

# **Studying the Independence and Institutions of Food Inspection and Certification in Taiwan (*Food Safety Study Series No. 3*)**

**Project Investigator: Chwen-Wen Chen**

**Collaborator: Hong-Wung Wang, Wen-Hsiang Kung, Chuan-Feng Wu, Mei-Jen Hung**

In recent years, several severe food safety events occurred in Taiwan, including some certified food processing plants. As a result, the government examines the current certification system and wants to reform it. This study will continue the study last year in order to provide more insights. In particular, it will investigate the independence of certification system in Taiwan.

The 2014 tainted cooking oil scandal destroyed citizen's confidence in government ability to ensure food safety because the companies involved in the scandals were certified by current food safety institutions. The systems and institutions of food safety and certification are the current reform targets, and the major focus of this project. Based on the empirical studies of certification system in agriculture products completed in the year of 2014 and 2015, this team looks forward to conduct more empirical research on the design of organizations and institutions about food inspection and certification in 2016.

More specifically, the team will focus on the following research questions important in building a sound food safety regime. First, how are food inspection and certification contracted out under the current system? What are the characteristics of organizations responsible for food inspection and certification? Second, how can the independence and transparency of these organizations be improved to win more citizen confidence? Third, to understand how food inspection being carried out, interviews of the front-line inspectors will be conducted. Since these inspectors are employed by the certification companies, not the government, it is expected that they will encounter problems when they conduct inspection. An effective food safety regime heavily depends on the implementation of food safety regulation by these inspectors. The team will try to find out the difficulties these inspectors are facing and offer policy suggestions to address the difficulties. Fourth, the team will also collect detailed information about three to four certification systems in the developed countries for cross-country comparison. Fifth, the team will continue to look at consumers' perception of certification. Previous research shows the lack of awareness and confidence of consumers in food certification. More research needs to be done to understand the motivations and perceptions of consumers. The team will employ an internet survey to collect more empirical data on this issue. A conference on Taiwanese food safety institution

will be held in early 2017 for the research team to exchange research results with outside practitioners and researchers. After the conference, the team will publish a book with rich research results and practical policy suggestions.