



# Participation in the ASEAN- USABC Multi-Stakeholder Forum: Farm-to-Table Initiative

From :

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## **ASEAN-COSTI Participation Report**

**Participant:** José Cornélio Guterres

**Country:** Timor-Leste

**Theme:** Participation in the ASEAN–USABC Multi-Stakeholder Forum: Farm-to-Table Initiative

**Dates:** 3–4 of February 2026

**Venue:** Hermitage Hotel, Menteng, Central Jakarta, Indonesia

### **Executive Summary**

Timor-Leste participated in the ASEAN–USABC Multi-Stakeholder Forum: Farm-to-Table Initiative, held in Jakarta on February 3-4, 2026, in the context of its engagement with ASEAN Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation (COSTI)–related dialogues. The participation aimed to contribute the perspective of a small and developing economy to ASEAN–United States discussions on sustainable, resilient, and inclusive food systems, with a particular focus on the role of science, technology, and innovation (STI) in strengthening food security, agricultural value chains, and nutrition outcomes.

The participation sought to (i) share policy-relevant lessons on farmer capacity building, research and development investment, innovation adoption, and private-sector engagement; (ii) strengthen alignment between national priorities, ASEAN-COSTI STI frameworks, and relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and (iii) identify opportunities for regional cooperation and partnerships within ASEAN–US and SDG-aligned mechanisms.

Day One discussions highlighted the importance of STI-driven approaches to climate-resilient agriculture, sustainable production systems, food safety, and nutrition. Key thematic areas included climate-smart and regenerative agriculture, policy coherence for agricultural ecosystem transformation, food safety and antimicrobial resistance governance, innovation in seeds and inputs, and sustainable value chains supported by trade facilitation and digitalization. These discussions reaffirmed strong alignment with ASEAN-COSTI priorities and SDG Two, SDG Nine, SDG Twelve, SDG Thirteen, and SDG Seventeen.

On Day Two, Timor-Leste participated in Working Group I, at farm, group II, at supply chain and group III at the Table, which focused on the initial to final stage of the food system, emphasizing food quality, food safety, nutrition, and consumer awareness. The group identified constraints related to technology adoption, digital infrastructure, information availability, access to finance, and regulatory processes not fully responsive to technological change. Limited awareness of updated food standards among regulators, producers, and consumers was also highlighted as a barrier to food system upgrading.

Priority actions discussed included strengthening digital literacy and basic technology adoption, enhancing regulatory capacity and standards awareness, institutionalizing public–private dialogue,

and modernizing science-based nutrition and food information campaigns. Pilot initiatives, targeted capacity building, and seed funding were identified as enabling measures to support innovation uptake at the consumption stage.

Overall, the Forum reinforced the need for a holistic food system approach, integrating production, processing, and consumption through STI. For Timor-Leste, key lessons include the importance of aligning national food security and STI policies with ASEAN-COSTI frameworks, strengthening the research–policy–practice interface, improving food safety and nutrition governance, and leveraging regional cooperation and partnerships to support long-term food system transformation.

### **Day One – Key Thematic Highlights : ASEAN–USABC Multi-Stakeholder Forum: Farm-to-Table Initiative**

The opening session featured remarks from the United States Embassy, the ASEAN Secretariat, and the Deputy Secretary of the Philippines.

Speakers emphasized the role of science, technology, and innovation (STI) in supporting food security, climate resilience, nutrition, and sustainable farm-to-table value chains in ASEAN.

The opening remarks highlighted the importance of policy coherence, innovation adoption, and multi-stakeholder collaboration, including public–private partnerships, to enable scalable and inclusive agri-food system transformation.

The session reaffirmed alignment with ASEAN-COSTI priorities and relevant Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG Two, SDG Nine, and SDG Seventeen, providing a common framework for subsequent technical discussions.



