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HÀNG RÀO KỸ THUẬT THƯƠNG MẠI CỦA NHẬT BẢN ĐỐI VỚI MẶT HÀNG THỦY SẢN XUẤT KHẨU TỪ VIỆT NAM

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Tóm tắt

Nhật Bản được biết đến là một thị trường khó tính với các tiêu chuẩn kỹ thuật và quy định về an toàn thực phẩm khắt khe, chính điều này đã đặt ra cho ngành thủy sản Việt Nam những thách thức lớn. Trong nghiên cứu này, nhóm tác giả hướng tới việc đưa ra một số giải pháp từ nhiều khía cạnh khác nhau cho người nông dân, doanh nghiệp và các kiến nghị tới chính phủ nhằm nâng cao năng lực và chất lượng xuất khẩu sang Nhật Bản để mở rộng thị phần thủy sản của Việt Nam tại thị trường Nhật Bản. Để thực hiện nghiên cứu này, nhóm tác giả đã thu thập dữ liệu thứ cấp về kim ngạch xuất khẩu thủy sản sang Nhật Bản từ các báo cáo của chính phủ, các cơ quan bộ ngành và các bài báo của Hiệp hội Chế biến và Xuất khẩu Thủy sản Việt Nam (VASEP) trong thời gian từ năm 2020 đến tháng 8 năm 2021. Bài nghiên cứu định tính thực hiện rà soát tổng số 5 phân loại rào cản kỹ thuật Nhật Bản áp dụng đối với mặt hàng thủy sản Việt Nam: Các quy định về vệ sinh và kiểm dịch động thực vật; Yêu cầu ghi nhãn; JAS - Tiêu chuẩn Nông nghiệp Nhật Bản; Quy định về ô nhiễm môi trường và nguồn lợi thủy sản; Luật chống bán phá giá thông qua các phương pháp phân tích và so sánh những dữ liệu thứ cấp đã được tổng hợp và thống kê. Từ đó, nhóm tác giả đưa ra những đánh giá về môi trường cạnh tranh, cơ hội, thách thức và tiềm năng phát triển đối với gần 350 doanh nghiệp xuất khẩu thủy hải sản Việt Nam vào thị trường Nhật Bản.

Từ khóa: Nhật Bản, Hiệp định hàng rào kỹ thuật thương mại, tiêu chuẩn kỹ thuật thương mại, xuất khẩu thủy sản, Việt Nam

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JAPAN'S TECHNICAL BARRIERS ON VIETNAM'S SEAFOOD EXPORTS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Abstract

Japan is known to be a fastidious market with strict food safety regulations and technical standards itself which poses great challenges for Vietnam aquatic industries. In this study, the authors aim to provide some solutions from many different perspectives for farmers, businesses and the government to improve the capacity and quality of exports to Japan to increase Vietnam's seafood market share in the Japanese market. To carry out this study, the authors had collected secondary data on seafood exports to Japan from governmental reports and articles from Vietnam Association of Seafood Exporters and Producers (VASEP) during the period from 2020 to August 2021. This qualitative study reviews the 5 main classifications of technical barriers that Japan applies to Vietnamese seafood products: Sanitary and Phytosanitary regulations; Labeling requirements; JAS - Japanese Agricultural Standards; Regulations regard environmental pollution and aquatic resources; Anti-dumping law by analyzing and comparing the collected statistics. Thereby, the authors make assessments on the competitive environment, opportunities, challenges and development potential for nearly 350 Vietnamese seafood exporters to the Japanese market.

Keywords: Japan, Technical Trade Barriers Agreement, trade technical standard, seafood export, Vietnam.

1. Theory on related terms

1.1. Overview of non-tariff barriers (NTBs)

CIF organization defines non-tariff barriers as trade barriers that restrict the import or export of products by means other than tariffs. The World Trade Organization (WTO) has set up different non-tariff barriers to exchange, including import licensing, pre-shipment inspections, rules of origin, custom delayers, and other mechanisms that prevent or restrict trade.

