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Working Paper

Is it worthwhile for Cambodian smallholders to invest in CamGAP certification? A domestic demand-side investigation

Diskussionsbeitrag, No. 2503

Provided in Cooperation with:

Department for Agricultural Economics and Rural Development, University of Goettingen

Suggested Citation: Reich, Charlotte; Bae, Dongjin; Mußhoff, Oliver; Bruns, Selina J. K. (2025) : Is it worthwhile for Cambodian smallholders to invest in CamGAP certification? A domestic demand-side investigation, Diskussionsbeitrag, No. 2503, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Department für Agrarökonomie und Rurale Entwicklung (DARE), Göttingen

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/323233>

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2025

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A domestic demand-side investigation**

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ISSN 1865-2697

Is it worthwhile for Cambodian smallholders to invest in CamGAP certification? A domestic demand-side investigation

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Disclaimer: We disclaim no conflict of interest by the authors;

Abstract

Transformation of the food system is critical in the face of growing challenges such as climate change. Smallholder farmers in the Global South are particularly vulnerable to these challenges, often living in poverty. One potential pathway to increasing their resilience and income is through price premiums and consistent buy-offs from supermarkets. However, supermarkets rarely source from domestic smallholder farmers due to unstable production and a lack of guarantee of complying with food safety standards. An instrument to overcome these shortcomings are certification schemes. However, for a farmer to invest in or for a policy to subsidize certification, it is central to understand if there is a consumer group that will respond to it. Thus, our objective is to investigate whether urban consumers in a low-income country setting are willing to pay a premium for certified food. We specifically focus on Cambodia and the newly established Cambodian Good Agricultural Practice (CamGAP) certification, which promotes food safety. This research seeks to understand whether the willingness to pay (WTP) of consumers can support the entry of small farmers into the supermarket supply chain. In markets where food safety is an emerging concern but clear signals are lacking, a key question is whether certification can override existing heuristics consumers currently use to identify safe food. We used a quantitative questionnaire and a discrete choice experiment (DCE) with middle to high income urban shoppers to assess their WTP for CamGAP certified food. We also conducted an information treatment as part of the DCE by showing a short video to a randomly selected treatment group to examine the impact of consumer knowledge on purchasing decisions. Our results show that consumers' WTP is higher for certified food, with an even stronger WTP after receiving the information treatment. Notably, consumers were also more willing to pay for domestic fresh food after the treatment. Our study provides first evidence for governments and international agencies that certification can support smallholder farmers in accessing supermarkets, even in countries where food safety certifications are just entering the market.

Smallholder Farmers, Discrete Choice Experiment, Willingness to Pay, Market Integration

1 Introduction

Worldwide, 80 percent of the extreme poor live in rural areas, most commonly in smallholder farm households in the Global South. These individuals are particularly vulnerable to poverty and operate under highly uncertain conditions, for example due to unstable environmental, market, and household conditions (FAO, 2021; World Bank, 2016, 2018, 2025). Focusing on increasing the welfare of small farm households is central to the Global Development Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially for achieving SDG 1 *no poverty* and SDG 2 *zero hunger* (United Nations, 2024). One promising avenue to improve household incomes and stability is by earning price premiums through access to high-value markets, such as domestic supermarkets. However, smallholder farmers often struggle to maintain stable production levels and demonstrate compliance with food safety standards.

Signaling food safety is imperative for accessing high-value domestic or international markets. If farmers cannot comply, they are excluded from these markets (Hoffmann et al., 2019). There is good reason for this market entry barrier to formal markets. Every year, unsafe food leads to 600 million cases of foodborne disease and 420,000 deaths worldwide (World Health Organization, 2015). Alarming, 30% of these deaths occur among children under five years of age, which is likely underestimated (World Health Organization, 2015). In Southeast Asia specifically, contaminated food causes 150 million illnesses and 175,000 deaths annually (World Health Organization, 2015). These foodborne diseases have a detrimental impact on socioeconomic development, as they strain healthcare systems and negatively affect national economies, tourism, and trade (World Health Organization, 2015).

