

What is GI and its benefits?

Geographical Indication (GI) refers to a name, sign, or symbol used on products that originate from a specific geographical area and possess qualities, reputation, or characteristics essentially linked to that location. It is not just a simple label but a recognition of the relationship between cultural heritage, natural resources, and human expertise. Examples include well-known products such as Champagne from France or Jasmine rice from Thailand.

The benefits of GI are multifaceted. Economically, GI provides producers with a competitive advantage in both domestic and international markets by ensuring authenticity and uniqueness. It prevents unfair competition and misuse of names, as only certified producers in the designated area can use the GI label. Socially, GI promotes community pride and cultural heritage preservation, strengthening local identity. Environmentally, GI can encourage sustainable practices since the value of the product is tied to the local ecosystem and traditional knowledge. Consumers also gain benefits, as they receive guarantees of product quality, traceability, and authenticity.

Types of GI protection under Thai law

The Thai Geographical Indications Act recognizes and protects GI in two main categories. The first is *domestic GI*, which refers to products originating within Thailand. These include agricultural, textile, and industrial goods such as Phitsanulok Nam-Dokmai Mango, Lamphun brocade silk, and Ratchaburi dragon jars. The second is *foreign GI*, which extends protection to products registered in other countries but recognized under Thai law, such as Darjeeling tea from India. This dual recognition system not only protects Thailand's own cultural and agricultural heritage but also aligns with international trade agreements and the TRIPS Agreement under the World Trade Organization.

Upgrading local agricultural products through GI

The training emphasized that GI is not merely a legal designation but also a strategic tool for economic and community development. To elevate local agricultural products using GI, several approaches can be considered:

1. **Quality standardization and certification** – Establishing clear production standards ensures consistency and builds consumer trust.
2. **Value addition through branding** – Positioning GI products as premium goods can attract niche markets and higher prices.
3. **Community participation** – Engaging farmers and local stakeholders in the process strengthens ownership and ensures long-term sustainability.
4. **Market access and promotion** – Creating strong marketing channels helps expand recognition beyond local boundaries.
5. **Linking GI to tourism and culture** – Promoting GI products alongside local cultural events or tourism can increase visibility and income opportunities.

In conclusion, the training broadened my understanding of GI as more than a legal protection mechanism—it is a bridge between indigenous knowledge and commercial wisdom. By effectively leveraging GI, local communities in Thailand can enhance the value of their agricultural products, preserve cultural heritage, and secure long-term economic sustainability. The integration of law, culture, and commerce makes GI a powerful instrument for rural development and international trade.