Developed countries, for example, Japan utilizes non-tariff barriers as a financial methodology to control the level of trade among them and exporting countries. When deciding to implement non-tariff barriers in international trade, countries base the barriers on the availability of imported and exported goods and services, as well as the existing political alliances with other trading partners.

Since this definition is broad, a detailed arrangement is necessary to better identify and distinguish among the different types of non-tariff measures. In December 2019, the International Classification of Non-tariff Measures was endorsed by the Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers, Committee of Experts on Business and Trade Statistics and Inter-Agency Task Force on International Trade Statistics. This classification develops a tree/branch structure dividing measures into chapters, depending on their scope and/or design.

The following table includes chapters that reflect the requirements of the importing countries concerning their imports, with the exception of measures imposed on exports by the exporting country (chapter P).

Table 1. Classification of non-tariff measures by chapter

Imports	Technical Measures	A	Sanitary and phytosanitary measures
		B	Technical barriers to trade
		C	Pre-shipment inspection and other formalities
	Non-technical Measures	D	Contingent trade-protective measures
		E	Non-automatic import licensing, quotas, prohibitions, quantity-control measures, and other restrictions not including sanitary and phytosanitary measures or measures relating to technical barriers to trade
		F	Price-control measures, including additional taxes and charges
		G	Finance measures
		H	Measures affecting competition
		I	Trade-related investment measures
		J	Distribution restrictions
		K	Restrictions on post-sales services
		L	Subsidies and other forms of support
		M	Government procurement restrictions
		N	Intellectual property
		O	Rule of origin
	Exports	P	Export-related measures

Source: International Trade Statistics (2019)

Due to limited space, this research seeks to examine only what are technical barriers to trade and how Japan uses these barriers against imported seafood, particularly seafood products from Vietnam.

1.2. Overview of Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement

TBT stands for the phrase "Technical Barriers to Trade" (or technical barriers in trade). These are technical standards and guidelines forced by a country on imported products and/or procedures to assess whether the imported goods comply with these principles and specialized guidelines (otherwise known as technical measures – TBT measures).

On a basic level, these technical measures are necessary and reasonable to secure significant interests such as human health, environment, and safety. Subsequently, every WTO member country has established and maintained a separate system of technical measures for domestic and imported goods (TBTVN, 2021).

However, in practice, technical measures might become potential barriers to international trade, since importing countries can utilize these measurements to protect domestic production, making it difficult for foreign goods to access the importing country's market.

Nevertheless, Japan's technical standard system is considered a high "wall" for Vietnamese goods. Fulfilling quality standards and sanitation regulations is an unquestionable requirement for every importer if they want to penetrate the Japanese market.

It should be noticed that the application of Japanese technical standards completely meets the provisions of the WTO, and is not defensive or oppressive between domestic goods and imported goods. In addition, Japan regularly cooperates with other countries to improve their capacity to fulfill quality standards to be able to meet Japanese regulations. Therefore, failure to comply with the regulation could lead to products being refused entry at Japanese ports and prosecution of exporters (TBTVN, 2021).

1.3. Overview of Vietnam Japan Economic Partnership Agreement

The Vietnam - Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (VJEPA) was signed on December 25, 2008, and took effect from October 1, 2009. VJEPA has comprehensive content, covering many areas such as trade in goods, trade in services, investment, improvement of the business environment, movement of natural persons. Accordingly, in the last year of the Tax Reduction Roadmap (2026), that is, after 16 years of implementing the Agreement, Vietnam commits to eliminating tariffs on 90.64% of tariff lines, of which tariffs will be eliminated immediately at the time of entry into force of the Agreement for 29.14% of tariff lines. The remaining tax liens are the automobile CKD tax lines and the sensitive tax lines that maintain the base tax rate or do not commit to cutting them, accounting for about 9%, focusing on some groups of alcohol, tobacco, and some products. chemicals, explosives, rubber, cotton, cloth, iron, and steel.... (Investvietnam, 2018).