Cambodia is an example for an emerging economy that has recently (2015) graduated from a low-income economy to a lower-middle income economy (World Bank, 2024a). It is one of 51 countries in the lower middle income group. These countries are experiencing rapid growth and societal changes and at the same time, consumer awareness and demand for safe food are rising (Pisei, Hin, 2021a; ALiSEA teams, 2021). Despite these trends, unsafe food remains an issue. For example, from 2014 to 2019 Cambodia recorded more than 130 foodborne related outbreaks, resulting in almost 6,000 cases of illnesses and around 80 deaths (Mekong Institute, 2019). Although there are most likely unreported cases, foodborne disease outbreaks have been officially recognized throughout the country (Ebner, 2020).

Fresh produce - such as vegetables and fruits - is one of the potential causes of foodborne diseases due to potential microbial and chemical contamination (Olaimat and Holley, 2012), which is a global phenomenon. Limited empirical evidence shows that Cambodia is also faces contaminated vegetables, for example due to being contaminated with bacterial pathogens (Muramatsu et al., 2020; Desiree, 2019; Schwan et al., 2021). Desiree (2019) examined the presence of microbial contamination on vegetables in traditional markets in Cambodia and found a considerably high presence of *Salmonella enterica*, *E.coli*, and coliform in both dry and rainy seasons. Likewise, Schwan et al. (2021) revealed that the food contact surfaces are highly contaminated by *Salmonella enterica* in traditional markets in Cambodia where cross-contamination occurs.

Reasons for this status quo are manifold and present throughout the food value chain, spanning from production to distribution, with the literature suggesting: Firstly, farmers might have limited information about chemical usage and its impact on health which can lead to a potential overuse of pesticides (Sokcheng et al., 2021). Secondly, contaminated soil and/or water can sometimes be the only available input to farmers (Schwan et al., 2021; Desiree, 2019; Murphy et al., 2018; Pravalprukskul et al., 2018). Thirdly, cross-contamination during storing, shipping, and selling is possible due to subpar hygiene practices and deficient cold chain systems (Schwan et al., 2022, 2021; Muramatsu et al., 2020; Nguyen, 2021; Desiree, 2019). Lastly, there is a lack of a contamination inspection system for agricultural products along the value chain. As one actor alone cannot solve the problem, there is a need for strategic approaches to improving food safety (Thompson et al., 2021).

Governments can address food safety and environmental concerns through laws, regulations, and

standards (Caswell and Mojduszka, 1996; Wongprawmas and Canavari, 2017). Market-driven certification schemes have also emerged as key instruments, though their effectiveness remains debated (Henson and Humphrey, 2009; Bonroy and Constantatos, 2015; Handschuch et al., 2013; Schleifer and Sun, 2020; Oya et al., 2018). In principle, these schemes help producers adopt proper practices and signal food safety to supermarkets and consumers (Caswell and Mojduszka, 1996) and there is empirical evidence that smallholder farmers can improve net incomes through certification (Tran and Goto, 2019). In Cambodia, both the government and private sector have introduced food safety laws (Government of Cambodia; Sreylin) and major efforts have been invested to install a certification program: The Cambodian Good Agricultural Practice (CamGAP) (Pisei, Hin, 2021a).

Launched in 2013, CamGAP aligns with ASEAN GAP to enhance food safety and sustainable farming. The government has progressively strengthened its organizational framework, expanded certification, and integrated producers into the market. Development programs have supported its implementation by establishing residue test laboratories, training inspectors, and subsidizing certification costs for fruit and vegetable farmers (IFAD, 2021). While information on uptake is limited - at least in the English language - uptake appears to be slow. The FAO reports that their collaborative program - together with the Cambodian government - 258 farmers were certified by 2020 (FAO, 2020). The Phnom Penh Post reports that by 2021, 250 farms were certified, and CamGAP produce is available in some Phnom Penh supermarkets (Pisei, Hin, 2021b,a).

Thus, despite the efforts, adoption appears to remain low given the vast number of Cambodian farms — cucumber alone is cultivated by approximately 60,000 households (National Institute of Statistics, 2020). Compliance with CamGAP entails costs and operational changes, posing barriers to adoption (Kersting and Wollni, 2012). Economic incentives play a crucial role in motivating farmers to adopt voluntary standards (Dessart et al., 2019; Laosutsan et al., 2019; Srisopaporn et al., 2015). Thus, consumer demand and willingness to pay (WTP) are essential for the expansion of such standards, e.g. in order for farmer groups to invest and/or for the government to increase subsidies (Wongprawmas and Canavari, 2017).

