



## Policy Brief

When Powerful Processed Food Companies Dominate:  
**What Challenges Does Thai Society Face**  
and How Can They Be Addressed?

# When Powerful Processed Food Companies Dominate:

## What Challenges Does Thai Society Face and How Can They Be Addressed?

Processed food companies in Thailand have expanded rapidly and become influential actors in both the national economy and public policy processes. These companies contribute significantly to employment and income generation. However, they also produce and market processed food products that are linked to major public health concerns, including obesity, diabetes, and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs) <sup>(1)</sup>. Moreover, these corporations have increasingly engaged in shaping policy by building networks with political elites and employing various influence strategies to advance their own commercial interests. This growing influence poses significant challenges to the development and implementation of public policies aimed at protecting population health<sup>(2)</sup>.

## Seven Influence

### Strategies Employed by Processed Food Companies and Their Impacts on Thai Society



#### 1 Political Strategies

Processed food companies in Thailand employ systematic and multifaceted political strategies to build relationships and expand their influence over policymakers across various policy domains, including food and nutrition, labor, agriculture, and education. These strategies include participation in government working groups and advisory bodies, the provision of technical advice, and the movement of personnel between government agencies and the food industry—a practice often referred to as the “revolving door.” Companies also leverage personal and familial networks to engage in political processes or align themselves with political parties. Both formal and informal lobbying efforts are commonly used, as are financial contributions to political parties and public officials. In some cases, legal threats or litigation are deployed to intimidate or silence

critics. Furthermore, companies frequently promote policy alternatives, such as voluntary self-regulation, in place of binding legal measures. These political strategies reflect an imbalance of power in the policy arena and significantly undermine the state's ability to safeguard public health and promote social equity<sup>(3)</sup>.



**Relevant government agencies and supervisory bodies at all levels  
should enhance transparency by disclosing the following information:**

**1**

**Limit the Role of Processed Food Companies to Information Providers Only**



The involvement of processed food companies in policymaking committees or working groups should be restricted to the role of information providers. They should not participate directly in decision-making bodies.

**2**

**Disclose Conflicts of Interest Clearly and Promote Public Participation**



All conflicts of interest among committee or working group members must be transparently declared. Additionally, public participation should be actively encouraged in committees and working groups at every level of the policy process to enhance transparency and public trust.

**3**

**Report and Monitor Intimidation and Threatening Incidents**



Mechanisms should be established to document and track cases of intimidation or harassment. Preparedness programs should be provided, including awareness-raising and training in areas such as IT security and legal knowledge. Legal counseling and peer-support networks should be made available to protect and assist individuals seeking help.

**4**

**Maintain a Lobbyist Registry and Public Records of Interactions**



A comprehensive lobbyist registry should be maintained. Records of all meetings or interactions with processed food companies must be publicly accessible, including the date, time, purpose, and attendees from both government and industry sectors. Summaries of discussion points or potential agreements should be disclosed. Procedures should require the presence of third-party observers during meetings. Furthermore, an "Open Data" system should be developed to publish the names of decision-making committees, agendas, meeting minutes, and records of company engagements.

**5**

**Establish an Independent Multi-Stakeholder Committee to Audit Political Party Finances**



An autonomous committee composed of representatives from various sectors should be tasked with overseeing and auditing the financial activities of political parties.

**6**

**Require Political Parties to Regularly Disclose Funding Sources**




Political parties must provide timely disclosures of funding sources on their websites, accompanied by monthly or quarterly financial reports. This will enable the public to monitor political financing in near real-time.



## 2 Science strategies

**Processed food companies engage in science-based strategies that can be categorized into two major components:**

- 
- 1** **Framing and Contestation of Scientific Evidence.** This includes funding academic research and conferences, hiring scholars as consultants or spokespersons, selectively citing favorable evidence, disseminating non-peer-reviewed studies, participating in academic events, and promoting education programs aligned with industry needs. Companies also engage in practices such as controlling the publication of research findings, generating confusion around scientific evidence, and actively discrediting or contesting data produced by civil society organizations. These actions allow corporations to shape the evidence base in ways that support their commercial objectives while weakening the credibility of independent research.
  - 2** **Product-Oriented Research and Development.** Companies invest in research and technological innovation to extend product shelf life through chemical and industrial processing, develop plant-based meat alternatives, and utilize digital technologies to collect and analyze consumer behavior. These insights are then used to refine marketing strategies and target specific consumer segments with greater precision. Together, these scientific strategies enable corporations to maintain legitimacy, influence public and policy discourse, and advance market-driven innovations—often at the expense of health and evidence-informed policymaking.