Picture 1 : photo group, on day 1 activities of ASEAN USABC Multi-stakeholders Forum

### *Science, Technology and Innovation for Climate-Resilient Food Systems*

Presentations highlighted climate-smart and regenerative agricultural practices as effective STI pathways to enhance resilience, productivity, and food availability under climate variability. Evidence from conservation agriculture demonstrated reduced production costs, improved crop performance, and sustained yield increases over multiple seasons, contributing directly to SDG Two (Zero Hunger) and SDG Thirteen (Climate Action).



Picture 2 : Panel discussion on STI for Climate Resilience food system

### *Policy Coherence and Agricultural Ecosystem Transformation*

Discussions emphasized the need for integrated policy frameworks linking climate change, agriculture, and food security. Strengthening evidence-based policymaking, research–policy interfaces, and regional coordination was identified as critical to advancing inclusive and resilient agricultural ecosystems, aligned with ASEAN-COSTI priorities on STI for sustainable development and SDG Nine (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure).

### *Food Safety, Biosecurity, and Antimicrobial Resistance*

Stakeholders underscored the importance of regulatory systems, surveillance, and responsible use of agricultural inputs, particularly in the livestock sector, to mitigate antimicrobial resistance. These measures support safe food systems, public health protection, and SDG Three (Good Health and Well-being) while strengthening supply-chain integrity.



Picture 3 : food safety policy in the context of Timor-Leste

### *Innovation in Seeds, Inputs, and Production Systems*

Advances in seed innovation, biological inputs, and new genomic techniques were presented as enablers of productivity growth, nutrition improvement, and sustainability. The role of science-based regulation and regional knowledge exchange was highlighted to ensure responsible adoption, contributing to SDG Two, SDG Nine, and SDG Twelve (Responsible Consumption and Production).



Picture 4 : panel presentation on innovation in Seeds, inputs and production system

### *Sustainable Value Chains, Trade, and Digitalization*

The upgraded ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement and supply-chain sessions reinforced the role of trade facilitation, transparency, digital traceability, and sustainability standards in

strengthening resilient and inclusive food value chains. These efforts align with ASEAN economic integration objectives and SDG Seventeen (Partnerships for the Goals).



Picture 5 : panel on sustainable value chains, Trade and digitalization

### *Nutrition-Sensitive Food Systems and Private-Sector Engagement*

Discussions stressed that nutrition outcomes require integration from farm to processing to market, with the private sector acting as a key driver of innovation, value addition, and food affordability. Public–private collaboration was identified as essential for closing nutrition gaps and promoting positive nutrition across ASEAN.



Picture 6 : feedback on nutrition sensitivity food system

### *Consolidated Lessons for Timor-Leste*

- Embed climate-smart and regenerative agriculture within national STI and agricultural policies to enhance resilience and food security (SDG 2, and SDG 13).
- Strengthen research, extension, and policy coherence to translate STI into scalable agricultural solutions (SDG 9).
- Improve food safety, biosecurity, and AMR governance through regulation, monitoring, and regional learning (SDG 3).
- Leverage innovation in seeds, inputs, and digital tools to improve productivity, nutrition, and sustainability (SDG 2, SDG 12).
- Promote regional cooperation and partnerships to integrate Timor-Leste into resilient ASEAN food value chains (SDG 17).



Picture 7 : comments on lesson learned for a food system improvement in Timor-Leste

### **Day Two – Working Group Discussions**

Working Group Participation: Group III – *At the Table*

#### Key Issues Identified

Group III discussions focused on the final stage of the food system, with particular emphasis on food quality, food safety, nutrition, and consumer awareness. Participants identified persistent constraints affecting innovation uptake, including limited technology adoption, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient access to information, and restricted access to finance. These

constraints were recognized as key factors limiting improvements in food quality, safety, and nutrition outcomes at the consumer level.

Regulatory and standards-related gaps were also highlighted. Processes were considered not sufficiently responsive to technological change, while awareness of updated food safety and quality standards remains limited among both regulators and stakeholders. This affects policy enforcement and regional harmonization efforts.