2. Vietnam's commitments

2.1. Vietnam's commitments to the TBT Agreement

In 2005, the Prime Minister approved the Project to implement the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) as proven for Vietnam's determination to become a member of WTO.

Upon the Agreement, the Prime Minister acknowledged the valuable opportunities in the development process for Vietnam's goods to receive international recognition as well as access to technical standards, regulations, and needs from importing countries. Furthermore, this grants Vietnam a legal base to settle disputes and questions in trade. which implements to the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), the Government displayed the need to review the entire system of legal documents, especially the Vietnamese Standard system (TCVN), eliminating outdated standards which are not in line with international practices and developing new ones in the direction of harmonizing with international or regional standards to boost exports (People's News, 2005).

2.2. Vietnam's commitments to the Japanese trade regulations

Vietnam and Japan started negotiating the Vietnam - Japan Economic Partnership Agreement in January 2007 and officially signed the Agreement on December 25, 2008. VJEPA content covers many areas such as trade in goods, trade services, investment, business environment

improvement, movement of natural persons. This is the first bilateral FTA of Vietnam and the tenth economic partnership agreement of Japan (Lam et al, 2017).

In which, VJEPA's TBT chapter includes 7 articles of unifying principles under the WTO TBT Agreement, which proposes cooperation activities, a questioning forum, and the subcommittee on technical regulations, standards, and regulations conformity assessment program to ensure the effective implementation of the TBT Chapter as well as the application of mechanisms to resolve disputes arising.

Besides the VJEPA Agreement, Vietnam and Japan also participate in two other FTAs, including the Vietnam-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (VJEPA) and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Japan commits to eliminate taxes as soon as the Agreement comes into effect for 86% of tariff lines (equivalent to 93.6% of Vietnam's export turnover to Japan), and nearly 90% of tariff lines after 5 years. In particular, although overall, the tax reduction commitment in the CPTPP Agreement is said to be more extensive than in other FTAs, because the CPTPP Agreement has just begun to be implemented while the AJCEP and VJEPA Agreements are entering the final stage of the tariff reduction roadmap, some tax lines in 2021 within the framework of AJCEP and VJEPA will have more preferential rates. Specifically, 38/96 lines in the AJCEP framework and 31/96 lines in the VJEPA framework have now been reduced to 0% while these lines are still on the tax reduction roadmap under the CPTPP Agreement.

3. Vietnam's seafood export status under Japan's technical barriers

3.1. Vietnam's seafood export turnover to the Japanese market in 2021

Vietnam was the fourth-largest seafood supplier to Japan in January 2021, with 11.4 thousand tons valued at 9.17 billion yen (equal to 85.5 million USD), up 0.3 percent in volume but down 14.1 percent in value from the same month in 2020. In January 2021, Vietnam's seafood market share in Japan's total imports grew from 6.6 percent in January 2020 to 7% (Nguyen, 2021). While the market in 2020 witnessed a drop in both value and volume (General of Vietnam Customs Department, cited by Ministry of Industry and Trade, 2021); in subsequence, this is a sign of great potential growth in the seafood market exports of Vietnam till the end of 2021.

Japan's seafood imports were 165.03 thousand tons for a total value of 997.9 million USD in January 2021, a 4.8 percent decrease in volume and a 16.9 percent decrease in value from January 2020. Japan increased tuna and fish roe imports while reducing shrimp, squid, octopus, and other seafood imports compared to the same time in 2020. Seafood exports grew by 20% year on year in June 2021, reaching 865 million USD, bringing the total value of export seafood in the first six months of the year to more than 4.1 billion USD. By the end of July 2021, the country's seafood exports would have reached over 5 billion USD, a 13 percent increase over the same time the previous year (Japanese Customs Agency, cited by Ministry of Industry and Trade, 2021).