While there is first limited empirical evidence that Cambodian consumers are aware of food safety issues (ALiSEA teams, 2021; Kouy et al., 2016; Nurhasan et al., 2021), to our knowledge, no research was conducted on consumers' WTP for fresh produce in Cambodia. This is a critical literature gap (Ortega and Tschirley, 2017), as it would provide evidence on how food safety generally affects emerging agrifood systems. Therefore, using a quantitative survey and a Discrete Choice Experiment (DCE), we investigate i) Consumers' safety concerns with respect to fresh domestic products, ii) Consumers' trust in the CamGAP certificate as well as their WTP for certified domestic fresh products.

Our work is closest to work to Wongprawmas and Canavari (2017). The authors investigate consumers' WTP for safe food signaling in Thailand and employ a DCE to do so. There are important differences: While the countries (Thailand and Cambodia) are neighbors, their economies differ considerably. At the time of Wongprawmas and Canavari (2017) data collection in 2013, Thailand was categorized as "Upper-middle Income" and Cambodia "Low income". Since 2015 Cambodia has graduated to becoming a lower-middle income country (Thailand's status has remained the same) (World Bank, 2024b). This also explains the difference in foci between our studies. While Wongprawmas and Canavari (2017) are interested in a relative comparison and they can do so as there are a variety of brands and labels on the Thai market at the time, known to the consumer. They aim to identify the "relative value of food safety label, compared to existing brands and labels (...)" (Wongprawmas and Canavari, 2017, p. 26). In our case, the governmental and private efforts to introduce domestic food safety labels to the supermarkets have just begun. Thus, we are not interested in a relative comparison between brands and labels, instead we are interested in if a label would trump other currently used heuristics that the consumer might use at the market. In other words, we set out to understand if at all, and under which conditions, there might be a higher WTP for certified domestic fresh food products in the first place.

Therefore, our work is relevant to policy and research. By gathering first empirical evidence about

Cambodian consumers’ perceptions of and preference for safe food, we provide signals to policy-makers, project developers, and relevant stakeholders to develop evidence-based interventions. At the same time, we contribute to the literature by investigating the nexus between rising food safety concerns and standards in formal supply chains in an emerging country setting. In this context investments in certification schemes often pose a great challenges for smallholders with opaque payouts and high upfront costs (Glasbergen, 2018) which thus require support mechanisms.

The remainder of the study is structured as follows: In Section 2 we will briefly discuss the background relevant to the national context and the certification scheme. In Section 3 we elaborate on Materials and Methods chosen. In Section 4 we present and discuss the results and end with concluding thoughts in Section 5.

2 Background

2.1 The vegetable industry in Cambodia

Rice dominates Cambodian agriculture, with over 70% of arable land being cultivated for rice production, and more than 60% of farm households being engaged in rice production (National Institute of Statistics, 2020). The vegetable sector in Cambodia still remains vulnerable, which is mainly due to the limited capacity to cope with pest and disease control and poor irrigation infrastructure leading to flooding or drought (Goletti and Sovith, 2016; IFAD, 2022). Thus, vegetable production in Cambodia is highly seasonal and erratic. Frequent shortages of domestic supply result in dependence on importing vegetables from neighboring countries. The country imports 30% of its vegetables from neighboring countries such as Vietnam, Thailand, and China, with most of the imported goods sold in urban markets (IFAD, 2022).

2.2 Markt based instruments:

2.2.1 Good Agriculture Practice (GAP) in Cambodia

In 2006, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) introduced ASEAN Good Agricultural Practices (ASEAN GAP) to standardize fruit and vegetable production, minimize socio-economic and environmental risks, and align with international food safety standards (ASEAN, 2006). Many ASEAN countries developed country-specific GAP schemes (e.g., Q GAP, VietGAP). Cambodia adopted ASEAN GAP as CamGAP in 2013, establishing it as a voluntary national standard. CamGAP consists of four modules: (a) food safety, (b) environmental management, (c) worker health, safety, and welfare, and (d) produce quality. It applies to fresh fruits and vegetables, excluding high-risk items like sprouts and minimally processed products, but includes post-harvest handling. Organic and GMO-free produce are not covered. Certified crops include leafy greens, cabbages, cucumbers, yard-long beans, bitter melon, mango, longan, and durian (MAFF, 2024; FAO, 2020).

