The production of safe and environmentally friendly agricultural products (SAEPs) is often presented as an opportunity to lift smallholder farmers from developing countries out of poverty, by connecting them to high-value agricultural markets. Although wealthy consumers in developed countries are usually targeted, attention is increasingly devoted to domestic and regional markets, especially in Southeast Asia. This may be explained by: the emergence of an educated urban middle-income class; the diffusion of modern food retail; accelerating regional integration and increasing food safety issues. Indeed, while analyses reveal a widespread presence of pesticide residues (sometimes above accepted safety levels), food-related scandals, sometimes resulting in casualties, are widely publicized. As a result, safe and environmentally friendly agriculture initiatives are spreading throughout Southeast Asia. However, little is objectively known about what Southeast Asia consumers genuinely think about the food they eat, and how they cope with perceived food-related issues.

This research fills this gap by providing robust information on the perception and behaviors of urban consumers in Myanmar regarding food, based on a survey of over 600 consumers in various food outlets (e.g., wet markets, supermarkets, convenience stores) in four cities of Myanmar. The survey focuses on consumption and purchasing habits, and aims to understand what consumers in Myanmar consider as “good food”. We implement a choice experiment focusing on water morning glory (WMG) – a popular food crop in Myanmar – and estimate the economic value of selected production and marketing attributes by analyzing surveyed consumers’ hypothetical choices among different WMGs contrasted by these attributes.

We show that in Myanmar, urban consumers request more clarity and control over their food. While traditions remain robust in terms of buying and cooking practices, social media play an increasing role as alert systems, opinion makers and sources of information. Consumers are aware of food safety issues, but are confident in their expertise to mitigate the risks associated with unsafe food. Still, they expect the government to guarantee that the food they eat is safe. This research shows that food safety is a key feature of consumer buying decisions, and that there is an untapped demand for SAEPs in Myanmar.