Despite the prosperity in July 2021, exports to Japan fell by 36% in August 2021 after more than a month of social distancing and 3 on-the-spot methods, in the context of Covid - 19 tensions in Ho Chi Minh City and other southern provinces (VASEP, 2021).

3.2. Vietnamese seafood exporting trends to Japan

During the first two quarters of 2021, the main staples of Vietnam's seafood exports have displayed certain changes in terms of the number of exports.

3.2.1. Squid, octopus exports in the first 6 months of 2021

In the first six months of 2021, Vietnam's squid and octopus exports increased significantly; Japan is the second-largest export market of Vietnam's squid and octopus (after Korea), accounting for 20% of export value, which is also on the rise (VASEP, cited by Xuan, 2021). These are the indicators that squid and octopus exports will continue to rise in the coming months.

3.2.2. Shrimp exports to Japan in the first 6 months of 2021

The overall value of shrimp shipments to Japan in April 2021 was 154.2 million USD, a 2.1 percent decrease from the same month the previous year. Shrimp exports reached about 402 million USD in June, representing a 15% increase over the same time in 2020, bringing the overall turnover for the first six months of 2021 to 1.7 billion USD, or a 13 percent increase over the same period in 2020.



Figure 1. Shrimp exports to Japan during quarter 1/2021

Source: VASEP (2021)

3.2.3. White-leg shrimp exports

Japan is among the markets with the highest average import prices. In light of the more complex COVID-19 scenario, the country continues to raise the number of imported white leg shrimp at more reasonable rates. White leg shrimp accounted for 76% of the total, reaching over 1.3 billion USD, an increase of 23%.

White leg shrimp accounted for approximately 63.1 percent of shrimp shipments to Japan in 2020 and the first quarter of 2021, up 5.8 percent from the same time the previous year (Ta, 2021).

3.2.4. Other shrimp exports

Black tiger shrimp accounted for 15%, reaching 257 million USD, down 10%, in which the export value of live, fresh, and frozen black tiger shrimp (HS03) fell by 30%, while the export value of processed black tiger shrimp (HS16) fell by 10.2%. Up to now, Japan is still the largest export market of Vietnam's black tiger shrimp.

Overall, shrimp exports decreased by 9% in the first half of the year, reaching 154 million USD, down 16 percent from the same time the previous year. However, dried shrimp (HS03) rose 7.6%, while other live, fresh, and frozen shrimp (HS03) rose 24.2 percent (Ta, 2021).

3.3. Japan's technical standards for Vietnamese seafood products

Sanitary and Phytosanitary regulations

As stated in the article published by ConnectAmericas (2021), in order to export food products into Japan's territory, exporters are required to complete a series of procedures, which consists of three steps: import notification, inspection, and getting the notification certificate.

Import notification:

According to the Food Sanitation Law, importers have to submit a notice in advance of importing. They must fill in the Food Import Notification Form and send it to the quarantine station. The form can be submitted in writing or through the electronic system.

Inspection:

During the process of inspection, the inspector will authenticate the information that was reported in the Notification Form: export country, product name, manufacturer, place of manufacture, ingredients, materials, and additives used, and the manufacturing methods.

In addition, the inspector will check if the imported food satisfies the requirements of the Food Sanitation Law, if the amount of additives used meets the required standards or if it contains poisonous or hazardous substances.

Notification certificate:

If the document verification and cargo inspection show that the product is in compliance with the law, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare will issue a "notification certificate" to allow the importation to proceed.

In contrast, if the product is not approved, it will not be imported into Japan. The quarantine station will send the importer a notification of the detected flaws and the importer has to adopt corrective measures.

Labeling requirements

Labels have to be written in Japanese and contain the following information: ingredients, nutrition value, serving size, expiration date, the daily reference value of a dietary standard, country of origin, the manufacturer or importer's name and address, product description, and other special claims (VietnamExports, 2018).