**Relevant government agencies or supervisory bodies should undertake the following action:**

**1**

### **Academic Institutions and Researchers**

Academic institutions and researchers should adhere strictly to principles of academic neutrality, and avoid accepting funding from processed food companies with direct conflicts of interest, particularly concerning topics related to a funder's products or activities. The sources of research funding should be systematically disclosed in research reports, academic publications, and public communications to ensure transparency and enable readers to independently assess the credibility of the information.

**2**

### **Establishment of Independent Academic Bodies**

Government agencies or relevant authorities should establish or support independent central academic bodies responsible for verifying, analyzing, and synthesizing data from multiple sources without affiliation to any vested interests. These bodies must operate under rigorous academic standards, including peer review and meta-analyses, and be tasked with producing evidence-based policy recommendations. Transparency in their processes and credibility in the eyes of government, civil society, and private sectors are essential.

**3**

### **Research Funding Systems Based on Public Interest**

Funding agencies should implement research grant systems grounded in public interest, promoting academic advocacy among researchers and providing training for science data users, including journalists. This is to reduce the undue influence of processed food companies on scientific work.

**4**

### **Transparency in Product Research and Development**

Processed food companies conduct research and development involving technologies, chemical additives, product reformulations, and plant-based meat alternatives, but do not disclose detailed information on formulations or modifications. Therefore, these companies should maintain a registry of recipes, reformulations, and research trials, and publicly disclose such information to ensure accessibility for the public.

**4**



### 3 Marketing strategies

Processed food companies adopt comprehensive and well-coordinated marketing strategies aimed at dominating media space, shaping consumer perceptions, and driving purchasing behaviors. These strategies include:

1



#### Brand Promotion

Extensive use of mass media and digital advertising, product giveaways, sweepstakes, celebrity endorsements, and co-branding campaigns are employed to enhance brand visibility and consumer engagement.

2



#### Packaging Design

Products are designed with packaging that emphasizes health-related claims and emotionally appealing imagery—especially targeted at children and adolescents—to attract attention and convey desirability.

3

#### Brand Loyalty and Institutional Penetration

Companies secure exclusive contracts in educational institutions and engage in corporate social responsibility activities such as donations and sponsorships to foster brand loyalty and promote a socially responsible image.

3

### Marketing strategies

4



#### Multi-Channel Distribution

Products are distributed through both offline retail outlets and online platforms, ensuring widespread market access and convenience for consumers.

5

#### Pricing Strategies

Time-limited discounts are used to prompt impulse purchases, while product resizing is employed to create the illusion of affordability, especially among price-sensitive consumers.

6



#### High Marketing Investment

Significant financial resources are allocated to marketing, enabling companies to saturate communication channels and maintain continuous brand exposure. These marketing strategies are not merely promotional tools; they are systematically designed to influence public perception, dominate consumer decision-making processes, and entrench processed food products within everyday consumption patterns.



**The Thai Department of Health (of the Ministry of Public Health) has drafted a bill aimed at regulating the marketing of food and beverages that adversely affect children's health.**

This legislation encompasses advertising restrictions across all communication channels and prohibits marketing strategies such as the use of celebrities—including actors, singers, and influencers—promotional activities involving discounts, giveaways, or contests, and the use of cartoon images on product packaging. Therefore, it is imperative that this bill be expedited and enacted without delay to effectively protect child health.

## 4 Supply chain and waste strategies

**Processed food companies implement vertically-integrated supply chain strategies, exerting control over both upstream and downstream operations to ensure cost efficiency, production stability, and market expansion.**

**1** Upstream Control: Companies expand or gain control over raw material sources through acquisitions, investments in subsidiaries, and contractual arrangements such as contract farming. These approaches enable firms to secure a stable supply of agricultural inputs, manage production risks, and maintain low costs.



