thai products in favour of African and South American produce.

In addition, the EU's current ban and restrictions on the use of polystyrene foam, which is widely used for containing Thai produce, is threatening Thailand's perishable goods exports.

Mr Catto-Smith underlined these critical issues, warning that if Thailand fails to take remedial action, a huge number of farmers, packing houses and exporters could be driven out of business.

Stewart Sinclair, managing director of Bangkok Flight Services Co (BFS), one of the major ground and cargo handling service providers at Suvarnabhumi Airport, acknowledged that spoilage is a serious problem for Thai exporters.

He said that 16-17% of 1.1 million tonnes a year of Thai products shipped by air are perishable. Much of the 150,000 tonnes of perishable products are orchids.

About 140 tonnes of Thai produce, with an average value of 200 baht per kilogramme, travel through the docks at Suvarnabhumi Airport each night, while the airfreight cost is about 130 baht/kg.

Mr Catto-Smith noted that heat damage

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and poor handling mean that about half of the coriander from Thailand cannot be exported. Thai coriander is a prized commodity in Europe, fetching 10 euros per kilogramme.

Coolcargo, a company newly incorporated in Bangkok by Mr Catto-Smith, has developed solutions that promise to combat the problem.

The company specialises in thermal protection, improved storage handling and transport of perishable and temperature sensitive goods.

He suggests a number of inexpensive measures that allow goods to remain at 10 degrees Celsius throughout the transport process. Local shippers have been

forced to use bulky foam boxes and gel packs due to the lack of thermal protection in the transport chain.

With heat protection, produce can be contained in conventional cardboard boxes that provide 30-40% greater weight utilisation.

Several shippers have confirmed that the process saves up to 20-30 baht/kg, and results in immediate revenue increases, he said.

BFS, a 50:50 joint venture between French-owned Worldwide Flight Services and Bangkok Airways, has engaged Coolcargo to manage and operate its perishable handling facilities at Suvarnabhumi, starting in April.



Showing off the Coolcargo Aircover unit at the BFS yard, from left Coolcargo managing director Chris Catto-Smith, BFS managing director Stewart Sinclair and Coolcargo international business development manager Keith Packer.

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 A small image of a bottle of Bangkok Post, showing the brand name and logo.