JAS - Japanese Agricultural Standards

JAS provides the legal basis for the Japanese Agricultural Standards and criteria for adopting standards, quality grading, certification, accreditation of certifying bodies, laboratories, and

inspectors. Products with JAS labeling are regarded as high-quality products by Japanese consumers (VietnamExports, 2018).

Regulations regard environmental pollution and aquatic resources

The Japanese Environment Bureau encourages the purchase of products with “Ecomark” labeling to promote the protection of the ecosystem. Products with this labeling must not pollute the environment but instead, contribute to the protection of the environment.

The Fisheries Codes control the usage of aquatic resources to better benefit the aquatic industries by safely supplying for consumers. This demands suppliers to have better aquacultural and management policies to ensure consumers’ benefits (VietnamExports, 2018).

Anti-dumping law

Antidumping laws seek to prevent products manufactured overseas from being sold by marine enterprises in Japan at "less than fair value. Most importing countries considered this as a negative phenomenon as it diminishes their price competitiveness and market shares.

Recently, Japan reiterated new regulations for imported seafood products that must be labeled in Japanese and comply with laws and regulations including Law on Standardization and Appropriate Labeling for Agro-Forestry Products, Law Food hygiene, and safety, Measures Law, Health Protection Law, Law on Promoting Efficient Use of Resources, Law Against Overvaluation, Misinformation and Misleading Description, laws relating to intellectual property rights (Anti-Unfair Competition Law, Trademark Law). When importing and selling fresh seafood into Japan, the importers must provide the following information on the label, in accordance with the quality labeling requirements for fresh products of the Law on Standardization and Appropriate Labeling with agricultural and forestry products: product name, country of origin, nutritional content, name, and address of the importer (VietnamExports, 2018).

4. Recommendations for Vietnam’s seafood industry

4.1. Evaluation of Vietnam's seafood exports to Japan

4.1.1. Opportunities

According to statistics compiled by Japanese customs, Japan has a requirement to import a variety of seafood goods, including fish, fish products, shrimp, eel, and other commodities that are among Vietnam's strengths. Japan, on the other hand, imports mostly from other partner markets such as China, Chile, Norway, and so on (Thu, 2021).

Compared to China or Chile, Vietnam has a competitive advantage due to preferential tariffs under the commitments of bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) with Japan. Thus, the export potential of this product group of Vietnam to Japan is still very large (Thu, 2021).

Vietnam and Japan are currently parties to three bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements: the Vietnam-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (VJFTA), the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (AJCEP), and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) (Thu, 2021).

The two countries' participation in these agreements creates many opportunities and is favorable conditions for the expansion of bilateral trade cooperation in many fields, especially when the structure of import and export goods between Vietnam and Japan is limited.

For seafood products, Japan commits to eliminating tax with about 65 percent of seafood product lines as soon as the agreement takes effect; tariff reduction and elimination with many seafood tax lines from Vietnam according to a timeline of 6 - 16 years from the date of the agreement's entry into force (Thu, 2021).

4.1.2. Challenges

The CPTPP, as can be seen, provides a chance for Vietnam's agricultural, aquatic, and food product exports to Japan to develop. Japan, on the other hand, has rigorous food hygiene and safety regulations, creating a non-tariff barrier for items imported into the nation.

There are crucial differences in the approach to quality control of food hygiene and safety of the two countries' Vietnamese and Japanese counterparts, it is necessary to have a mutual recognition mechanism in hygiene control of imported aquatic products.

Currently, between Vietnam and Japan, there is no agreement on quarantine of aquatic products, the problem of antibiotic residues and impurities in seafood products exported to Japan has not been completely overcome, so there is still a risk of infection. This explains why Japanese authorities erected strict barriers to the import of Vietnamese seafood products.