To obtain CamGAP certification, producers must complete a three-day training by GDA officers, followed by farm inspections and audits covering waste management, soil and water quality, and chemical residue testing. Currently, all laboratory tests are conducted at the GDA laboratory in Phnom Penh. The certification, managed by the Department of Plant Protection Sanitary and Phytosanitary and the Provincial Department of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, allows producers to label products with the CamGAP logo and a QR code for traceability. Certification is valid for two years, requiring renewal through re-inspection (MAFF, 2024).

While there are no official numbers, based on the official certification manual (MAFF, 2024) and stakeholder discussion we estimate that the average cost of CamGAP certification, including training, auditing, and laboratory tests for water, soil, and crops, is approximately \$500 per farm. Costs will vary based on location, farm size, and application type. Group applicants will benefit from lower costs due to shared training and audit expenses, whereas individual applicants will face

higher fees. However, this would present a considerable economic burden to smallholder farmers given that in 2020, the average monthly agricultural income per farm household was approximately \$200 and the median disposable household income in rural areas was \$358 per month (National Institute of Statistics, 2021).

2.2.2 Organic Certificates

EU and USDA NOP certificates are the most prominent available organic certificates in Cambodia, provided through private certifying agencies. There are a few organic farms that obtained these organic certificates in Cambodia: In 2022, there were 66 projects for USDA NOP, 46 for EU organic. Dayet et al. (2024) investigate the organic by default rice practices, describing the traditional cultivation system that existed before the certification. They show limited profitability and a declining trend of organic by default rice cultivation. The Japanese Agricultural Standards (JAS) certificate is a new player on the market, with 3 projects running in 2022 (Control Union Cambodia, 2022). Although most organic products produced in Cambodia target export, some of them are available in the market for high-end consumers (Control Union Cambodia, 2022).

3 Materials and Methods

3.1 Data

We conducted an online survey in Cambodia in the summer of 2023. Given that certified products are predominantly available in urban areas and typically appeal for higher-income populations, we specifically targeted urban populations likely to fall within or above the middle-income segment - i.e., the primary target group for organic and certified products. To reach this audience, we recruited respondents through university networks (students and staff), governmental institutions, hospitals, and non-governmental organizations. This strategy allowed us to capture a diverse yet socioeconomically relevant sample for assessing preferences and willingness to pay for CamGAP-certified products. We thoroughly piloted and tested our survey and experimental design. One member of the research team was present in Cambodia from the development idea, testing the survey, translating and double-checking the survey, up to the data collection. We started our pilot work by visiting markets and supermarkets to get an understanding of products available and how these are presented. We also conducted qualitative interviews to understand heuristics which consumers might use to navigate the market to assess the quality of food products. We then tested the survey and DCE with government workers and students in early 2023.

The online survey links were distributed through various channels that we were able to contact in Cambodia such as professors of universities, the heads of government offices, heads of hospitals, and NGOs in Cambodia supported by KOICA (Korean International Cooperation Agency) Cambodia office. The survey yielded a *random* sample of 211, after cleaning the data our sample consists of 196 respondents. Respondents' characteristics are described in Table 1. We have received ethical clearance for this study from the University¹.

3.2 The Experiment

We utilize a DCE to elicit consumers' preferences and their WTP for fresh vegetables. Just as Wongprawmas and Canavari (2017), we searched for a popular vegetable for our experiment. Thus, pak choy (*Brassica rapa* subsp. *Chinensis*, also called Bok choy) was used as a representative product for the experiment because it is a common fresh vegetable that is produced and consumed on a regular basis in Cambodia (PINN et al., 2020). Precise price information of pak choy is available across the country as a baseline reference of WTP analysis (WFP, 2023). Price, certification,

¹Please note: We do not mention the name of the institution due to the blind peer-review. We will add it afterwards.

Table 1: Discrete Choice Experiment

Attribute	Levels
Price	2,000 Riel
	4,000 Riel
	8,000 Riel
Certification	CamGap
	Organic
	-
Country of origin	Domestic (Cambodia)
	Thailand
	Vietnam
Package	Plastic wrap
	No plastic wrap
Outlet type	traditional market
	Supermarket
	Known vendor in traditional market
	Any type of outlet

country of origin, package, and outlet type were selected based on our qualitative interviews as part of our pilot work. We designed the DCE in a way to understand whether or not a certificate can trump other heuristics and we used both the literature and qualitative pilot work to understand common heuristics to navigate the market for food safety. That is why, beyond to price and certification, other attributes are included: Consumers might find products from selected other countries to be safe (country of origin), might orientate themselves through the packaging (such as a product wrapped in plastic might be perceived as high quality or safe) and/or by knowing the vendor/market. We made respondents aware that we refer to a 'known vendor' as someone they regularly shop with. We deliberately left the definition of regular vague to accommodate the subjective nature of the term. Table 1 shows attribute levels in the DCE.