**2** Downstream Expansion and Distribution: Downstream strategies include investments in transportation and logistics systems as well as establishing manufacturing operations across different countries. Additionally, companies use franchising models to engage local entrepreneurs, thereby scaling up distribution networks efficiently and penetrating diverse markets.

**3** Waste Management Practices: Although companies often implement waste management protocols, environmental law violations remain a concern. Common issues include the discharge of untreated wastewater into rivers, and post-harvest crop burning, which contributes to air pollution. These supply chain strategies reflect a deliberate effort to consolidate power across the production-distribution spectrum, enabling processed food companies to maintain control over market flows while externalizing environmental costs onto communities and ecosystems.

**Relevant government agencies or concerned authorities should undertake the following action:**

**1** The Office of Trade Competition Commission (TCC)  
The TCC should actively monitor the enforcement of competition laws and convene expert consultations to amend legislation to comprehensively address monopolistic practices and market dominance. Individual opinions of commissioners regarding merger decisions must be transparently disclosed, and a report should be submitted to the Parliament prior to annual budget allocation. Furthermore, the TCC should require merger assessments to be based on combined asset values or sales figures instead of solely relying on market share. Strict enforcement against monopolies and promotion of fair competition should be complemented by incentive programs recognizing processed food companies with exemplary business practices.

**2** The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC)  
The SEC should mandate publicly-listed companies to disclose detailed information regarding their supply chain partners to enhance transparency and auditability of supply chain operations. Additionally, the SEC should establish a beneficial ownership registry to improve transparency in cross-border financial flows.

**3** Waste Management  
The Department of Industrial Works (of the Ministry of Industry) must:

- > Develop a bottom-up governance framework by restructuring regulatory oversight into a multilateral cooperative model that empowers the public and media to participate in monitoring processed food companies alongside government agencies
- > Utilize advanced technologies to monitor waste management practices effectively
- > Establish a pollution remediation fund as stipulated in the draft Factory Act. Concurrently, processed food companies should be required to publicly disclose their waste management data to ensure accountability.



## 5 Labour and employment strategies

Processed food corporations employ labor and employment strategies that undermine worker protections and prioritize business interests at the expense of employee rights and well-being. These strategies encompass several key dimensions:

### 1 Undermining Labor Regulation



Corporations often obstruct the formation and operation of labor unions. This includes retaliatory dismissal of workers leading unionization efforts, as well as corporate acquisitions that result in the dissolution of existing unions under new management terms.

### 2 Unfair Employment Practices



Labor rights violations are particularly prevalent within subsidiary companies and subcontracted operations. Common issues include non-payment of overtime wages, denial of legally mandated rest periods, and attempts to evade accountability in cases of workplace accidents.

### 3 Ineffective Grievance Mechanisms

Although internal grievance systems and civil society-led complaint mechanisms are nominally in place, companies frequently fail to respond substantively. Moreover, the independence of civil society actors is often compromised, as many receive financial support from the very corporations they are meant to monitor.



### 4 Unsafe and Unhealthy Working Conditions



Workers frequently face hazardous and strenuous conditions, including prolonged standing, heavy lifting, and pressure to meet aggressive sales targets. These issues adversely affect both physical and mental health. Furthermore, limited external oversight enables companies to avoid compliance with labor protection laws—such as Thailand's Labour Protection Act B.E. 2541 (1998)—and international human rights standards. These strategies reveal systemic weaknesses in labor governance and corporate accountability, highlighting the need for stronger legal enforcement and independent monitoring to safeguard workers' rights.

**The Department of Labour Protection and Welfare (of the Ministry of Labour) should undertake the following action:**

1



Promote the Establishment and Strengthening of Labor Unions and Networks Encourage the formation and empowerment of labor unions and worker networks to serve as mechanisms that protect against labor rights violations by private sector entities.

3



Enforce the Occupational Safety, Health, and Work Environment Act B.E. 2554 (2011) Mandate unannounced labor inspections and publicize inspection results through accessible platforms, such as the Department's online media, to promote transparency and minimize data manipulation. Establish an independent oversight mechanism comprising civil society representatives to increase credibility and mitigate potential biases inherent in government-only inspections.