When importing seafood products into Japan, the paperwork necessary is extremely extensive, including the Certificate of Health and Safety, test results, and documents verifying the components, additives, and manufacturing method (Certificate of the manufacturer). There are also many more important Japanese laws, such as International Trade Law and Foreign Exchange, Food Sanitation Law, Tariffs and Customs Law, and so on. For Vietnam's marine and food products business, this is a difficulty. Because, according to Japanese legislation, product quality requirements, particularly pesticide residues, are quite stringent. If excessive residues are discovered, these goods will be closely monitored (Thu, 2021).

Furthermore, because of the greater input costs required to meet Japan's technological standards, the price of the finished items has risen. Input costs such as environmental protection tax for PE plastic packaging increased, unions demanded 2% of funds, payment for quality inspection of exported seafood and veterinary inspection increased by 300 percent, resulting in a total increase of 30% compared to 2011, while the price of goods sometimes had to drop to compete with neighbors (VLR, n.d.).

4.2. Recommendations

In general, the quality of Vietnamese seafood is still not guaranteed from production, farming to processing for export. To improve the quality of aquatic products, first of all, it is necessary to synchronously implement solutions to improve breeds, feed, and people's knowledge and skills.

4.2.1. Recommendations for growers

Each grower should also improve and suffice knowledge about aquaculture to regularly face and respond promptly and appropriately to the situation of fisheries. They need to regularly update through news, documents, and books, and if possible, they should attend relevant seminars related to aquaculture. It is necessary for them to renew the method of exploitation, the means of exploitation, the method of preservation, and the improvement of the port system.

4.2.2. Recommendations for Vietnamese enterprises

To compete with other international firms and grow exports to Japan, Vietnamese businesses must also address these concerns. First and foremost, they should conduct quality checks on agricultural products prior to processing, only purchase high-quality seafood that is certified free of harmful substances, chemicals, and impurities, and not use preservatives and chemicals in processed seafood that exceed the Ministry of Fisheries' requirements.

They have to quickly implement the quality management program according to HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) standards like the EU, US, and Korean regulations and Vietnam. currently still in progress. Businesses should also improve the quality of seafood raw materials and reduce input prices by equipping the ship with a preservation system, building a system of fish markets at fishing ports of key provinces, centers of processing industry, and consumption. Special attention is paid to aquaculture as the main source of raw materials for processing because farmed products often give better quality and uniformity than caught products, and it is also convenient to preserve before processing. and reduce the risk posed by microorganisms.

Furthermore, enhancing equipment renewal, modernizing seafood processing and preservation technology to ensure the quality of seafood exported to Japan is necessary. Enterprises have to select to import advanced Japanese fishing, farming, and processing technologies in line with the actual conditions of human resources and the conditions of Vietnam's aquatic resources. Apart from that, human resources need to be trained following the level of technology, master and use modern machinery and equipment well, have knowledge and understanding of food safety and hygiene from production, purchasing, transportation, etc. transfer to storage and processing.

In order to fulfill the demands of the Japanese market, businesses should attempt to reduce antibiotic residues while increasing investment in modern processing equipment that adheres to quality assurance standards. Furthermore, companies must be properly prepared, paying special attention to the development of a contemporary warehousing system and brand; expanding the use of the internet in marketing strategies; focusing on manufacturing high-quality products to comply with the ever-growing import restrictions.

Vietnamese enterprises can build brands for export products. To build a brand for products exported to Japan, Vietnamese businesses need to request the National Office of Intellectual Property of Vietnam to guide, help and support to be registered for protection of corporate trademarks in the Japanese market. Next, they can research the law on product promotion of Japan and apply all forms of advertising and brand promotion under the provisions of Japanese law, and carefully study the needs and tastes of Japanese consumers to offer and promote appropriate brands to create a strong impression on Japanese people about the unique features of products and brands of Vietnamese businesses. Seeking support and assistance from the Ambassador, the Trade Office of Vietnam in Japan, and international organizations to settle trademark disputes in the Japanese market; Cooperating with processors, distributors of agricultural products, and food with prestigious Japanese brands are highly recommended.