Price Prices covered three levels to reflect the range of retail prices for 500 grams at the time of the study in July 2023. The value of prices is 2,000, 4,000, and 8,000 Riel. The range was derived from local market prices and WTP stated in our pilot. The current prices of pak choy in supermarkets ranged 3,000 to 6,000 Riel depending on the quality, according to market price research in August 2023. In the conducted a pilot survey consumers' WTP ranged from 1,500 to 7,000 Riel.

Certification We considered two types of certificates that are available in Cambodia as attributes: GAP and Organic. CamGAP is available in supermarkets. In terms of organic certificates, EU and USDA organic labels are available in supermarkets.

Origin Country of origin covered Domestic (Cambodia), Thailand, and Vietnam. Thailand, and Vietnam are chosen since these two countries are the biggest exporting countries of agricultural products to Cambodia. It is estimated that Cambodia imports 30% of its vegetables from neighboring countries, and over 70% relied on Vietnam among the total amount of imported vegetables. Meanwhile, Cambodian consumers prefer domestically grown produce (ALiSEA teams, 2021). .

Package Package refers to as not being wrapped or plastic wrapped. Most traditional markets sell their products without packaging in Cambodia whereas the supermarkets sell plastic-wrapped products in general. The reason for packaging in supermarkets is that they try to satisfy consumers' safety concerns of cross-contamination along distribution and selling. Reflecting poor hygiene practices in typical wet markets in Cambodia, products properly wrapped in plastic may be preferred even in the wet market if consumers are worried about cross-contamination in the market.

Outlet type We have defined four outlet types, namely *traditional market*, *supermarket*, *known*

vendor in a traditional market, and any type of outlet.

As we are particularly interested in attitudes towards the CamGAP certificate, which is relatively new on the Cambodian market, we randomly split the sample into a treatment and a control group. The treatment group received a short explanatory video (designed by the FAO) about CamGAP. The control group went straight into the DCE without any prior briefing. Since CamGAP-certified produce is only just entering selected supermarkets, we assume there is an information gap. The video was one minute long and gave an overview in the local language of what CamGAP is and how it improves the product. A software randomly assigned each participant to either the treatment (sees the video) or control (does not see the video) group.

3.3 Identification strategy

We analyze consumers' preferences and WTP for pak choy via mixed logit models estimated in preference as well as WTP space. The mixed logit model is well suited for DCEs as it accounts for preference heterogeneity, substitutable alternatives, and panel effects when individuals make repeated choices (Train, 2009).

In the preference space specification, we follow McFadden (1974) and estimate utility as a function of the alternative-specific attributes and price:

$$U_{ijt} = \beta' X_{ijt} + \alpha P_{ijt} + \varepsilon_{ijt} \quad (1)$$

where U_{ijt} is the utility individual i derives from choosing alternative j in choice situation t , X_{ijt} is a vector of product attributes (e.g., CamGAP certification), and P_{ijt} is the price of the alternative. The coefficient vector β captures mean preferences, while α represents the price sensitivity. We account for preference heterogeneity by specifying normally distributed coefficients for attributes where both positive and negative valuations are plausible and lognormally distributed coefficients for attributes that are expected to have a strictly positive or negative effect, such as price.

Since directly estimating WTP rather than deriving it post-estimation may yield more stable distributions, we estimate a WTP-space model where utility is reformulated as (Train and Weeks, 2005):

$$U_{ijt} = \lambda(\gamma' X_{ijt} - P_{ijt}) + \varepsilon_{ijt} \quad (2)$$

where $\lambda = -\alpha^{-1}$ scales utility, and $\gamma = \beta/\alpha$ gives WTP measures for each attribute. This specification ensures that WTP distributions remain behaviorally plausible by constraining price coefficients to be strictly negative. By estimating both preference-space and WTP-space models, we validate robustness and ensure that our WTP estimates remain consistent with economic theory and behavioral expectations.