In addition, participants noted low levels of consumer awareness regarding nutrition, food safety, and environmental impacts of food systems. The absence of consistent, science-based communication limits informed consumer choice and weakens demand for higher-quality and sustainable food products.

### *Priority Action Areas*

#### A. Technology and Innovation

- Promote digital literacy and basic technology adoption among farmers and food producers as a foundation for improving food quality and safety.
- Implement country- or cluster-focused capacity-building workshops, starting from practical digital tools relevant to rural contexts.
- Develop clear guidelines on essential tools and information needs for farmers and food producers.
- Demonstrate technology benefits through pilot and showcase projects, particularly linking technology use to improved nutrition and food safety outcomes.

### *Questions Raised and Responses*

#### Questions Raised

- How can technology adoption be accelerated among smallholders with limited digital exposure?
- What type of technology is most relevant at the “table” stage of the food system?
- How can governments justify investment in technology where immediate returns are not visible?

#### Responses

- Adoption should start with simple, low-cost digital tools supported by targeted training and local demonstration projects.
- Priority technologies should focus on food quality, traceability, and nutrition information, rather than complex systems.
- Pilot projects demonstrating clear links between technology use, food quality, and nutrition outcomes can help justify public investment and encourage scaling.

#### B. Regulatory Harmonization and Policy Enforcement

- Strengthen government capacity to keep pace with emerging food technologies and standards.
- Institutionalize regular public–private dialogue to align regulatory processes with technological developments.
- Support knowledge instruments such as conferences, technical briefings, and policy white papers on global trends in food standards and technology.

#### *Questions Raised and Responses*

##### **Questions Raised**

- How can regulators remain up to date with rapidly evolving food technologies?
- What mechanisms can improve alignment between public authorities and the private sector?
- How can ASEAN standards be applied while respecting national regulatory capacities?

##### **Responses**

- Regulators require continuous capacity building, including exposure to global standards and emerging technologies.
- Regular public–private dialogue platforms were identified as essential to streamline regulatory expectations and implementation.
- Knowledge tools such as technical conferences, policy dialogues, and white papers can support gradual harmonization without imposing excessive compliance burdens.

#### C. Education and Consumer Awareness

- Modernize nutrition and food information campaigns, using science-based and evidence-based messaging.
- Promote food and farm education initiatives, including physical or virtual farm-to-table experiences.
- Improve consumer understanding of food origins, food additives, and biotechnology, including GMOs.
- Encourage farm-to-table tourism and experiential learning as tools to strengthen consumer engagement with the food system.

## Questions Raised and Responses;

### Questions Raised

- How can consumer awareness be improved in a cost-effective and inclusive manner?
- What role can education play in strengthening the farm-to-table connection?
- How can science-based information compete with misinformation on food and nutrition?

### Responses

- Education campaigns should prioritize clear, science-based, and practical messages tailored to local contexts.
- Farm-to-table education initiatives, including physical or virtual farm tours, were identified as effective tools to connect consumers with food origins.
- Collaboration between government, academia, and the private sector is required to ensure credible and evidence-based nutrition communication.



Picture 8 : Presentation on food system

### Key Take-Away Lessons for Timor-Leste

- Food system improvement must extend beyond production to include food quality, safety, nutrition, and informed consumption.
- Digital literacy and simple technology adoption are foundational for improving food quality in smallholder-based and rural contexts.
- Responsive regulation and standards awareness are critical to ensuring food safety while enabling innovation.
- Science-based consumer education can create demand for safer, higher-quality, and more sustainable food products.
- Targeted public investment, including seed funding for research, pilots, and awareness programmes, is necessary to support innovation at the “table” stage.
- Integrating food systems with tourism, education, and nutrition policy offers opportunities for diversified value creation in Timor-Leste.



Picture 9 : comments on take away lessons for Timor-Leste

Sincerely,  
  
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Conselho Executivo  
Executive President

**National Institute of Science and Technology (INCT)**

**Timor-Leste**

THANK YOU