4.2.3. Recommendations for the Vietnamese Government

External affairs

The Vietnamese government needs to promote cooperation and sign a quarantine agreement in the seafood field with the Japanese side. If the two sides have not yet agreed on the standard of testing methods at the laboratory, the Japanese side will create conditions to support Vietnam in training testers on methods of analyzing residues of banned chemicals and antibiotics to have similar results, under the requirements of Japan. At the same time, it is proposed that Japan reduce import tax on tuna and open negotiations between the two countries. It is recommended to remove the requirement to register for quarantine for imported frozen seafood (stored at temperatures below -18 degrees Celsius) because according to businesses, at -18 degrees Celsius, seafood products are no longer dangerous. cause disease in humans and animals. If the inspection continues, it will cause waste and slow down the export progress of enterprises, increasing export costs for the Vietnamese side.

Vietnam requested the Japanese side to recognize the equivalent status of NAFIQAD - Vietnam's Department of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries Quality Control. NAFIQAD has the right to inspect and certify seafood safety and hygiene like Japan's veterinary and sanitary inspection agencies to have Japan's prior certification of the quality of goods to facilitate export. seafood exports from Vietnam. Japan pledged to support Vietnam in building a center to ensure international hygiene standards. In response, Vietnam will have to meet certain criteria on the use of food ingredients for seafood processing.

Internal affairs

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development should create national criteria for aquatic breeds and issue laws governing their maintenance and monitoring. Apart from that, the government should ban the sale of items of unknown origin that do not satisfy quality requirements (in terms of size and age) and have not been quarantined, as well as publicize and warn people not to buy fish that have not been quarantined and are not up to standards.

The Vietnamese government also plays an important role in assisting businesses in competing with other foreign corporations for the majority of market share in Japan. The government may enhance investment in aquaculture in Vietnam and support clean aquaculture operations, allowing Vietnamese aquaculture researchers and businesses to create higher-quality goods. Furthermore, communicating Japanese technical standards to Vietnamese businesses is critical since businesses in general, and farmers in particular, have a strong understanding of Japan's market requirements. Local governments are being directed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to evaluate and re-plan the aquaculture area, as well as to guarantee that requirements for intensive cultivation and disease safety are met.

Ensuring high-quality products means that Japanese markets will prioritize and acknowledge our products which in turn will decrease the cost in quality checking procedures while providing more opportunities for current Vietnamese enterprises as well as the new entrants to thrive in such a difficult market.

During this Covid 19 pandemic, In addition to promoting vaccination for workers, the Government should issue a separate Resolution for the production, processing, and consumption of agricultural and aquatic products so that localities can pay enough attention to support businesses and industries in the new context. It is suggested that localities create conditions for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to have a role and voice in the local Anti-

epidemic Steering Committee - so that agriculture and fisheries have more mechanisms for early recovery and avoid fractures.

In the period of production recovery along with the protection of anti-epidemic achievements, the role of localities is very important, having a great impact on encouraging and promoting enterprises to quickly stabilize production safely.

CONCLUSION

After the analysis of the current state of seafood exports of Vietnam in the Japanese market and the consideration of the situation of COVID-19, it is obvious that the competition to gain more market shares in Japan is getting more and more intense. However, Vietnam has proven its capability to compete with other neighboring countries, regardless of the effects of the pandemic, and remained potential for further improvement.

Acknowledging the upcoming opportunities and challenges, Vietnam's seafood industries should utilize the benefits that come from the latest signed FTA and focus on certain problems related to the quality of their exporting goods and legal papers needed for customs clearance to reduce the price of the final goods. Nevertheless, the government has to enforce measures to ensure the quality of seafood before exporting as well as financially support the marine industries through this crisis.

Lastly, this study remains a possible limitation as our paper was unable to quantify the direct impacts of Japan's technical barriers to show the relation between the data and results. Moreover, our study did not account for the external effects the COVID-19 has upon the number of exports. These limitations of our research are matters for further analysis in subsequent studies in Vietnam in the future.

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