4 Results

4.1 Descriptives

Table 2 presents sociodemographic statistics for our sample of 196 individuals. The average age of respondents is 32.07 years. Education levels average 14.89 years of schooling, making our sample relatively educated compared to the rest of society. In 2021, 22.1 % of the population of 25 or older has at least completed lower secondary school (World Bank, 2025). 45% of our sample is female. Household size averages 4.82 members, which is in line with the average Cambodian household size (United Nations, 2017). Most of our participants live in the city center or close to the city. Most participants own a smartphone.

In addition to our efforts in the pilot, we also included questions on market navigation and perception. First of all, 71% of participants answered with *yes* to the question *Are you concerned about*

Table 2: Sociodemographics N=196

Variable	Mean	Std. Error
Age	32.07	10.28
Education ^A	14.89	2.93
Gender ^B	0.45	
Household size	4.82	2.13
<i>Location</i>		
City center ^C	38.27 %	
in/around city ^C	30.61 %	
Semi-rural ^C	15.82 %	
Rural ^C	15.31 %	
Simple Phone ^C	22.96 %	
Smartphone ^C	85.71 %	

A:in years; B:dummy, female=1; C:dummy, yes=1

getting sick after eating Cambodian fresh fruits or vegetables. We further asked an open question regarding how individuals know if their product is safe. Participants stated to rely on visual cues (e.g. appearance, "not very fresh", "look at color"), trusted sellers or farmers, as well as trial-and-error approaches. In the trial-and-error method, they simply test the food, i.e. they eat it and see if they fall sick. If they do not fall sick, they go back to the same vendor and categorize her products as safe. Many consider certificates to indicate safety, also the outlet "buy in supermarket" as well as the packaging "wrapped in plastic". Many, however, state that they simply do not know ².

4.2 Discrete Choice Experiment

The results from the DCE mixed logit models shown in Table 3 and Table 4 provide insights into consumer preferences and WTP for the different product attributes. A few key patterns emerge across both models. Consumers exhibit strong aversion to products from Vietnam, a preference for organic and GAP-certified products, and a dislike for purchasing from known outlets and supermarkets. As expected, we observe price sensitivity, with variations across treatment and control groups.

The mixed logit results suggest that price plays a crucial role in decision-making. In the overall sample - driven by the treatment group - price has a statistically significant positive coefficient, indicating greater WTP for preferred attributes. However, the control group's price sensitivity is weaker, suggesting different valuation patterns.

Product origin strongly influences consumer preferences. Vietnamese products are statistically significantly less preferred across all groups, particularly by the control group (-0.60). The treatment group shows a much smaller negative coefficient (-0.07), indicating that exposure to the treatment may have softened their aversion to Vietnamese products. Preferences for domestic products are not statistically significant overall but are positively statistically significant (0.25) in the treatment group, suggesting a shift in favor of domestic origin. Conversely, the WTP for Vietnamese origin is statistically significantly negative, at -13,850 KHR in the general sample and an even more extreme -31,810 KHR in the control group. The treatment group, while still negative, shows a smaller effect at -11,200 KHR, suggesting that the intervention may have reduced aversion to Vietnamese products.

Certifications play a key role in driving consumer choices. Both organic and CamGAP certifications show strong positive and statistically significant coefficients for the whole sample and the treatment group. Organic certification is slightly more valued than CamGAP certification, with coefficients of 1.26 and 1.07 in the general sample, respectively. The treatment and control groups follow a similar pattern, reinforcing the importance of quality certifications in consumer decision-

²In the final version, we will attach an Appendix showing these answers in detail.

Table 3: Preliminary Results of the DCE Mixed Logit

Variable	<i>General</i> <i>N=5,112</i>		<i>Treatment</i> <i>N=2,880</i>		<i>Control</i> <i>N=2,232</i>	
	Coefficient	Std. Error	Coefficient	Std. Error	Coefficient	Std. Error
<i>Means</i>						
Price	0.05***	0.02	0.06***	0.02	0.04	0.02
Origin (Vietnam)	-0.65***	0.12	-0.07***	0.17	-0.60**	0.18
Origin (domestic)	0.08	0.09	0.25**	0.11	-0.11	0.13
Certification (organic)	1.26***	0.18	1.36***	0.24	1.14***	0.27
Certification (GAP)	1.07***	0.15	1.19***	0.21	0.92***	0.22
Package (none)	-0.29***	0.07	-0.28***	0.09	-0.29**	0.10
Outlet (known)	-1.07***	0.19	0.98***	0.23	-1.20**	0.37
Outlet (supermarket)	-0.73***	0.09	-0.79***	0.13	-0.67***	0.13
asc	2.21***	0.32	1.68***	0.40	2.84***	0.52
<i>SD</i>						
Origin (Vietnam)	0.01	0.22	0.01	0.24	0.02	0.04
Origin (domestic)	-0.01	0.15	-0.03	0.19	0.02	0.09
Certification (organic)	0.34	0.23	-0.027	0.36	-0.54*	-2.11
Certification (GAP)	0.70***	0.14	0.90***	0.18	-0.12	-0.11
Package (none)	0.13	0.21	-0.12	0.30	-0.16	-0.58
Outlet (known)	-0.42	0.44	-0.08	0.68	-0.88	-1.45
Outlet (supermarket)	0.04	0.52	0.26	0.29	-0.02	-0.05
asc	2.42***	0.27	2.38***	0.35	2.44***	5.61