2

Expand Stakeholder Participation from Tripartite to Quintuple Structure Broaden the labor policy decision-making framework to include academic institutions and civil society alongside government, employers, and workers. This expansion aims to enhance balance and reduce risk of employer interference in worker representation.

4

Ensure Compliance of Processed Food Companies with Labor Laws and Ethical Responsibilities Processed food companies must not only comply with legal requirements but also recognize their ethical obligation to protect the health and safety of workers throughout the entire supply chain.



## 6 Financial strategies

Processed food corporations in Thailand employ four key financial strategies to enhance profitability and expand their market power:



### 1 Legal Tax Minimization



Companies engage in lawful methods to reduce tax obligations, including product reformulation to alter tax classifications, utilization of accumulated losses to offset taxable income, and strategic charitable donations to gain tax deductions.

### 3 Promotion of Credit and Debt

Through partnerships with financial institutions, companies facilitate access to credit for affiliated businesses and small-scale entrepreneurs within their networks. These practices increase financial dependence on the corporate system and foster vertical integration.

### 2 Mergers, Acquisitions, and Market Consolidation

Corporations acquire firms along the supply chain to consolidate control and limit competition. Additionally, they often replicate innovative products developed by smaller entrepreneurs, undermining fair competition and innovation.



### 4 Exploitation of State Investment Incentives



Firms take advantage of government investment promotion policies, including tax exemptions and public subsidies. Multinational food corporations further strengthen their financial capacity by leveraging access to global capital markets. These financial strategies not only enhance corporate efficiency and market dominance but also raise concerns about equity, regulatory capture, and the long-term sustainability of public finance and small enterprise development.

Relevant government agencies or concerned authorities should undertake the following action:

- 1 The Revenue Department should implement excise taxes to increase the prices of products containing health-harming substances, such as sweeteners similar to sugar, to reduce consumption. Additionally, the Department should monitor the use of accumulated losses and charitable donations for tax deductions to ensure transparency and genuine public benefit.



- 2 The Department of Intellectual Property should expedite protection for small entrepreneurs through accelerated patent registration, reduced fees, and provision of free legal consultation. It should also promote "ethical business" practices by awarding processed food companies that respect intellectual property rights.



- 3 The Bank of Thailand and the Ministry of Finance should ensure transparency in the use of credit, while the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives should support farmers through business collateral systems.



- 4 The Board of Investment and the Revenue Department should require companies receiving government investment incentives to report their economic, social, and environmental impacts. Moreover, there should be a system to evaluate the social return on investment to ensure that state support yields genuine societal benefits.



- 5 The Board of Investment should grant incentives and support to processed food companies that produce healthy food products.



# 7 Reputation management strategies

Processed food corporations in Thailand employ systematic reputational management strategies, often framed under the rhetoric of sustainability, Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) policies, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These strategies include:



**1 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** Companies actively engage in CSR initiatives that highlight their environmental and social commitments, often aiming to counterbalance public concerns over health and regulatory issues.

1

**4 Media Relations:** Companies cultivate close relationships with the media, bloggers, and journalists by providing financial support for media events and arranging company site visits to promote favorable coverage.





Processed food companies play a significant role in transforming the food system and have considerable impacts on long-term health and sustainability goals<sup>(5)</sup>. Thailand must carefully reassess the role and involvement of these companies across all strategic domains, ensuring that public interest principles are upheld and that health-related scientific evidence forms the foundation for policy formulation. This approach is essential to safeguarding the health rights of the Thai population over the long term.

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## Disclaimer

- This Policy Brief is part of the research report from the project titled Commercial Determinants of Health Study: Business Strategies of Ultra-Processed Food Companies. It is intended solely for academic use by the agency and individuals directly involved with the research topic.
- This Policy Brief has been developed based on publicly-accessible academic research and knowledge related to commercial determinants of health. The relevant information has been analyzed and synthesized by the research team for the purpose of academic case study only. There is no intention to defame, disparage, or cause harm to any individual, organization, or entity, nor to promote or advertise any food company in any manner. The funding agency bears no responsibility for the content of this Brief, as it reflects the independent academic work of the research team. If there are any inaccuracies or harm arise, the research team accepts full responsibility within the academic scope.