*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1*

making. The WTP for organic certification is particularly high, with estimates of 28,020 KHR in the general sample and even higher (70,730 KHR) in the control group. GAP certification follows a similar trend, with WTP estimates of 25,650 KHR in the general sample and 59,300 KHR in the control group. These figures suggest strong consumer preference for quality assurance in food products.

Consumers exhibit a clear aversion to products without packaging, as indicated by the statistically significantly negative coefficient for the “none” category. Additionally, retail preferences show a strong pattern: consumers prefer not to buy from known outlets and supermarkets, as reflected in the negative and statistically significant coefficients. This suggests a preference for alternative retail sources, possibly traditional markets or specialized stores. Consumers are willing to pay a penalty to avoid purchasing from known outlets and supermarkets, with WTP estimates of -24,200 KHR and -21,190 KHR, respectively, in the general sample. The control group exhibits even stronger negative WTP for known outlets (-95,930 KHR), suggesting deep-seated aversion to these retail formats.

The alternative specific constant (asc) is positive and statistically significant in the general and control groups, indicating an overall preference for the presented alternatives. In the treatment group, however, the asc is not statistically significant, pointing to a potential shift in choice behavior following treatment.

5 Discussion and conclusion

Our study addresses a critical gap in empirical research on Cambodian consumers’ WTP for food safety, particularly for fresh domestic produce. While prior studies indicate some awareness of food safety concerns, no research has quantitatively assessed how much consumers value certified safe food. Using a quantitative survey and a DCE, we analyze (i) consumer safety concerns regarding fresh domestic products, (ii) perception of the CamGAP certification and the WTP for certified domestic produce.

Table 4: Mixed logit model in WTP space

Variable	<i>Whole Sample</i> <i>N=5,112</i>		<i>Treatment Group</i> <i>N=2,880</i>		<i>Control Group</i> <i>N=2,232</i>	
	Coefficient	Std. Error	Coefficient	Std. Error	Coefficient	Std. Error
<i>Means</i>						
Price	-3.10***	0.39	-2.79***	0.35	-4.27***	1.26
Origin (Vietnam)	-13.85***	1.74	-11.20***	4.11	-31.81	36.75
Origin (domestic)	-0.03	1.96	4.07*	2.33	-8.05	10.67
Certification (organic)	28.02***	7.20	22.13***	6.85	70.73	80.12
Certification (GAP)	25.65***	8.13	19.38***	6.77	59.30	67.56
Package (none)	-5.98***	1.75	-4.60***	1.62	-14.83	16.36
Outlet (known)	-24.20***	4.12	-15.86***	6.10	-95.93	114.25
Outlet (supermarket)	-21.19***	4.12	-12.78***	3.96	-33.79	37.83
asc	53.78***	21.24	27.61**	12.61	256.23	341.45
<i>SD</i>						
Price	0.59**	0.23	-0.04	0.72	0.99***	0.25
Origin (Vietnam)	-0.27	6.04	0.01	3.80	21.02	27.25
Origin (domestic)	-0.85	2.57	0.12	3.11	-1.44	9.68
Certification (organic)	-6.92	4.77	-3.47	8.36	0.63	18.34
Certification (GAP)	-11.73**	5.20	-14.77**	5.93	10.98	20.53
Package (none)	-7.55**	2.17	-3.05	3.38	-5.24	14.22
Outlet (known)	7.24	9.12	-2.15	10.29	3.35	39.80
Outlet (supermarket)	4.00	4.90	4.16	5.13	1.78	15.34
asc	55.07***	20.69	-38.24***	14.30	202.86	260.43

*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1*

Our results indicate clear consumer awareness and preference for safer food, reflected in a statistically significant WTP for certificated produce. Certification schemes such as CamGAP and organic labels receive strong consumer support, with WTP estimates suggesting a promising market for safer food. Price remains an important factor, but consumers are willing to pay more for fresh produce that signals safety standards.

The findings suggest potential supply-side constraints. While the urban population might show rising demand - as suggested by the literature and our analysis - yet, the uptake of certification by domestic farmers is limited. Integrating CamGAP with existing programs, such as the World Food Program school meal initiative (WFP, 2023), could help bridge supply gaps - by assuring farmers of the investment - while providing verified safe food to children. Targeted support, including prioritizing CamGAP farms for procurement, could create incentives for farmers while securing stable markets. Overall, our results suggest that while there seems to be consumer demand for safer food, expanding CamGAP's reach will require coordinated efforts in certification, supply chain development, and consumer education. This is especially critical for more remote smallholder farmers, who need to consider additional costs for transportation and are of higher risk of their products perishing when not transported in a timely and reliable manner. These (and other) factors need further investigation from researchers to allow for nuanced analysis of the potential profitability of certification.

Finally, our information treatment provides evidence that raising consumer awareness remains crucial to bridging the information gap on food safety and certification schemes. Our results indicate that information leads to change in preferences. Currently, there is lack of information which can affect the decision-making and purchasing behavior of consumers. NGOs and academic institutions can play a vital role in public education through information campaigns through social media, seminars, advertisement and publications. Effective food safety enforcement requires multi-sector collaboration to strengthen monitoring, enforcement, and adherence to safety standards.

It is important to note that our study only concentrated on higher educated urban consumers. The majority of individuals in Cambodia and low-and-middle income countries shop at informal markets and future research should test our findings in field experiments (as strongly suggested by Hoffmann et al. (2019)) and concentrate on cross-sectional food safety perceptions and food safety signaling on informal markets (Hoffmann et al., 2019; Grace, 2023). Furthermore, while our results indicate that a certificate (organic or CamGAP) can trump other heuristics, certification by itself does not guarantee better market access or price premiums. Market entry depends on factors beyond product quality, such as transportation costs, market information, and networks. Distributors often prioritize suppliers with consistent year-round production and stable quality, posing a challenge for smallholder farmers (Hoffmann et al., 2019). Research that undertakes a holistic analysis of these factors could aid government and research in understanding the potential of certificates in lower income economies.

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Die Wurzeln der **Fakultät für Agrarwissenschaften** reichen in das 19. Jahrhundert zurück. Mit Ausgang des Wintersemesters 1951/52 wurde sie als siebente Fakultät an der Georg-August-Universität durch Ausgliederung bereits existierender landwirtschaftlicher Disziplinen aus der Mathematisch-Naturwissenschaftlichen Fakultät etabliert.

1969/70 wurde durch Zusammenschluss mehrerer bis dahin selbständiger Institute das **Institut für Agrarökonomie** gegründet. Im Jahr 2006 wurden das Institut für Agrarökonomie und das Institut für RURALE Entwicklung zum heutigen **Department für Agrarökonomie und RURALE Entwicklung** zusammengeführt.

Das Department für Agrarökonomie und RURALE Entwicklung besteht aus insgesamt neun Lehrstühlen zu den folgenden Themenschwerpunkten:

- Agrarpolitik
- Betriebswirtschaftslehre des Agribusiness
- Internationale Agrarökonomie
- Landwirtschaftliche Betriebslehre
- Landwirtschaftliche Marktlehre
- Marketing für Lebensmittel und Agrarprodukte
- Soziologie Ländlicher Räume
- Umwelt- und Ressourcenökonomik
- Welternährung und rurale Entwicklung

In der Lehre ist das Department für Agrarökonomie und RURALE Entwicklung führend für die Studienrichtung Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften des Landbaus sowie maßgeblich eingebunden in die Studienrichtungen Agribusiness und Ressourcenmanagement. Das Forschungsspektrum des Departments ist breit gefächert. Schwerpunkte liegen sowohl in der Grundlagenforschung als auch in angewandten Forschungsbereichen. Das Department bildet heute eine schlagkräftige Einheit mit international beachteten Forschungsleistungen.

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